

# **KENI NI HA'ANANAUHA**

**Women : As Givers of Wisdom**



**Rethinking the Changing Roles of Rural Women in Waisisi Community  
(Surairo, Kopo and Hunanahara), Solomon Islands, 1997.**

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## KENI NI HA'ANANAUHA

The term *keni ni ha'ananauha* in the Are'Are language was repeatedly voiced out by the women, as one of the most important roles and contributions women can give towards the wellbeing and future direction of their children. It simply means, *the passing of knowledge, wisdom and kastom values to their children very early in life through word of mouth and practical demonstration*. Regardless of the gender of the child, this task must be performed by the women. The men also contribute a great deal at a later time in helping the child through *ha'ananauha*.

*Ha'ananauha* by the mother takes place as early as when the child is still in the mother's womb. The mother continues to have an input in the child's life until s/he reaches maturity and is married into another family in the case of a daughter. Only then will she relax that her effort has been brought to fruition. Yet, she will continue to pass on knowledge to her grand children and great grand children into her old age. *Ha'ananauha* is done at any time and anywhere. It is done in the morning while the child is cooking and doing house cleaning with the mother, in the evening when the child is in bed and during the day when both are canoeing, walking in the forest and working in the garden. There is no boundary nor time limit for mothers to *ha'ananauha* (give wisdom) to their children.

Women have taken this role very seriously. As a mother, a woman ensures that the child is well nourished in her womb for the first nine months with good nutrition and love. She builds a mutual relationship and accepts the child with joy and fun. She attends to the child and communicates with her/him. In the Are'Are *kastom*, before the child is due, the mother builds a delivery hut in the forest, away from the communal village to house the new born child. At the birth of the child, it is the mother who receives the child and draws her to her breast, an act of welcome and responsibility. She is alone and receives assistance from a *kastom* midwife attendant, sometimes paid for by the husband or a relative of the family. For the first one to three months, the child is exposed only to the mother. The mother cares for the child, communicates with the child and searches the forest for food with the child. She responds appropriately to the child when s/he cries. Emphasising the mother's responsibility for the child, one of the respondents recalls her experience,

*I delivered my baby son in the forest and lived with him in the hut for a month. Within that period, I must cook my food early in the morning when it is still dark and the people are still sleeping. Reason that, it is tabu for them to see the smoke from my cooking. Everyday for the rest of the period of my time in the hut, I survived on cold food each day.*

*One day, I wrapped up my child in nice clean leaves and headed off into the forest, searching for wild leafy vegetables. I found one plant and while I reached for the young leaf of the plant, a big centipede fell on my shoulder. I quickly swept it away from me and my child. If the centipede had fallen on my child and bit him, he would have died for me in the forest.*

The mother/child relationship is closely knit, depicted by the responsibility for the child, right at that early age. *Ha'ananauha* progresses in the hut out there in the forest as she sings and hums rituals, songs and lullabies to the child. These rituals and songs are powerful communication methods which transmit wisdom and history to the child. The child smiles and hums back to the mother in response to the mother's words. All this interaction between the mother and the child at this initial stage excludes the father's input and presence. The tabus of the Are'Are *kastom* forbid the father to welcome, see and enjoy the presence of his child at birth and to have any input into the child during this early period.

After one to three months of strong relationship and interaction between the child and the mother, the father appears on the scene to see his child, welcome and embrace her/him. The father will join the mother to bring up the child. It is understood from the discussion with the women that it is the mother who invests very early in the life of a child through *ha'ananauha*.

The challenge facing us today in regard to *ha'ananauha* (*women as givers of wisdom*), is that women have a lot to offer, but their wealth of wisdom and resources is being overlooked by leaders and decision makers. Women's knowledge must be expanded to the community leaders as well as their government through *ha'ananauha*. Unless, both the women and the men work cooperatively together in determining a balanced future

direction for their community and the nation, their future development will be governed by a one sided perspective of development. A development that will be dominated by men and which will benefit men but disadvantage the women, resulting in heavy workloads for women, struggling for their livelihood and that of their family with poor essential service deliveries.

*Dedicated to the women of Waisisi community*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>KENI NI HA'ANANAUHA</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>x</b>
<b>MAPS</b> .....	<b>xii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1. BACKGROUND TO WAISISI COMMUNITY (SURAIRO, KOPO, HUNANAHARA).....	3
1.1.1. <i>Are Are Ma'asina : A Traditionally-Based Association</i> .....	5
1.2. RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE.....	6
1.2.1. <i>Insider/Outsider Perspective</i> .....	6
1.2.2. <i>Centre/Periphery Perspective</i> .....	7
1.2.3. <i>Gender Perspective</i> .....	9
1.3. RESEARCH PARAMETERS.....	10
1.3.1. <i>Research Question</i> .....	10
1.3.2. <i>Sub-Questions</i> .....	10
1.3.3. <i>Hypotheses</i> .....	11
1.3.4. <i>Assumptions</i> .....	11
1.3.5. <i>Methodology</i> .....	12
a. <i>Semi-structured Questionnaire and gender issues</i> .....	14
b. <i>Collecting and Documenting Women's Stories</i> .....	15
c. <i>Observing and Participating</i> .....	16
1.4. RESEARCH LIMITATION.....	19
1.5. CONCLUSION.....	21
<b>CHAPTER 2. REVISITING RURAL WOMEN OF THE "THIRD WORLD".....</b>	<b>23</b>
2.1. INTRODUCTION.....	23
2.2. THE CHANGING ROLES OF RURAL WOMEN :A "THIRD WORLD" PERSPECTIVE.....	24
2.3 THE CHANGING ROLES OF RURAL WOMEN : A MELANESIAN PERSPECTIVE.....	28
2.4. CONCLUSION.....	31
<b>CHAPTER 3. RURAL WOMEN'S ROLES AND POSITION IN THE COMMUNITY STRUCTURE : THE WAISISI CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1. INTRODUCTION.....	33
3.2. THE RURAL GIRL CHILD : PRIVILEGE POINTS VERSUS NEGATIVE POINTS.....	35
3.2.1 <i>Bride price</i> .....	37
3.3. RURAL WOMEN'S ROLES : THE PRIVATE/ PUBLIC SPHERE.....	38
3.3.1. <i>Reproductive Roles</i> .....	0
3.3.2. <i>Productive Roles</i> .....	0

3.3.3. <i>Community Managing and community politics</i> .....	43
3.4. <i>KASTOM TABUS : MENSTRUATION AND DELIVERY HUTS</i> .....	44
3.5. <i>RURAL MEN’S ROLES AS TOLD BY WOMEN</i> .....	46
3.6. <i>CONCLUSION</i> .....	47
<b>CHAPTER 4. WINDS OF CHANGE</b> .....	<b>49</b>
4.1. <i>INTRODUCTION</i> .....	49
4.2. <i>CATALYST FOR CHANGE</i> .....	52
4.2.1. <i>Rural Women and the Church</i> .....	52
4.2.2. <i>Rural Women and the Solomon Islands Education System</i> .....	56
4.2.3. <i>Introduction of Cash into the Community</i> .....	59
4.4. <i>THE CHANGING ROLES OF THE RURAL WOMEN AND MEN OF WAISISI COMMUNITY</i> .....	69
4.5. <i>CONCLUSION</i> .....	70
<b>CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>72</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTIONS</b> .....	<b>75</b>
6.1. <i>SUPPORT SERVICES</i> .....	75
6.2. <i>ESSENTIAL SERVICES</i> .....	76
6.3. <i>COMMUNICATION AND LINKAGES</i> .....	76
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>78</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	<b>86</b>

*Graphs*  
*Photographs*  
*Questionnaires*

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Raemanoha rika'a (Thank you very much)

# ABBREVIATIONS

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

SSEM – South Seas Evangelical Mission

SSEC – South Seas Evangelical Church

AAWL – Australia, Asia Workers Link

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

SICHE – Solomon Islands College of Higher Education

Note : Throughout the thesis Are’Are is used as the spelling, however, variants are used by some writers for example, Warren Paia (1983).

*Kastom* means culture in the context of this thesis.

## ABSTRACT

This research project was undertaken in January to February 1997 at the Waisisi community, Malaita province, Solomon Islands. It examined the changing roles of rural women. The thirty two women consulted were in the age range of 20 years and above. The research was approached from rural women's eyes, employing three perspectives which are Insider/Outsider perspective, Centre/Periphery perspective and Gender perspective. The methods used to solicit information include : use of semi-structured questionnaire, collecting and documenting women's stories, observation and participation, group discussion and use of literature, texts and books.

Chapter two explores the changing roles of rural women in the "third world" countries, including the Melanesian countries of the South Pacific. I suggest the following similarities: firstly, rural women are not benefiting from rural development projects as envisaged by the so called "experts" in project documentation. Instead, they become disadvantaged in the following forms: their workload has increased and they are working longer hours for little money, they are assigned the labour intensive tasks which have not become mechanised and the work they do is under-valued. Secondly, women lack access to and control over land, water and cash. Having little access to these resources means that women are denied their right to the land, water and cash. It results in women working as labourers and being placed in a position of powerlessness. Thirdly, their lack of access to new resources, skills and organisations excludes them from participating in group work, accessing loans and credit and attending training programs. Finally, out-migration of the men to the urban areas results in women taking on extra responsibilities which were previously carried by the men. This has greatly increased women's workload. Although women work very hard and sustain the livelihood of their family, the work they do is under-valued and unrecognised.

Chapter three discusses the roles of the Waisisi women. From the outset, the Are'Are *kastom* outlines six categories in which a girl/woman conducts herself These are :- *keni putanita'e*, *keni eroero*, *keni paraaihahia*, *keni sikimani unu*, *keni poiohia*, and *keni mane*. As a girl child, she is well versed with the type of girl she should be and is taught to be hardworking, industrious and submissive. The family and the relatives invest a lot in their daughter(s) compared to their son(s), because a daughter means wealth, productivity and

mothering of the next generation. She is expected to perform her many roles without complaining or retaliation. She lives an obedient and submissive life to her parents, brothers and, if married, the husband and in-laws. If she is lazy and retaliates to the orders of those in authority, she will be heavily criticised. If she is obedient and hardworking, she is praised.

Although the Waisisi women have expressed that their heavy workload disadvantages them from performing to their full potential, especially in the decision-making arena, almost all of them have pride in their work. They have authority over their gardens, pigs and any wealth in the form of shell money. They are strong and powerful in performing their roles without much input from the men. They are very knowledgeable about the land, the forest and their resources.

The men assist the family by performing their roles as well. A man attends to his family's house, feeds pigs and assists in the gardening. However, men's roles are not as many compared to the women and are scattered throughout the year. While women's roles are performed on a daily basis.

Chapter four looks at the changing roles and the life style of the rural Waisisi women. 87% of the women consulted said that their roles and life style are changing. 56% said that these changes have gained momentum after Solomon Islands gained its independence in 1978 while 13% said some of the changes were prevalent before independence. For the Waisisi community, colonialism paved the way for the changes that are currently taking place. Under colonialism, the women identified three main issues that could be explained as catalysts for the change. These are the influence of Christianity, education and the introduction of cash into the community.

These catalysts of change, as argued by the women, pose both negative and positive impacts on women's lives and roles. Some of the negative impacts include: firstly, that the women's body has become monetarised and used as a business through compensation by the men and for the men. Women as victims of crime do not benefit from this transaction. Secondly, women's status has dropped, making them silent and limiting them to house work. Thirdly, the sisterhood values of helping each other are now being slowly

replaced with cash and individualism, Fourthly, children are becoming disobedient, irresponsible and losing respect for their parents and the elderly. Finally, frequent pregnancies and lacking access to proper health and education denies them the right to better essential services.

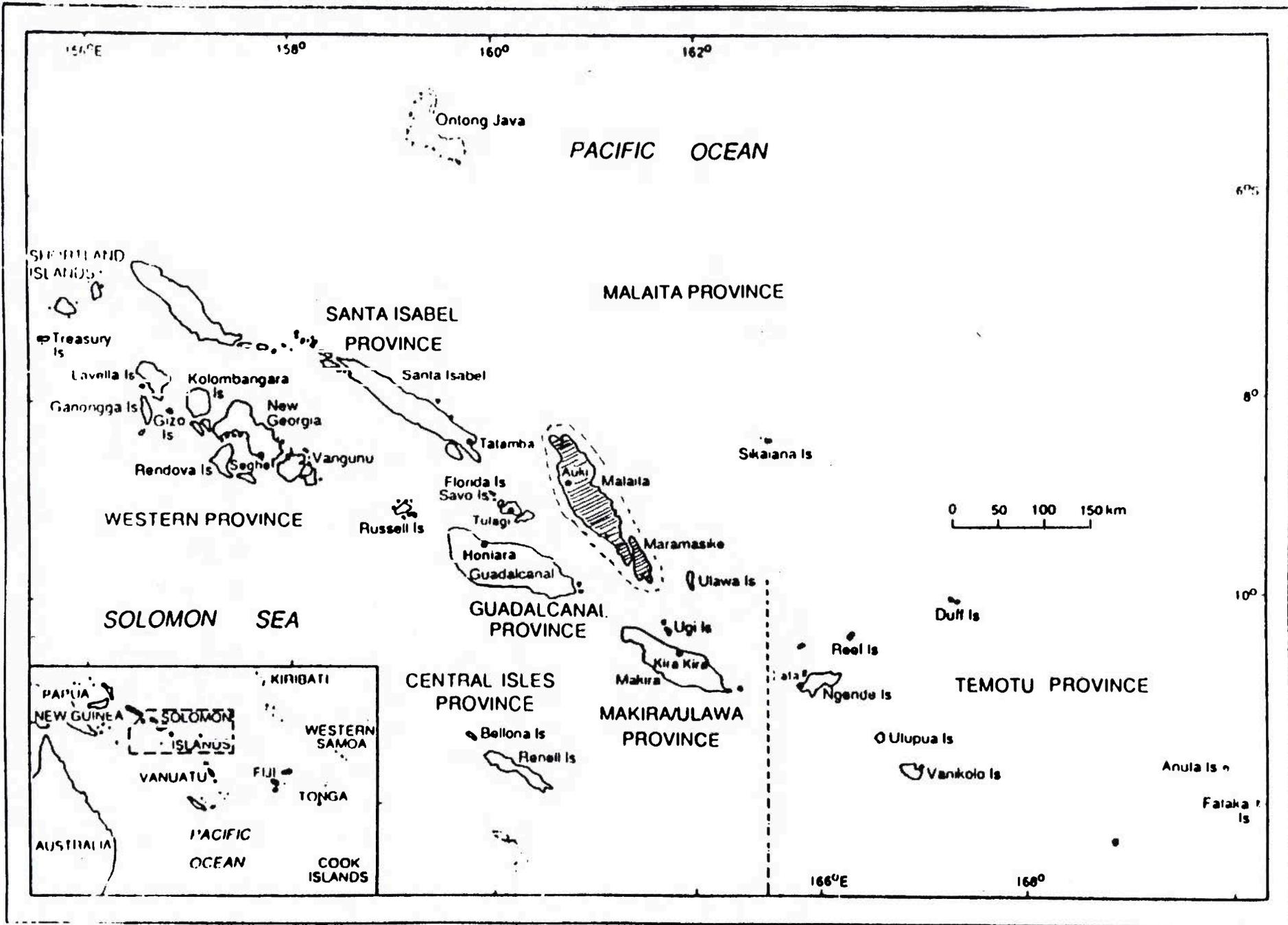
Some of the positive impacts of change on women's roles and life style include: firstly, women are becoming independent and gaining confidence in themselves, rather than depending on their husbands for cash and assistance. They speak out in meetings, lead church programs and earn cash. Secondly, men are now taking on some of the women's roles such as cutting firewood, childcare and gardening, a development highly welcomed by the women. Thirdly, women's living standards have increased greatly. They live in raised houses, deliver in clinics and the children are clothed and given equal access to education despite their gender.

While the women welcomed the positive changes, they have also recognised that some of those changes come at a cost. Their workload has increased and they have to work extra hard to earn cash to clothe and educate their children.

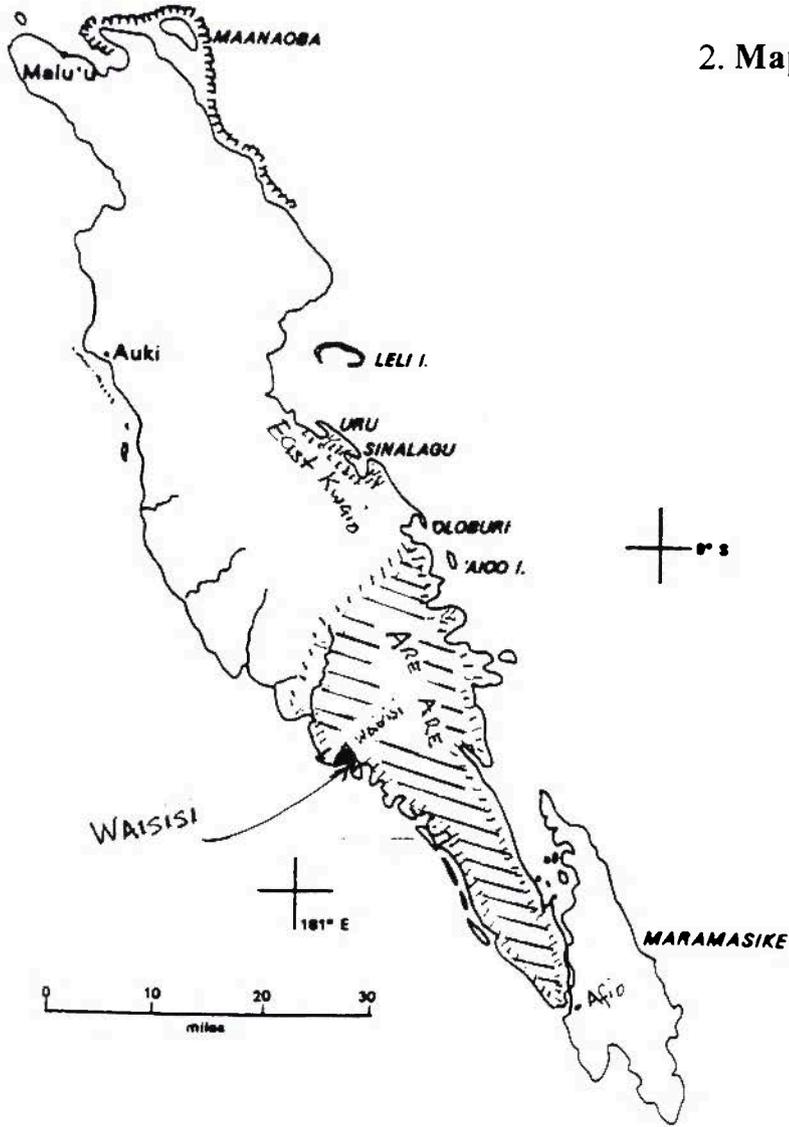
To address some of the issues raised in this document, women proposed three main recommendations which are :-

1. Improvement of support services currently operating in the community.
2. Improvement of essential services for the women and the entire community.
3. The establishment of communication linkages amongst members, villages and national women's organisation, both within the government and the non-government organisations.

# 1. Map of Solomon Islands



2. Map of Malaita Island



3. Map of Waisisi



# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The entire livelihood of any family in Waisisi rests upon the tireless labouring hands of the women who till the land and search the lagoon for food daily. An example of a day of a typical mother begins with morning prayer as early as 5am. She goes to the kitchen to sweep the floor, washes the dishes from yesterday's late dinner and then heads off to the morning church service. She comes back to her kitchen and prepares a hot breakfast, consisting of sweet potatoes and cabbage, or for some, it is tea and rice. These morning activities account for almost half of the morning session. After feeding her family and sending the kids off to school, she puts her basket on her head, her bush knife in her hand and heads off into the forest, to perform the numerous activities for the day. These activities include feeding the pigs, cutting firewood and collecting water, checking on one or two of her gardens and finally arriving at the garden she plans to work in for the day. She will then continue to harvest a bag of sweet potatoes and a bundle of cabbage before heading home. Arriving at home, she unpacks her bag of potatoes, washes a portion sufficient for the evening meal and boils them in a pot over the open fire. While the pot of potatoes is slowly being cooked, she husks and grates one or two coconuts, creams them into a smaller pot, and cooks the cabbage. The cooking of this simple meal takes two to three hours. It is evening and the family must have their meal. After the family's meal, she goes to the church and rings the first bell ....., the second bell ....., and then the third bell which is the final bell. By then, the congregation have started arriving and she leads the worship. The evening service is over and by the time she reaches her house, it is almost 9 p.m. The children are already asleep. She says her prayers and off to bed as well. The day's work is over and she looks forward for tomorrow's activities which are the same.

A woman's day described above demonstrates her enormous contribution towards the livelihood of her family and her community. She ensures that there is sufficient food for the next meal, that there is water available and that there is sufficient firewood for cooking in store. She raises sufficient money through sale of food at the local market and copra making to clothe, feed and send her children to school for the day.

The rural man also plays a significant role in assisting the wife in the area of gardening, disciplining the children, cutting firewood and leading the worship. He is an overseer, ensuring that issues relating to his family and the community are in order and up and running. Women emphasised that men's contribution in roles such as gardening and cutting firewood are performed upon request. Usually the men are involved in seasonal jobs that are not performed on daily basis, such as attending meetings and building houses. Being the head of the family also means that he must participate in family and community welfare issues.

The significant contribution of women is often unheard of and given minimal recognition. It is often taken for granted that the roles performed are expected roles laid down by *kastom* for women. It could be argued that these roles are numerous and are burdensome to women, preventing them from participating actively in the communal life, particularly in meetings and decision making bodies. In exploring further how women see their roles and the impact change is having on their roles, this piece of work attempts firstly, to discuss the different perspectives and the research parameters that were used to solicit information for this research. Secondly, it will explore the different roles performed by women and their position within the community power structure. Thirdly, it will look at change to women's roles and its impact on their lives. And finally, it suggests some practical recommendations that could be implemented to address some of the issues raised by women.

The concept *rural women* as used in this research project refers to women who live in a communal village setting which is outside of the urban or peri-urban towns, who may be blood related or not and whose lives are dependent on subsistence gardening, fishing and sometimes hunting. Their villages do not have access to electricity except a generator at times, may or may not have access to water supply, good transport system, schools, health centres and they live in thatched roof or semi thatched roof housing. They care for and share with each other and are dependent on each other.

It is also important to bear in mind that as you read through this document, you will realize that I was addressed in the community by my maiden name "Aruhe'eta" and "Aru" for short. I was not addressed by my Christian name "Alice" or my surname "Pollard". It

is the Are'Are *kastom* that women keep their own name even though they are married. They do not take on their husband's name. Naming is linked to land, clan, events and represents pride and power. Thus it is important to keep the name given at birth. Secondly, the use of "Aru" and not "Aruhe'eta" in conversation, demonstrates that although the men may have some negative perception of me and my research, they still kindly accept me and would assist me if required.

The use of the term of "we" instead of "I" in women's stories and conversation also represents communal and collective action as a group. Because women work together in many of our roles, the use of "I" is not very common in Melanesia.

The research was conducted in the Are'Are language, and translation of some of the conversation and stories told by women included in this report is done in a manner that does reflect their voices. In so doing, it is not translated into the "best" English grammar.

This following section will give a brief discussion about the Waisisi community, its people and their life style.

### **1.1. Background to Waisisi Community (Surairo, Kopo, Hunanahara)**

Waisisi community lies on the coast of the Are'Are lagoon, south west on Malaita Island, Solomon Islands (refer to maps 2 and 3, page xiv). It is eight hours by boat from Honiara, the capital and almost three hours by outboard motor canoe from Auki, the Malaita Provincial centre. Each village is separated by sea and canoeing becomes the main means of transport to each village and also for the many roles performed by women such as gardening, cutting firewood and meetings. Each village has an estimated population ranging from 50 to 150 inhabitants, most of whom are all blood related. As the population of the community continues to expand, smaller settlements are established near the three main villages. Sharing food, caring for children and helping each other with gardening is still practised as an important aspect of communal life.

The people are of the Are'Are culture and speak the unique Are'Are language, while some speak the Pijin, which is the Solomon Islands functional national language, only a few speak English. The Waisisi people played a very significant role in establishing the Are'Are Ma'asina movement in the sixties and seventies (see page 5). The livelihood of the people depends entirely on subsistence agriculture, fishing and sometimes hunting. Due to development and modernisation, a small percentage of the population lives and works in the urban towns, and they send gifts such as rice, flour, tinned food and basic items quite regularly to the village. The imported food has formed an added diet to the people's staple meal of potatoes, vegetable and fish.

Waisisi has one primary school to provide for its growing population, located at Kopo village. The nearest clinic is located at Rohinari Catholic station which is approximately twenty minutes ride by outboard motor canoe or 2-4 hours on foot and canoeing. There is no wharf but a newly installed water supply for Surairo and Hunanahara has eased women's roles of carrying water, while Kopo is still struggling over its water supply source. There is no domestic electricity constantly available, but alternative measures such as purchasing of small generators to provide lighting and use of electrical equipment on special occasions has proven to be successful. Use of the generator is limited to special occasions and tasks only. All work, whether in the home or outside the home is done on a manual basis mainly by women.

In terms of religious affiliation, Kopo and Hunanahara are Roman Catholics while Surairo is Evangelical Christian. The church influence on the community is also reflected in the administration and the leadership of each community. Surairo village is governed by the Deacons Board with special responsibilities given to different men and women with leadership skills. While Kopo and Hunanahara is governed by the parish priest with special responsibilities given to men and women with special skills. Each village has established its women's organisation with its own office bearers. Despite the Church leadership style and influence, the Are'Are leadership values and knowledge are very much prevalent in each village. The people live together in harmony and should there be any quarrels and violence in the community, it is attended to immediately.

### **1.1.1. Are'Are Ma'asina : A Traditionally-Based Association**

Are'Are is an ethnic, linguistic and cultural region on the west coast of Malaita Province. Their cultural values and language make them unique. In 1968, the Are'Are Ma'asina was founded, with the aim to discuss issues relevant to the Are'Are people and to provide avenues to foster income generation for the region. At its initial stage, the Are'Are Ma'asina was serving a population of about 6,000 people from forty villages. Each member-village has a committee of seven to eight people, comprising of church representatives, big-men (**arahas**), women and representatives from medical, agricultural and education fields.

Once every year, the general assembly which is comprised of all member-villages meets to discuss the activities of the year and to plan ahead for the following year. The general assembly also selects members for the representative council who draw plans and make policies out of issues raised at the general assembly. The board of Arahass is the highest decision-making body and they can approve, amend or defer any policies and decisions that may need further scrutiny. They meet regularly and liaise with the village representatives. Programs and projects at each village are supervised by the village committee (Paia 1983:141-142).

The organisation implemented some very good programs and projects such as operating trade stores, a ship, cattle farming and increased copra production. They were very successful and were servicing the needs of the west Are'Are people. The women took a very active role in implementing some of its programs and were represented at its various meetings.

Today, this association is non-functional and has left a gap in which the women are asking why and searching for answers. The reasons for the breakdown of the association are not clear to the women and therefore unknown to the researcher. This could be a useful area for future research.

## **1.2. Research Perspective**

The carrying out of this research has been approached from the rural women's eyes, encompassing three perspectives which are -: the insider/outsider perspective (Goodwillie & Lechte 1986) which engaged in looking at women's roles as someone who was both from the community as well as an outsider, the centre/periphery perspective which critiques the government national machinery and its ineffectiveness in servicing its rural population in contrast to its services in the urban areas (Kabeer 1994; Stiefel & Wolfe 1994) and the gender perspective which looks at the way in which women and men perceive their roles (Kabeer 1994; Kulupi 1985).

### **1.2.1. Insider/Outsider Perspective**

I approached the research as an insider, a person who is not a stranger to the women but lives with them in their environment. I involved myself in the work they do on a daily basis such as going to the garden, cutting firewood, cooking and making copra. I speak their language, eat and sleep with them. As an insider I have experienced the workload and the many responsibilities women must perform in order for their family to survive. I observed how much time they spend on performing their roles and how much assistance is received from their men. On the other hand, I also shared the joy, the satisfaction and the pride women have in performing their roles. A good harvest from the garden is often a celebration that we have enjoyed and laughed about. However, the impact change is having on women's roles is adding another dimension to their workload. As an insider, I have asked "how can I respond to their issues of concern to bring about some changes so that there is equity and sharing of responsibilities by other family members of the community". In answering that question, (Burkey 1993) provides this alternative,

"Go to the people [Women]  
Live with them  
Love them  
Learn from them  
Work with them

Start with what they have  
Build on what they know  
And in the end  
When the work is done  
The people [Women] will rejoice [and sing]  
“We have done it ourselves!”  
(Cited in Burkey 1993:2<sup>nd</sup> to cover page; unreferenced).

The outsider perspective carries the notion of an outside researcher, who comes to the community as a stranger for a limited time but is very willing to work with the community. She wants to consult with both men and women but, receiving a negative response from the men, she chooses to work only with the women. She develops friendship with the women, consults with the women and critique their lifestyle, roles and responsibilities. She makes some very good recommendations for them and produces the report. **Because** of her fine work, she will receive credit for the work done.

**Unfortunately**, she must leave the women, their village and their country with the wealth of information because her visa has expired and the work has been done. Although she would like to implement her recommendations with the women, she finds it to be problematic because of poor communication skills, distance and lack of funds. The women's expectations will not be met nor will there be any follow up programs for them. The outsider has left for her country for good and will not be seen again (Goodwillie and Lechte 1986:21).

### 1.2.2. Centre/Periphery Perspective

The rural women carry on with their normal activities each day, tending their gardens, looking after the children and responding to issues that arise daily. Nothing changes very much for them. Life goes on as usual. They send their children to school, go to the clinic if members of the family are sick and makes some copra to earn some cash to pay for basic items. Every four years they participate in the elections for area council, provincial assembly and the national parliament, a political duty assigned to them. They hear many promises from the different candidates and cast their votes. They do everything required by their leaders and their government but what help is that to them? They ask themselves, *when will these promises be fulfilled? Where is the ship, the road, the school and the*

*clinic promised by our government representatives and essential service providers? We have not seen them for ages. Most of the activities are being implemented in the urban areas while little services or nothing is reaching us. What can we do? We must continue to make our gardens in order to survive.* Their unanswered questions remain unsolved and are carried forward for another year. They would like to see some of their issues addressed but how can they do it? They don't know how to write a letter and who to write to for assistance. They wait upon their Area council member, Member of Parliament, Women's development officer and National Council of Women but no one has visited them in the last five years. They remain desperate and place their hope in themselves.

While carrying out this research as a government officer and a representative, I was aware that I was accustomed to looking at women's issues on a national level and not at a communal level. I was involved in designing programs and projects for rural women but whether these programs and projects were addressing women's needs is a question to be answered. The Solomon Islands government established the "Women and Development Division" in 1962 and the "Solomon Islands National Council of Women" in 1982 to specifically research and address rural women's issues but these two organisations are not reaching rural women. Apart from these two organisations, there are also extension agriculture officers, church workers and health workers. There is also the Member of Parliament and the Area council member who represents rural people at the government level. Are rural women being assisted by these government representatives? If not, why?

If the Member of Parliament or any other government representatives visits the rural villages, they will meet with the leaders who are mostly men while the women will cook for them and entertain them. There is some aid available to assist rural women with their programs but women do not have easy access to the funds and sometimes these funds are misused by the responsible authorities. In the name of rural women's development, aid coming in is used up in the government bureaucratic set up through its administration expenses. A rural women's group would be lucky to receive a portion of the fund allocated towards women's development. Rural women are disadvantaged even in the government set up. Their issues are not the government's top priority as stipulated in their five year plan. Women's issues of concerns are invisible and are not being adequately

addressed by the government, the churches and the non-government organisations (Kabeer 1994: 87-89; Stiefel & Wolfe 1994:141-142).

### 1.2.3. Gender Perspective

The idea of a gender perspective is central to women's studies practice and involves a recognition that gender difference plays a major part in society/culture. It also places great importance on how gender roles are perceived in different societies and cultures.

The rural women and men's roles are clearly defined by *kastom*. Both are complementary to each other, although women seem to be doing more than the men. Women's roles are carried out on a daily basis while men's roles spread out through the years.

As a typical Waisisi woman would lament, I find it very difficult to cope with the many responsibilities assigned to me by my *kastom* and the present environment I am in. I must perform those roles for my family's livelihood. I have no choice. In addition to my household responsibilities, I must also attend to the community/church activities which binds us together as a community. If I don't attend to the community's work program, I may be criticised for being absent. I am also worried about the future of my children, their school fee, their clothing, decent housing for them and food to feed them. It is a tough job and a worrying episode.

As a typical Waisisi rural man would respond, I am doing all I can do, such as building our house, attending village meetings, making copra and helping with the gardening. It is the woman who do the rest of the jobs in the home and the garden. According to my *kastom*, my roles are to build the house, cut big trees in the garden, make canoes and be the head of the household. Should my wife requires some assistance in her roles, I'll make myself available to assist her (Kabeer 1994: 117-126; Kulupi 1985:134-136).

The above three approaches shape the way in which this research has been approached and researched.

## 1.3. Research Parameters

### 1.3.1. Research Question

The central question this thesis attempts to answer is, “How do rural women in Waisisi perceive themselves, their changing roles and their position within the power structure of their community? What implications does this have for their roles? And what issues do they see as barriers to their active participation in their community to bring about change?”

### 1.3.2. Sub-Questions

- a. How do Waisisi women look at the roles they perform? Are those roles aimed at their survival, their enjoyment and pride, for feasting and celebrities or are those roles imposed by *kastom*?
- b. Have there been changes to Waisisi women’s roles emphasized by *kastom*? And if so, what causes the change?
- c. Have there been changes to Waisisi men’s roles as emphasized by *kastom*? And if so, what causes the change?
- d. What are some of the negative and positive impacts, change has placed on Waisisi women’s roles?
- e. What positions do Waisisi women hold within the community/church power structure?
- f. What essential services are available and accessible to Waisisi women and who provides them?
- g. Are there worrying issues existent in the community? And if so, what are the dominant ones for the Waisisi women?

h. What changes would Waisisi women like to see take place for them in the future?

### **1.3.3. Hypotheses**

- a. Development and modernisation of the rural communities have increased the rural women's burden in the areas of production, reproduction and community responsibilities.
- b. Rural women's limited access to decent education, having a heavy workload and a large family size, disadvantaged women from participating actively in their community.
- c. Rural women's knowledge and wisdom of their environment and their skills in food production enables them to be self-reliant and resourceful, upon which their family is sustained.

### **1.3.4. Assumptions**

- a. That there is a substantial and continual change to rural women's roles.
- b. That some of the changes empower while others disempower the rural women and their position within the power structure of their community.
- c. That rural women are excluded from the decision making positions within the community structure and on the other hand are implementers of decisions made by the leaders who are often men.
- d. Rural women access and benefit minimally from government and non-government essential services and infra-structures compared to the urban population.

- e. Rural women's heavy workload and regular pregnancies pose health threats to their lives and restrict them in participating to their full potential in their community.
- f. Due to rural women's absence in program designing for the community, some of the programs proposed do not address women's issues.
- g. Unless rural women become partners in development with the men, no or little change and benefit is envisaged for their future.

### **1.3.5. Methodology**

The research methods used were multiple, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative. It is a piece of work based on community/feminist research methods. The feminist multiple research methods were preferred due to the fact that a single research method does not always reflect the many roles and activities that rural women do. It is assumed that engaging different research methods reflects the many activities and stories of rural women. Reinharz (1992) states that,

“Feminist descriptions of multimethod research express the commitment to thoroughness, the desire to be open-ended and to take risks (Reinharz 1992:197).

It is with that understanding that this research was carried out. It involved the active participation of the community through close dialogue and non-hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched (Lather 1988:574). Close friendship and personal involvement in activities such as visiting them in their own homes, laughing with them, eating and sleeping with them, makes the interaction between the researched and the researcher free flowing and without threat. This is a very important aspect in research, welcomed and encouraged by the researcher (Oakley 1981:41-42). Particular attention was given to listening to women's stories and voices. They are powerful information that must be documented and be used in improving women's lives and situation (DeVault 1990:101-105). However, it must still be noted that despite of that closeness and friendship, there is still the problem of the insider/outsider perspective in existence.

The quantitative data collected was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), a computer program designed to make analysing of data easier and faster. Use of available resources such as literature, pamphlets and newspapers in the Victoria University of Technology library was also helpful.

I was able to consult with thirty two women, out of which 31% are from Surairo, 38% from Kopo and 31% from Hunanahara. Their age ranged between 20 years and above. Notably, 47% did not know their age, a point that demonstrates the insignificance of birthdays in the rural setting and within their culture. It is the mourning over the death of a person that is often significant and remembered. 69% of the interviews were carried out in women's homes, 22% were done in a separate quiet house while 9% were done in the coconut plantation and where I lived.

All women interviewed were performing various activities in and around their home before my interview with them. These activities included: house cleaning, weeding, childcare, discussions with others, crab hunting, gardening and praying. 47% of the women continued to perform their activities while being interviewed, in particular, childcare. On the other hand, some husbands and older children provided childcare assistance, reflecting their support in this form.

Giving of gifts by the women was quite remarkable. 31% gave gifts after interview while 9% gave gifts before interview. The gifts were in the form of food and prayers. This involved having breakfast and lunch with the interviewee and, or an interviewee offering a prayer for us before doing the interview. Women interviewed were fully involved in the discussion and giving of their opinions. After each interview, we would spend another fifteen minutes to half an hour, discussing other issues of interests and past experiences, which really strengthened our relationship with each other.

## a. Semi-structured Questionnaire and gender issues

A set of three semi-structured questionnaires was prepared, one for the women, one for women's group discussion and one for the men (see Appendix C). Use of semi-structured questionnaire allows the researcher and the researched to discuss openly and in a friendly way (Wadsworth 1984:33-38). My intention of preparing the three sets of semi-structured questionnaires was to allow and listen to women's voices as well as men's voices on an equal basis regarding perception of their roles. Often, women's discussion on roles performed by rural men and women is biased and highlight the tremendous work done by women but little mention is made of the men's roles. I wanted the men to speak for themselves and on the importance of their roles towards their family and community. With such a good intention, I wanted to speak with fifteen men and thirty women. However, in the course of carrying out my interviews, my intention did not eventuate. Interestingly, I was able to consult with thirty two women and no men. I have tried to consult with the men on two attempts but their reluctance and negative response such as *no, no, no, don't speak to me, go and speak to another man* made it difficult for me to pursue the third attempt. Men's reluctance to speak with me could be explained for the following reasons. One, that I am a woman and often a woman is associated with inferiority and low status. Thus, for a man to consult with me, a woman and answer my questions is very humiliating and damaging to his image and status. Secondly, it may be due to a cultural barrier in which it is not acceptable for a woman and a man to discuss privately, leading to some misunderstandings and problems. Thirdly, I was perceived as an exploiter who had come to collect information for my own good and money. This is reflected in cynical comments by some men such as *women! Aru have come to collect information for her paper and big money, yea just assist her*. Finally, the men wanted to challenge and discourage me from carrying on with my research. If I give up, they win and if I continue and take my stand, it proves that I was serious of my intention to do the research. The gender aspect of this research was challenging and discouraging. I wonder if I had been a male student or an outsider, would the men have been more cooperative and supportive? A question that could be pursued in future research.

## b. Collecting and Documenting Women's Stories

Sociologist Lyn Lofland as cited in Reinharz (1992),

“... voiced the importance of documenting women's activities in her critique of the androcentric tradition of community studies. She claimed that, at best, women were simply “there” for participant observers because ethnographers had not seen how women played significant roles in the social settings of which they were part” (Reinharz 1992:51).

Women play important roles within their society and have a wealth of knowledge, experiences and stories that are not always documented. Their stories and experiences are often excluded from most texts and literature, assuming that their knowledge is of low standing. Pratt et al (1992) reiterated that information owned by illiterate people, [for example the Waisisi women], is very important and must be documented for use either in research or other development plans at all levels (Pratt et al 1992:54-55). Documenting women's stories for this research was not easy nor were Waisisi women easily accessible accessible to the researcher in this context. Women required detailed explanation of why I was recording them and for what purpose. They need assurance of the confidentiality of their information. In an oral society as the Waisisi community, women treat their personal stories and knowledge as a wealth that can only be passed on to their children. For example, Mrs. R is a well known woman for her wealth of knowledge and kastom values. She lives almost 8km away from where we lived. To reach her, we have to walk for four hours and cross the biggest river in the area to reach her. When we got to her house at almost 2pm, she was not at home but is still in her garden. We waited until she arrived at almost 6.30pm. At 8pm, we went to her house again and asked if I could record her stories, using a tape recorder. She replied, *no, don't record me but just write down the information as I speak*. It was a difficult proposal for me, because it was dark and the lighting in the house was limited to a small hurricane lamp. We sat up till 10pm, discussing and tossing around questions and issues which I was able to document the next day.

I observed that women were very cautious with their information. They need assurance and acknowledgement for their contribution. They must be given credit as the rightful owners of their information. Should recording and documenting of their stories be undertaken, proper negotiation and consultation must take place. In support of this, one of the woman asked me, *Aru, you do not live with us and come from overseas, why are you doing this research? Are you going to make money for yourself from my information?* I replied, *no, I shall compile the information collected from the women consulted and I shall come back to you with the findings, so that together, we can address some of the issues raised, in the most possible way.* Such questions were challenging and I did reply in a way to eliminate any misunderstandings. Although some women shared the men's suspicion of my research, as has been indoctrinated by the men, their cooperation with me could be explained in three ways. One, that they were easily identified with me as a woman working with another woman, resulting in sharing of similar experiences. Secondly, my consultation with the women was organised by their women's group leaders, thus any disobedience to the authority is not welcome as a group and thirdly, my presence with them represents friendship and mutual relationship in which we have learned to trust each other.

### **c. Observing and Participating**

A lot of women's stories and information are not articulated. Through observation and becoming part of the rural women's normal work program, I was able to observe their reaction and attitude towards their many responsibilities and the skills required to perform those roles. Through participation, I also experienced the load, the tiredness, the struggles, the seriousness, the acceptance and the fun, women experienced in performing their work.

The different activities I was able to participate in and observe include: going to the garden, fishing, cutting firewood, copra making, cooking morning and evening meals, visiting people, caring for the aged, attending community and women's group meetings and participating in community/church union work (Surairo). My lack of physical condition affected much my participation in the above activities. I was perceived as a

foreigner, a person who lacks knowledge and skills in rural women's work and relatively weak. The work I was assigned to perform were limited to easier and lighter jobs such as digging potatoes, carrying a lighter load, and doing easier work such as separating coconut shells during copra making, cooking and house cleaning. In addition, my body was perceived as weaker and paler compared to their body and looked unfit to do rural women's work. Comments such as *you don't look fit to go and make copra, don't come with us to the garden because it is hard work and far, and don't eat like us or else you get sick*, clearly demonstrates how I was perceived. This perception has clearly shown the power relation between the researched and the researcher, making the researched more powerful in their own territory while I become powerless. Their power was also demonstrated in the heavy load they carry, how big and far is their garden and how strong they are. Whilst for me, I am a stranger who is weak, owns no garden and is unable to perform their roles. My qualification and the little cash I have means very little compared to their power and status.

I noticed that women were working very hard and for longer hours. Some women would return from their garden at 6.30pm with a large load carried on their back. There is a mixed feeling about their attitude towards their many roles. Most of them have pride in their work, especially of their big healthy gardens. This is reflected in normal women's discussion about gardens, variety of plants grown in the garden, sharing of plants, funny jokes and laughter. They go to their garden and perform their roles as they wish. Control of time is not an issue for them. From my observation, they have freedom and choice in terms of what activities are to be performed. Women's complaints about their load is minimal and can only be heard if it is brought out into discussion. The women seem happy, content and accept their expected roles. For them, performing their roles is aimed at survival, it is not a choice.

Women's participation in community/church meetings and discussions is quite low compared to the men's participation, as observed at Surairo community. Men seemed to talk more and propose ideas while women would listen and support the proposed ideas. But if an idea relates to the women's group activities, women would speak out and explain the issue. Having funny jokes in their discussion on any issue in connection to any person is seen as a strength and not a ridicule. Jokes bring humour and laughter to the meetings,

placing both men and women in comfortable position. Women's participation in discussion is low due to the following reasons:- one, culturally, women were not encouraged to participate in attending meetings and discussion with the men. They always do the cooking and serving the men thus they feel inadequate, unknowledgeable and lacking confidence to speak. Secondly, some do not have the right words or language to participate in the discussion as a result of their exclusion from the decision making arena. Their language could be termed as "baby talk" and would be laughed at by the majority. Thirdly, women sit on the periphery as they must supervise and attend to kids during the meeting. They found it very difficult to participate and at the same time attend to the children. On the other hand, the men sit closer to the central area of the meeting and concentrate on the meeting. However, it must be noted that few women are very confident, outspoken and have the proper language to contribute constructively in the meetings.

In Surairo village, activities such as church union work, morning and evening services and church cleaning, are attended by more women than men. For example, in the third week of January, there were seven women to four men, selected to lead the weekly morning and evening worship. A similar picture was also noted in Kopo and Hunanahara in which more women lead the morning and evening worship rather than the men. Women are more active implementers of church/community programs than the men. An interesting incident took place at Hunanahara village, in which the women's group with two or three men went into the forest to cut posts for their church building. Having found the right tree, the men cut the tree and sawed the posts. It is the women who dragged the posts to the river, tied them together and floated them down the river until they came to Hunanahara. The men, seeing what had been done by the women, they came and assisted the women in carrying the posts to the building site. In this example, the women were the initiators while the men were the followers.

Women's high participation in community/church work in the villages demonstrates women's strength, fitness and hard working spirit. One of the contributing factors for low participation by men in church activities is that some men do not attend church while others have migrated to the urban area in search of jobs. This results in a higher proportion of women left in the village who sustain the community.

Use of a group discussion meeting was first of all conducted with the leaders of the three women's groups who assisted me in organising follow up meetings with each women's group. Meeting with each women's group prior to my consultation with the women was relevant for two reasons. One, for me to meet with each other and introduce my research proposal and secondly, for us to identify volunteers with whom I would consult with at a time suitable for them. This agreement prevents wasting both my time and theirs as they are very busy women who must go to their garden by 9-10am.

#### **1.4. Research Limitation**

In carrying out the research, there were issues and constraints that were encountered. These constraints are categorised as physical, gender and power relations, communication skills and a limited time frame.

The Melbourne life style compared to the rural village life style presents a very different picture. In Melbourne, one is faced with many choices in terms of what food to buy, which shop to go to, what means of transport to use and what communication methods to use. Technology make things such as transport, communication and the many roles performed by women much easier and faster. In a rural village, there are less choices of what food to eat or what drinks to drink and what technological means of transport and communication systems are available. Most of the activities are performed on manual basis. Cooking of food is done on open fire, washing is done by hand, transport is by canoeing and walking, communication is by face to face discussion and lighting is by use of hurricane lamps.

My trialling period was not limited to trialling the questionnaire for its relevance and appropriateness. It involved trialling out my language fluency and communication skills which I have not used for three years. It involved getting used to cooking extra food for the unexpected visitors, getting used to the rural women's real world and living in an environment that is technologically free. Testing out my physical fitness in terms of walking bare footed, sitting on bare wooden stools and canoeing were a real challenge. I

have come to learn that the Australian Liberal Party Campaign Theme : “For All Of Us” in 1996 was very practical in terms of sharing of food, work, limited resources and goods. There is little focus on “Mine” rather than “Ours”.

With such a rural life style, cooking of morning and evening meals is not fun. It requires skills in lighting the fire, husking and grating of coconuts and getting used to the smoke. Carrying of firewood was done on the back with a rope linking the load to the head. This carrying method is used for other loads such as baskets of food as well. Washing of clothes is done by hand. Consultation and meetings with the women were done by paddling the canoe everyday and most nights. For seeing other people or getting to the garden, walking and canoeing were the only alternatives. The seats in the homes and the churches are bare wooden stools in which I sat for hours during meetings and women’s consultation. Physically, it was tough and painful but rather interesting. Experiencing minor complaints such as blisters on my hands, headache and tiredness were a common occurrence. My lack of knowledge of the village setup without street numbers as in Melbourne makes locating the women’s house quite difficult. Having no access to my supervisor in Melbourne meant that communication and feedback could not be done on student/supervisor basis during the research.

Secondly, I struggled very much with gender and power relations in the work I intended to do. While most women and men were cooperative and appreciated me being there to do the research, some of the male leaders had a negative perspective towards my work (page 14) and had indoctrinated the following comments in the women’s thinking: *Aru came to collect your information for her paper and big money. She came to prepare her way for political power in the next election. We, men have not achieved anything for us, what else can you women do for us?* In addition, below is my conversation with one of the men leaders in a joking way with much laughter and fun.

Mr. W.                   Aru, how come, you are staying longer with us this time than any other time you’ve been home for holidays?

Aru                       Yes, I am.

Mr. W. I know why. You come here to get information from the women for your paper and to start work towards your political ambition.

Aru Yes, I come to collect information for my paper, but more than that, I count this a privilege to meet and discuss with the women. I am sorry, I'm not interested in Solomon Islands politics. It is not the kind of politics I like to see for Are'Are women. The present politics is characterised by unkept promises.

Mr. W. That's very true Aru, I agree with you.

Such face to face discussion was a common experience in the three villages and that was discouraging but on the other hand very challenging. The women and a few men leaders encouraged me to continue with the work and get it finished. It could be noted that I was accused of being interested in politics as my research falls in line with the time in which the candidates standing up for the West Are'Are constituency in the 1997 national election were also campaigning at Waisisi. Thus, I was perceived as another candidate.

Thirdly, I struggled a bit with my communication skills in the Are'Are language. Finding the right word for the right meaning was problematic. I realised that in my explanation of an issue, it required at least two to three English words. It took me a while to speak the language fluently again after few weeks of a lot of practice. However, I noticed that a few rural people were experiencing the same problem that I was encountering.

Finally, there was limited time available to carry out the research and work through the problems that were encountered. There was limited time to build good relationship with the women and the community. There was limited time to revisit the interviewees and there was limited time to participate more fully in the rural people's life style. Limitation of time may have also led to limited knowledge of the community.

## 1.5. Conclusion

Women comprise half of the village population and of course half of the total human resources. Reiterating this point further, Tuiasosopo (1988) in an opening address of the

fourth regional conference of Pacific women, held in Fiji in 1988, states that “women form the most valuable resource in the Pacific region” (South Pacific Commission 1988:71). It is the women that work the land for food for the family. It is the women that search the lagoon for fish and shell fish. It is the women that fetch the water, collect firewood, care for the aged, care for the children, perform household chores and attend to community activities. Life in a rural village depends entirely on the untiring hands of the women. It should be noted that despite women’s great contribution towards the livelihood and wellbeing of the village, they are sometimes ignored in the decision making processes of the community. Women’s wealth of knowledge is largely ignored and under-utilized. As we approach the year 2000, it is hoped that women’s repeated call for support and recognition be given attention by leaders, planners, decision makers and of course the men.

## **CHAPTER 2. REVISITING RURAL WOMEN OF THE “THIRD WORLD”.**

“About half of the women in the third world live and work in farmlands in developing countries and are responsible for 40 to 80 percent of all agricultural production, depending on the country” (Charlton (1984:61) cited in Moore 1988:43).

### **2.1. Introduction**

It is universally understood that rural women of the “third world” carry the bulk of the work required by a household to survive and a community to function. The work that they do varies a great deal from one place to another. Traditionally, they work in the gardens, collect water and fuel, raise up children, hunt and fish and take an active role in the community. The work that women do is strenuous, back breaking and time consuming. (Rogers 1980:152-158; Momsen 1991:50). Henrietta Moore (1988) classifies these work under four headings which are : agricultural work, commerce, household work and wage labour. Janet Momsen (1991) and Caroline Moser (1993) describes the work as firstly, “reproductive work” in which women are responsible for childbearing and rearing responsibilities required to guarantee the maintenance and reproduction of the labour force. Secondly, as “productive work” in which, women are responsible for subsistence agricultural work. In the urban areas, women work in the informal sector both in the home or the neighbourhood. Thirdly, as “community managers” in which women work in community activities such as water and sanitation programs, schools, health and church activities (Momsen 1991:1-4). Work, as Moore argues is not limited to what people do but must also take into consideration two important aspects of life which are,

“one, it must encompass the conditions under which that work is performed, and its perceived social value or worth within a given cultural context ... and secondly, if work is conventionally understood as ‘paid work outside the home’ then the value of women’s subsistence and domestic labour goes unrecognised” (Moore 1988 :43).

Lynne Brydon and Sylvia Chant add that women contribute a great deal to their household and the wider community. They state that

“Women’s work in rural communities thus combines domestic service and ‘productive’ work: it is often said that rural women must bear a ‘double burden’, working long hours in the farms or in craft production and then equally long hours in child-care, food preparation, cooking, washing and cleaning” (Brydon and Chant 1989:58).

In addition, Marilyn Waring (1991) noted that despite the great contribution by women to the sustenance and maintenance of their family, community and the global economy, putting a value on their work and recognising their contribution is still problematic, this view is also shared by Esther Boserup (Waring 1991:14, Boserup 1970:160-166). It must be understood that whatever way “women’s work” is discussed and defined, for rural women, it is an ongoing activity that they do both in the public and private sphere, for wage or non-wage and for survival or enjoyment.

This chapter will concentrate its discussion on the impact of change on rural women’s roles from two perspectives which are the “third world” perspective and the “Melanesian countries” perspectives. The “third world” perspective will focus on three aspects of changes to women’s work raised by Noeleen Heyzer (1987) with examples also drawn from Africa and Latin American countries. The Melanesian perspective will look at issues affecting the changing roles of rural women from the Melanesian countries within the Pacific region.

## **2.2. The Changing Roles of Rural Women :A “Third World” Perspective**

Studies carried out in various Asian countries in 1985 in the areas of rural change and rural development programs on rural women have brought out some intriguing scenarios for the work of women. Heyzer (1987) identified three issues affecting women’s work to be prevalent. These are : changes in the employment patterns and work load of women farmers, changes in women’s access to and control of water, land and cash incomes and

differential access of men and women to new resources, for example, technology, new skills, credit, new knowledge, especially to newly created organisations and channels of decision-making” (Heyzer 1987:13).

While rural development programs aim at bringing about positive rural changes for rural men and women and a better standard of living, studies have shown that rural women in Asia are the most over-worked, they generally work longer hours than the men. They carry a heavy workload but for little money and their work is not highly recognised. It is noted that in the countries studied, traditionally, women are the key people in food production. They worked the land and harvest the crops but due to rural development programs, women become marginalised and receive unequal benefits from the programs. For example, in the Philippines, the high yield rice production program in some areas has resulted in women working for longer hours and performing labour intensive tasks such as transplanting of rice in straight rows and weeding. The cash paid in exchange of the work performed is insufficient for the family’s consumption, resulting in women collecting leftover grains to make ends meet. In Indonesia, due to the green revolution in which chemicals and machinery were used in rice farming, women farmers were made redundant or forced to work in labour intensive jobs. The same picture has been noted in India and Thailand. The rural development programs, introduced a heavy workload on women and drastically reduced their status and power. Women working as labourers for lower wages also increased compared to the males. Women’s living standard was also low. Women were paid less than the men, yet they do the most labour intensive tasks. This means that women do much work but for little money (Heyzer 1987:15-19; Loutfi 1980:7). A similar picture was noted in a research carried out in three villages in India (Kunur, Raigir and Sikandernager). It was found that 70-80 percent of all the work done in the field was done by women and the labour time spent in performing the work amounts to 70-80 percent of the total yearly labour time (Mies, Lalita & Kumari 1986:57-64). In Thailand, Heyzer (1987) added that out migration of males and young girls to work in factories in the cities resulted in women working longer hours and under stress in the farms as well as attending to their household tasks. The rural women of the upper class however are privileged. They have the money to pay for hired labourers while the poorest women farmers do not have any choices.

Secondly, there are changes in women's access to and control of water, land and cash incomes. It was evident that Land Reforms by colonial rule and the bureaucratic governments in countries such as Sri Lanka, Malaysia and the Philippines, disadvantaged the women. In these countries, traditionally, women had access and land rights to farming land and ownership. Due to Land Reforms, women lost their rights to land, they work as labourers on rice farms, placing them in a weaker position and becoming dependent on their husband. Women's loss of rights to land ownership also leads to less control over food, resulting in poor nutrition. On the other hand, it is the men that have control over land, food and cash (Heyzer 1987:20-24).

Thirdly, there are changes due to access to new resources, skills and organisations by gender. The top-down approach imposed by planners and decision-makers, theoretically promised efficiency and equal division of labour but it is evident that women do more work than the men. The research carried out in the Asian countries has shown that the technologies invented are mainly for men's tasks while women's tasks have not been mechanised. Agriculture training is provided for male farmers although it is the women who perform most of the farming activities. It is the men who have access to extension officers and have access to loans and credit. Women continues to suffer class biases, heavy workload, exclusion of many programs and are thus worse off. In group work they are the organised or providers of cakes and tea while the men and women of upper class are the organisers (Heyzer 1987:29-34; Loutfi 1980:10; Savane 1980:31; Akeroyd 1991:153-161).

While the above discussions are based on Asia, similar episodes are observed in Africa and Latin America regions as well. A study in Kenya in 1972, showed that a significant number of households were headed by women as men migrated to the cities in search of work. Out migration of men means increased workload for the women both in the agricultural and household sector. Women's little earnings from their sale of subsistence agriculture produce goes towards meeting family's basic needs while the men's income which is often much higher than the women's income is saved and controlled by the men (Savane 1980:31). Katumba (1993), added that thousands of women in Africa are neglected although they produce 80% of Africa's food. This negligence is reflected in the use of male extension officers and introduction of new crops by the government. It

was also noted that due to extension officers being male, husbands do not allow their wives to attend the courses and come face to face with strangers, denying them information (Katumba 1993:59-60). In relation to land degradation, as noted in Kenya, the women and the children left in the villages are badly affected as they struggle to produce food for their survival while the men who have left for the inner cities are enjoying themselves (Katumba and Akute 1993:56). Akeroyd (1991) emphasizes that women throughout Southern Africa are faced with many difficulties and are in a disadvantaged position although they are the ones who are entirely responsible for the food production. They have a heavy workload, lacks access to training resources and skills and they are placed in a disempowered position due to political, social and cultural issues.

In some countries in the Latin American region, drought and forest destruction increase poverty and lower the standard of living. The basic human needs of people are at risk. An alternative measure to work in mines by widows and women to support their families is back-breaking. As one of the women in La Paz laments,

“The work is back breaking. We have to work non-stop. It’s a very hard job and we’re all old now” (Crespo 1993:196-197).

It could be summarised that for rural women in the “third world”, despite rural development programs and projects proposed by government and international organisations, their position has diminished and workload increased. Changes for rural women in the third world have not been positive and encouraging. They spend longer hours in the farm, do labour intensive tasks, have no or little access to resources and have taken on the roles that the men have left. However, it has been noted that women’s groups and non-government organisations both at local, national and international levels in the regions are engaging in different programs to address the marginalisation and subordination of women.

Having looked at the “third world” picture, the Melanesian women in the Pacific region paint a similar picture as well. They are no different to their sisters in the countries

discussed above. The following section will present the Melanesian perspective in terms of the changing roles of women.

### **2.3 The changing roles of rural women : A Melanesian Perspective.**

Rural women in the Melanesian countries (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and New Caledonia) are experiencing similar changes to their roles as that described above, in the post colonial era and more so after gaining independence, though only minimally in some countries. Women's work, traditionally was in the form of gardening, collection of firewood and water, household chores, family welfare and community activities. They produced food for the family and the community and their major concerns are for the wellbeing of the people (Samana 1986:27; Maeke1992:148; Cox and Aitsi 1988:24; Pollard 1988:42; Lateef 1990:23; UNICEF 1993:53). Bernard Narokobi (1980) describes a Melanesian woman as follows,

“The woman is like the fountain...she is the source...she is the mother, the creator. A man is either made or destroyed by the woman: she may choose if there should be a new life; she may take the herbs to prevent pregnancy; she may prevent a child from surviving after birth; she may prevent her husband from becoming generous; she may adopt any children and provide meals for other children. The woman who knows her husband well may do a variety of things to make or destroy him (Narakobi 1980:36).

Carol Hetler and Siew-Ean Khoo (1987), in recognition of women's roles in food production say,

“Melanesian women in countries such as Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and New Caledonia have a very strong record in the production of basic food crops and the raising of livestock, including pigs. Extension ethnographic and anthropological research has resulted in Melanesian women being described as ‘producers’ and men as ‘transactors’ (Hetler and Khoo 1987:2)

Jacqueline Leckie (1987) in writing about "Women and Work in the South Pacific" argues that

"women's work constitutes real work and that even if it is performed behind kitchen doors, it should be regarded as productive as that of the waged or salaried worker" (Leckie 1987:2).

She adds that despite women's active participation in the family and in the community through the work they do, women receive no or little recognition and their work is not highly valued. She states that "although women were the major contributors to subsistence production, men were the managers and women were the managed" (Leckie 1987:4). She emphasizes that many projects and programs targeted at rural women were concentrated on cooking, sewing, home management and pre-schooling while the bulk of aid was directed towards men's projects such as cocoa farms and cattle raising which are targeted at raising cash. It is the impact of these projects and introduction of cash into the rural community that has contributed to the changing roles of rural women.

Fungke Samana (1986) noted in Papua New Guinea that rural women are taking on extra responsibilities that men have carried in the past due to urban migration. Women must work extra hard and for longer hours to produce good yields for family consumption due to population growth and pressure on land. Women have to walk for longer distance as the nearby gardening land has been allotted to cash crops. Women are not benefiting from agricultural extension courses as they are always in their garden. Women are experiencing social problems due to alcohol consumption, resulting in men wasting time and neglecting work. Women are also working on cash crop farms, besides their normal duties, thus increasing their workload. In cases where rural families have migrated to the urban towns, women are faced with isolation, dependency on their husband for survival, overcrowding and poor nutrition due to over-gardening of land, resulting in poor fertile land. The young girls may resort to prostitution as a means of survival (Samana 1986:29-33). On the other hand out migration affects greatly those who have left behind in the villages, especially the rural women who have to take on the roles and responsibilities of their men on top of their normal load (Fleming 1987:7).

A similar example was also noted in Vanuatu in which women work as domestic workers in expatriate homes and as cleaners in offices. One of the ni-Vanuatu woman shares this testimony,

“My work is in four parts. I clean an office, clean an expatriate home, am a housewife and sew at home for tourists” (Austrahea Asia Workers’ Link 1992:8).

In Solomon Islands, a research carried out in 1996 on issues experienced by rural women market sellers at the Honiara markets showed that women work extremely hard in their gardens to produce enough food for their family and also to sell at the market to raise cash to meet expenses incurred for essential services. Women travel to the market at night as early as 10pm, sit for sun and rain during the day and travel back home at night arriving back at home at around 10pm. Marketing of their produce is difficult, disruptive and demanding, causing huge personal costs for no or little money (Pollard 1996:40). In addition, UNICEF (1993) estimated that exploitation of the forests through logging is already having a big impact on rural women who depend on the forest for food, medicine and shelter. Issues such as population growth and cash cropping are resulting in women working for longer hours with extra load, walking for longer distance and lower health status (UNICEF 1993:21-22).

Today, rural women’s roles in Melanesia have changed a great deal. The roles they do cannot be limited to that of gardening, household chores, childcare and community work. Their work has encompassed numerous activities both in the public and private spheres. In fact women’s loads have increased, yet they are invisible and have little access to essential resources. This is well summarised in the following observation by Epeli Hau’ofa and Gerard Ward (1979),

“men have taken on the more prestigious role of producers of non-traditional cash crops for export, while women remain engaged in production and marketing of local, and often lower valued, food crops. Not only have women in rural Melanesia received less benefit from the new technology than men, but the increase in commercial agriculture has often increased the burden of the subsistence role. Cash crop gardens, and cattle enclosures, the arenas of male farming, tend to be located on prime lands near the settlements. Food gardens tend

to push further from the settlements, thus increasing the time and energy inputs required for transport which, in Melanesia, fall on women” (Hau’ofa and Ward 1979:55).

In addition as shown in a study of Melanesian agriculture by Brian Hardaker and Ewan Fleming (1994), women in Melanesia spend a lot of time and effort in both food and cash crop production, yet their role in the rural areas receives little recognition for research and development by agriculture researchers (Hardaker and Fleming 1994:68). Women are largely denied and disadvantaged in their area of expertise as food producers in Melanesian countries. Their exclusion in the areas of research and development projects also denies them their wealth of knowledge and information.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

It can be concluded that rural women of the “third world” including the Melanesian countries in the South Pacific region, continue to maintain their traditional roles. On top of that, development projects, environmental degradation and population growth have given them additional roles which are affecting change to their roles and stretching their working time into the night. These changes include :- putting little value on women’s traditional roles in the area of production, reproduction, household chores and community activities; taking on men’s roles due to out-migration; working for longer hours and a heavy workload; and walking for longer distance and having no access to required resources. The men are still in control of power and dominate decision-making positions and have access to resources. Rural women continue to be disadvantaged and marginalised in the rural areas. This is well demonstrated in two projects carried out in Bolivia and India :

“In Bolivia, promotion of commercial crop production by various development organisations (governmental and non-governmental) is focused on men. Men participate in producers’ associations where they can obtain seed, fertilizer, credit, etc. Women, however, are increasingly excluded from decisions which they used

to talk about production. In India, the observed change has led to a shift in control over production from women to men; women remain in charge of the “traditional” food crops while men take responsibility for the “modern” cash crops. Men obtain bank loans, buy seeds, purchase pesticides and fertilizers. Women in both Bolivia and India complain that control over production is being taken away from them” (Gianotten, Groverman, Walsum and Zuidberg 1994:96).

Rural women are faced with a challenge to redirect and reverse the trend in which they are being marginalised. Through participation with the men at all processes and levels of decision-making, women will become agents of change not only for their families and communities but also for their own benefit.

# CHAPTER 3. RURAL WOMEN'S ROLES AND POSITION IN THE COMMUNITY STRUCTURE : THE WAISISI CONTEXT

## 3.1. Introduction

In discussing Waisisi women's roles and their position within the community power structure, I will first of all look at the roles of the rural girl child and the rural woman. Secondly, I will examine the tabus that must be observed by the women and finally, I will discuss the men's roles as told by the women.

According to my consultation with the women, the Are'Are *kastom* classifies women into six categories as far as their memories can recall. It is not clearly understood at this stage, whether there are other categories in existence but in the case of this report, discussion will be based on the six categories outlined by the women.

In the form of *ha'ananauha*, mothers clearly outline the six different categories of women existing in the Are'Are culture to their daughter(s).

First, *keni putanita* means, a girl/woman who works hard in her household and performs her roles without being told or ordered by the mother or in-laws. Her work performance depends on her careful observance and sensitivity. If there is no water or firewood, she'll go and fetch water or wood. If there is no food, she'll go to the garden and harvest food. She attends to her family's basic needs and ensures that everything in the house is in order and in full supply. The important character about this type of girl/woman is, she works hard without being told. All mothers prefer their daughter(s) to be in this category.

The second category is *Kēni eroero* meaning that a girl/woman must be told and ordered by the mother or in-laws before performing tasks in her home. She must be told before going to the garden or cutting of firewood. She must be told before cleaning the house and cooking for the family. In fact, she is the opposite of *keni putanita* category. She is

looked upon as lazy, ignorant and lacking wisdom. She is criticised by her close kin and the community. Mothers prefer their daughter(s) not to be in this category.

*Keni para'aihahia*, is the third category, meaning that a girl/woman is very quiet and humble despite the heavy workload and demand from mother/in-laws. She does not revolt or argue back to her mother/in-laws. She does not complain about her load, nor refuse to take on extra responsibilities. She obeys and does what is demanded of her. She minds her own business and works hard as desired. Mothers prefer their daughter(s) to be in this category.

*Keni sikimani unu*, is the fourth category, meaning that this type of girl/woman does not give much attention to her tasks in her own home. While she may put her pot of food over the fire, she would leave it unattended and go somewhere else. She lacks consistency, self control and perseverance. Her work is of poor quality and low standing. She can be rebellious and retaliates against orders. Because of her poor character, she is criticised by her close kin and the community. Mothers prefer their daughter(s) not to be in this category.

The fifth category is called, *keni poiohia*, meaning that this type of girl/woman does not stay put at her house. She goes from house to house, leaving all her work at home unattended. Her work output is low and of poor quality. Unless she is called or escorted back to her house, she will not attend to her house very much. She can be rebellious and disliked by the community. Mothers prefer their daughter(s) not to be in this category.

The final category is called *keni mane*, meaning that although she is a girl/woman, she is strong, wise and can perform heavy work like the men. She can build houses, cut big trees in the gardens, pay bride price equally with the men, talk and contribute constructively like men in discussion, willing, skillful and wealthy. She does not depend on any one for assistance and support. Her ability is recognised and supported by the men. Because she is a girl/woman, she still performs women's roles but even so she has no special place within the power structure of the community. It is not a common category, but mothers prefer their daughter(s) to be in this category.

These six categories of girl/woman grouping, set the standard and give direction to the way in which the Are'Are (Waisisi) girl conducts herself and her place in the community. Through the mother's *ha'ananauha* the girl/woman is destined for a good and prosperous future. No mother makes provisions for a rebellious life for her daughter(s).

### **3.2. The Rural Girl Child : Privilege points versus Negative points**

At a birth of a girl child, metaphors such as *mani parani ai nau* (my bundle of firewood), *mani parani kahu nau* (my bundle of bamboo of water) and *kareni mae nau* (my wealth through bride price) is chanted by parents and relatives. There is much rejoicing as the girl child is welcomed into the family. These chanting are in the form of reciting the girl child's roles, such as cutting firewood, fetching water and bride price. In addition, these chanting also demonstrates the girl's value both socially and economically. She is not looked upon as a mere girl child, but a person whose family can depend on her for survival, power and wealth.

Early in life, the parents, especially the mother starts investing in the girl child through *ha'ananauha* in the morning, in the evening while in bed, in the forest while walking to the garden, at sea while canoeing and in every opportunity that the mother has with the girl child. The mother does not only advise the girl child but demonstrates and allows her to have first hand experience in the different work and activities performed. The girl child is expected to acquire adulthood responsibilities earlier than the boys (Pollard 1988:42). The roles she is expected to do are numerous and vary a great deal. In reality, it is difficult to differentiate the girl child's roles and the woman's roles as both are closely intertwined.

The girl child is taught how to make her own garden, weave baskets, carry water, cut firewood, sweep the kitchen, cook and feed the household and provide hospitality to visitors. She is to respect her brothers, wash their clothes and feed them. She must not answer back to her brothers, walk in front of them or over their legs. She is not allowed to sleep late in the morning but is the first to wake up, to perform the morning duties. She

must not sleep in a different house apart from her family's house. When menstruating, she must stay away in the menstruation hut in the forest. When entering a custom house, she must only keep to the women's side and be very careful not to walk over firewood or betel nut skins. She must know all her relatives and be kind to them. She must welcome people and feed them. She must be willing and hardworking without complaining. She must keep herself away from boys. If she disobeys any of these rules, she is harshly punished and disciplined. She is expected to obey and live in submission to her parents and brothers. Her obedience to all the rules will qualify her to be identified as *keni putanitae* and *keni para ai hahia*. She will be highly praised and recognised by her family, relatives and community as a reward for fulfilling those expectations. She will be a pride for her family and will have a high chance of finding a groom which will bring wealth to her family in the form of bride price. Girls of the *keni mane* category are rare but exist and are seen as a challenge to men. She can be very powerful, wise, stronger and influential than her brothers. However, she is not treated differently to any other women and is still expected to work as hard as any other girl. Girls of other categories are heavily criticised and disliked.

The Waisisi women have stressed that mothers are very concerned for their daughters and would like to see them grow up to be responsible mothers. When asked, why so much emphasis and responsibilities are placed on their daughters and not their sons, the following reasons were noted; preparation for marriage 66%, passing of knowledge to her children (19%), self-reliance and acquiring of skills 15%. Preparation for marriage was scored highly due to the fact that, when a girl gets married, she is judged by her work output and character. If she is hardworking and caring for her family and in-laws, she will be praised and loved. Her good character will also bring a good reputation for her family and her community. If she is lazy, she will be criticised, as well as her family and community. It is important to note that a girl, when married, represents herself, her family and her community.

### 3.2.1 Bride price

Daniel de Coppet (1995) states that,

“In marriage ceremonies, those wishing to take part in the events must choose one of two groups, the bride’s or the groom’s. The marriage feast, which takes place at the bride’s village, is followed two or three years later by the return marriage feast at the groom’s village. Two main operations are accomplished through the various offerings observed. First, the monetary contributions offered by the ‘men’s side’ are lent to the ‘women’s side’ until the return feast, on the condition that each monetary contribution be returned only after it has been converted into one of the three different species : living taros to be planted, living pigs to be raised or shell money. In this last case, money is returned for money” (de Coppet 1995:249).

The bride price marriage ceremony is interesting but rather complicated to explain and I shall not dwell on that very much. I shall be discussing in this section the importance of bride price and how different it is from the dowry system operated in some Asian countries.

The bride price ceremony is an integral part of the Are’Are culture and thus the Waisisi community. As one of the women said, *it is in my blood and I am not going to give it up. My children are born into it and I am going to die in it. It must be continued.* It involves giving and exchanging of pigs, taros and shell money between the bride and the groom’s side.

I understand from my consultation with the women that bride price is important and fair in the following ways :- firstly, it involves the exchange and giving of gifts in the form of shell money, pigs and taros from the groom’s side to the bride’s side. Those gifts will be shared amongst the bride’s relatives and the clan, including her mother and sisters. The bride will then receive some gifts from her own family, relatives and clan (wateha ana keni) to prepare her to participate in any ceremony initiated by the clan she is married to. She then, has the choice to share those gifts with her husband and or give some to her in-laws if she wishes to. She has power over her own wealth.

Secondly, any children born to her are already covered under the exchange of gifts and it is considered that they belong to the male's clan. The children have equal access to their mother's clan as well. Should the mother die or decide to leave, the children belong to the husband and his clan. The children are loved, valued and properly cared for by the clan.

Thirdly, bride price binds the couple together as well as the two clans. When another member of the clan gets married, both clans will support each other in terms of contribution of taros, pigs and shell money.

Finally, bride price depends on the wealth of the family. If they are a wealthy family, they give more. If they are less wealthy, they give less. The most important issue is the development of friendship and sharing of resources. It is a gain/gain transaction on both sides and is argued to be in recognition of women's value.

Today, bride price is taking a different direction. It has included cash and is becoming an expensive transaction to families. 72% of the women consulted said that it is still relevant for today and must be continued. While the Catholics still embrace bride price as a traditional practice that must be continued, the SSEC are giving it up due to their personal Christian conviction and replacing it with European ways of marriage and partying systems. This change has raised some questions for the two churches to resolve and in particular, how to maintain their relationship with each other.

### **3.3. Rural Women's Roles : The Private/ Public Sphere**

94% of the 32 women who were consulted at Waisisi were able to outline their roles as emphasized by *kastom* and handed down from their mother without any difficulty. Very few took a while to remember some of the roles. Recollection of their roles was easy because they do them every day. These roles includes :- sweeping and cleaning the house, cooking and feeding people, cutting firewood, caring for children, caring for the aged, washing clothes and dishes, preparing for feasts and festivities, collecting water, welcoming and greeting people, respecting and caring for people, gardening, feeding pigs, cleaning village and giving advice to children. It has been noted that roles that are

performed every day and by everyone scored highly while roles that are performed once a year or only by some such as caring for the aged, feeding pigs and feast preparation were not so readily articulated. It has been found that not all women feed pigs or care for the aged. Some women have commented that traditionally, feeding pigs is a man's job as a means of cash for the family (see Appendix A, Fig 3).

Caroline Moser (1993) discussed these roles in three forms. These are : reproductive roles, productive roles and community managing roles.

### 3.3.1. Reproductive Roles

Caroline Moser adds that reproductive roles do not only refer to the biological reproduction of childbearing but also to the maintaining and caring for the lives of the family in the home for the next generation. In doing so, this involves cooking, weaving, feeding, washing and caring for the family (Moser 1993:29-31; Kandiyoti 1985:17). The Waisisi women have placed great emphasis on women's reproductive roles for three reasons. Firstly, a woman is an economic asset to her family through her industriousness and hardworking character. Secondly, she is a wealth to her family in the form of bride price, in recognition of her worth. 78% of the women consulted said that their family received bride price in their marriage. The women argued that bride price is a valuable transaction for various reasons. It develops friendship among families and the joining of two different clans. It is the people's *kastom* so it must be continued. It is a form of wealth for her and her family. It legally binds the marriage and commitment to each other. It draws the clan together through bringing of food, pigs and shell money in celebrating the marriage. The bride will then display her industriousness by providing for and serving the needs of her in-laws and her husband. Thirdly, she will bear children for the continuation of the clan's lineage (Pollard 1988:43; Lateef 1990:25). This is well summarised by Brydon and Chant (1989) that,

“A woman gains status through bearing children (especially sons in patrilineal societies), but in addition, her position is an extended residential or kinship group

is consolidated through the bearing and rearing of children” (Brydon & Chant 1989:66).

A woman, in performing her reproductive roles is silent and submissive as taught while a young girl. She is submissive to her in-laws and especially her husband. The offspring of the marriage belongs to the husband’s kin in exchange for bride price. The woman must work hard to feed not only her family but the extended family and close kin. She must not retaliate to her husband or dispute his decision. If she retaliates or disobeys, she is criticised, gossiped and condemned by her husband’s kin and women in the village. On the other hand, she is praised by her husband’s kin for working hard and being industrious. Judith Bennett (1987) noted that although a woman’s economic worth is recognised in marriage transaction and hard work, her social status is still low compared to the men. Moser (1993) also added that the fact that women’s reproductive work is seen as “natural” work, it is not looked upon as real work but [unreal and] invisible. Women work very hard and rarely find time to rest. They are the first to wake up very early in the morning and the last to go to bed at night.

It is interesting to note that while Waisisi women acknowledge the praise and recognition for hard work and having many children, the load they are carrying is beyond their capacity and power. Women are experiencing difficulties in providing just the basics for their children and family such as decent housing, good nutrition, school fees and clothing. One of the respondents says,

*Toiha e hia hahi nau. Na hua ma na tahiri. Rikimana horoa na niirae so’ona toiha nau ma hi mera nau, kareko ana kira, sereni hana sasaniha kira ma hanara ana kira, rara ma na kiru rika’a. Kira tore nau hi haospera ma na haero no’o hau Kilufi. E rika’a hahi nau. ‘Tai po’oni irora ke naka hotehote ra’ania’.*

Translated

*My roles are many and heavy upon me. I carry multiple loads on my head and shoulders. Everyday, I am worried about my work and my children’s education, clothing and their survival. At one stage due to my worries, I got very sick and*

*admitted to Kilufi hospital. It is very hard for me. It is only me who is working hard to make ends meet. "I am paddling the canoe on one side"*

The metaphor "I am paddling the canoe on one side" carries two powerful messages, meaning that one, she is alone, struggling and working hard to provide for her family's needs while the husband may be relaxing and ignoring her struggles and effort. He does not seem to care and assist her. Secondly, the canoe will be going around in a circle, it will not go forward nor backward, meaning that for her, she will be at the same level despite all her effort towards improving her family's situation.

While these roles are heavy and worrying, Waisisi women have no choices. They must perform all the roles that are expected of them. They have little choice over the number of children they must bear. As long as they are fertile, they continue to have children. This has resulted in many women having a large number of children as many as nine, ten, eleven and twelve. On the other hand, it must be understood from the outset that traditionally, the more children one has, the better. Children are counted upon as a very important resource for the family and the continuation of the lineage. Children are a wealth and an investment for the future. It will be children who will look after the parents at old age. It will be children who will manage the resources belonging to the clan. Thus, despite the many roles in the area of reproduction, women have greater pride in having children and working extremely hard to provide for their family's needs.

### **3.3.2. Productive Roles**

Brydon and Chant (1989) look at production in a broader sense and state that,

"... rural women are also for the most part responsible for the production of a significant proportion of the household economic resources, whether this is production of crops for food, care of herds or work in the storage and processing of crops, both for food and seed (production for use), or whether it is production for cash crops and /or craft products for sale (production for exchange)" (Brydon & Chant 1989:58).

Moser (1993) looks at productive roles as work done by women and men which encompass work for cash, for example, marketing of garden produce and work for household production for family use. Waisisi women have stressed strongly that gardening either for marketing or household consumption is a central role that they must play. It is the women who make and maintain the gardens. They place great emphasis on gardening not only for its importance for household survival, feasting and marketing but also for the following reasons. Firstly, a garden represents the strength, skills and the type of woman she is. If a woman has a big and healthy garden, she is identified as hardworking, willing, industrious and is called *keni putanita*. If a woman has a small and unproductive garden, she is identified as lazy, ignorant and a thief. She lacks skills in gardening and instead must steal food for her family, an act of contempt and low standing. Secondly, a garden is a resource owned by the women. Her name is associated with the garden. She has overall ownership of the garden. She has the rightful control over all produce of the garden. She knows the right time for planting and harvesting crops, and what part of the garden to use. She knows what plants will be replanted after harvesting. She has more than one garden and she maintains them according to her knowledge and skills. Her control over her garden demonstrates her powerful position and authority over her resources. Thirdly, Waisisi women are very knowledgeable about the land and the forest. They know names of most of the different types of trees and their uses. They know which land is good for gardening and which ones are not. They know which food crop will grow best on which land. Their knowledge in association with their productive roles places them in an empowering position. In support of this discussion, I quote one of the respondents: *my roles are many and heavy but I have the strength, wisdom and skills to do them for the survival and enjoyment of my family. From my perspective, I see that women are very wise and clever from the heart.*

Waisisi women place great pride, wealth and prosperity in their productive work. They are highly regarded and praised for high production and high work output. Their status in their own community is reflected in their productive roles.

However, it must be understood that performing their productive roles comes at a cost. It is strenuous and takes a lot of time. It places a heavy workload on the women on top of

their other roles and makes them work for longer hours than the men (UNICEF 1993:55; Lateef 1990:25). This is well expressed in this quote: *I am a widow. I have four children. The responsibilities of my family is very heavy on me. I must provide for the needs of my family because there is no one else to do it. There is no other source of income for my family. It is only me who must work for us. If one is sick, I must attend to him/her. If there is work required at the school during education week, it is me. If there is work required by the community/church, it is me. It is me in every work and everywhere.* For Waisisi women, recognition of their work comes at a great cost of being over worked.

### **3.3.3. Community Managing and community politics**

Moser (1993:34) defines community managing as “work undertaken at the community level, around the allocation, provisioning and managing of items of collective consumption”. Waisisi women have said that often they outnumber the men in community work organised and implemented at the community level. These community activities in the Waisisi context means, participating in church cleaning, village cleaning, church construction, church union work, feast preparation, leading morning and evening worship and the maintenance of Kopo primary school. It is important to note that men also play an active role in community work. For example, I was involved in a community activity organised by the Surairo village to construct a house for an aged couple. The turn out was 50/50 in terms of gender. The people were then divided into three to four groups, performing different roles. Our group which was comprised of twenty people (thirteen females and seven males) including the children, was the biggest group and was responsible for cutting sago palm leaves for the house. The other group, which comprised of all males, used an outboard motor (a piece of technology) along the Siua river to cut bamboo. It could be argued that despite a good turn out in terms of both genders’ participation overall, more women were performing the tedious tasks such as cutting and piling of sago palm leaves while the men cut bamboo, a less tiring work but requiring strength. I observed that in addition to the day’s work, some of the women also went to their gardens and harvested food for the evening meal. At the end of the community work, everyone shared a meal together as a group, a meal prepared by the women of the host family. Sharing a meal has become an important part of all community work. I also

observed that the nature of the work characterises the roles of women in the community. The work requiring great strength is performed by the men while lighter and tedious work is assigned for the women. In another similar incident, during the education week, the men carried the posts for the classrooms while the women cooked the lunch. This supports the theory of binarism and gender stereotypes in which men are associated with strength and toughness while women are perceived to be weak, emotional and submissive (Morgan 1986:178-179). Nonetheless, some of the work is jointly performed by both the men and the women. The work that was jointly performed is characterised by combining the special skills and knowledge of the forest (mainly women) and house building (mainly men) in order to achieve a single communal result, eg. the house for an aged couple.

Taking into consideration the work performed by husbands and wives, 38% of the respondents said that they do the husband's roles in his absence while 31% said that their husbands do their roles in their absence. Children, especially older girls often do the roles of both the wife and husband in their absence. Despite the children and the husband's effort, one of the respondents said, *during my absence, my husband and children try to do my work behind me but when I come back, I see no difference. All my gardens were full of weeds and the house was dirty.* This reflects women's high standard and pride in their work performance. Relatives and labourers also assist significantly to family roles in the absence of husband or wife.

However, it can be concluded that women work extremely hard and participate actively in all walks of life in their family and the community.

### **3.4. *Kastom* Tabus : Menstruation and Delivery Huts**

Traditionally, in the social structure of a family or a community in the Are'Are culture, the separation of men and women cuts across all aspects of life. The invisible lines that divide the roles and social life of men and women both in the private and public sphere are well arranged. Women, from childhood age, are well informed of these boundaries and separation. In a family *kastom* house, men sleep and sit on one side while women sleep and sit on the other side. Crossing the boundary lines is forbidden and can cost money through compensation. Men and women's water are kept separate and they also eat

separately. In feasts such as *houra mane* (men's feast), women are not allowed to eat with them although they may assist in the preparation of the feast. While the theories for this separation are not clearly understood, one of the central focus points for this is believed as told by the women, to be "the organs for reproduction; the blood of menstruation and childbirth". In addition, it is believed that women's urine and feces are also highly dangerous to men as observed in Kwaio, east Malaita (Keesing 1992:26-27). It is believed that blood from menstruation and delivery is a dangerous pollutant. When a woman is in such state, she is kept isolated in a hut built in the forest away from the community. During this period, she is not allowed to visit her family. She is not allowed to eat any food from the family's garden or use any family utensils. She is restricted to her own garden, firewood, water and personal belongings. Clothes and any items used must be kept in the hut and for that purpose alone. They must not be taken to the family house. If a daughter visits the mother in the hut, she must wash herself before returning to the family's house (Pollard 1988:43)

In the case of childbirth, the mother and the child live in the hut for one to three months. She cooks her own food early in the morning because it is tabu for the community to see the smoke from her cooking. Sometimes, she is helped by a relative or a midwife chosen by the family. The women and the child will engage in three stages of movement from one hut to another. The first hut is where childbirth takes place and the one furthest in the forest. As the child grows and the mother's health improves, they will move to a hut that is a bit closer to the village. The third move will be into their family house after a cleansing ritual is being performed. This comprises of removing some items in the house such as cooking utensils. Only then will the mother enter the house with the child. She is still restricted to cook for the family. She will then undergo the second ritual in which she will cook a meal for her husband and a stranger. After both have eaten that meal and show no sign of discomfort or illness, the mother is now given the right to participate fully in the affairs of her family.

Disobedience to any of these rituals results in payment of compensation by the woman. This indicates that women own wealth and were not entirely dependent on their husbands.

### 3.5. Rural Men's Roles As Told By Women

I was not able to consult with the men nor hear their stories from their perspective due to a general reticence to speak by the men (refer to page 14). The information covered in this section is limited to women's knowledge of men's roles. Almost all women were able to recite the men's roles as emphasized by *kastom* without any difficulty.

The rural boy child at birth signals respect and authority by his family and relatives. He is looked upon as the future head of the family and leader of the clan. He will acquire responsibilities over land, resources and the clan. He will receive teaching and words of wisdom through *ha'ananauha* both by the mother and the father. The boy child is taught to respect his sisters, keep away from girls, know his relatives and know *kastom* values which must be passed on to the next generation. He must work hard in gardening and piggery which are aimed at generating money towards bride price and custom festivities. He must welcome and entertain his friends in his home. He must have the skills in building houses, making canoes, paddles and hunting. As he grows up, he is attached to his father to learn the skills through listening, observation and hands-on experience similar to that of the rural girl's experience with her mother. Nonetheless, the boy child is highly respected in the family. He is given some privileges such as moving around to other villages, visiting his friends and participating in sports without close supervision by the parents. He can attend meetings and participates in men's activities. He can hit his sisters if they retaliate to his orders or go beyond boundaries. Girls are denied these rights. Girls are taught to be submissive and obedient to their brothers and family members while boys are taught to be authoritative, strong and aggressive.

A boy is ready for marriage when his wealth and skills are demonstrated through building and owning a house, a fence of pigs and a garden of taro. The house represents his ability to accommodate his family and to manage a family. The pigs and taros represent willingness, skills and capability to feed and finance his family. It is greatly emphasized that a boy must be willing, knowledgeable, hardworking and skillful with his hands in order to get married. Having such qualities qualifies him to get married, a decision that is made by the boy's parents.

After marriage, he must house his family, cut the big trees in his wife's garden and mound the garden. According to my consultation with the women, the following was noted: 81% said that the men were responsible for cutting big trees in their wife's garden, 78% said men build houses, 19% said men provide hospitality to other men, 50% said men are responsible for cash activities, 28% said that men are the decision-makers and *ha'ananauha* and 9% said men make crafts such as canoes, paddles and axehandles (see Appendix A, Fig 2). (It did not add to 100% as women were given the choice to list unlimited roles performed by men). A man must not beat his wife or commit adultery. He must participate in some income generating activities to finance his family and to participate in clan and community activities such as *houra* (feasts), *torana* (bride price) and *totoha* (compensation). He is the head of the household which means that he makes decisions and cares for his family. If he harms his family through any means, he must pay compensation as well. If he is lazy, he is also criticised by the community.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

Rethinking the roles of rural women and men in Waisisi community draws our understanding to three important conclusions. Firstly, women work very hard and have a heavy workload performed on daily basis for the family's survival. While their work is numerous and varies a great deal to that of the men's, women are willingly carrying the load without any retaliation. Their pride and wealth is invested in the work they do, either for sustaining the family or for cash. They receive recognition and demonstrate their power through their hard work. They gain ownership of their gardens. They are powerful and active implementors of programs which sustain the family and the community. Without women's contribution through their work, life in a community will be miserable, unsettled and uncomfortable. Women are the backbone of the community. On the other hand, it must also be noted that women's pride and recognition come at a cost. They endure physical harshness and carry the weight of responsibility with no rest from the cycle of life's daily demand.

Secondly, despite their contribution to the community, the status of women is quite low compared to that of the men in terms of privileges and their standing within the

community structure. Women are taught to be submissive and silent while men are taught to be outspoken, aggressive, strong and authoritative. Women must not hit back or retaliate if hit by a brother or the husband. During meetings, women do the cooking while men do the talking. Women are often on the periphery while the men are around the centre of decision making. Women's work is associated with providing a service while men are assigned responsible position as decision-makers and head of households. It could be argued that women's submission and exclusion have denied them access to power and authority.

Finally, women's roles must be performed on a daily basis while men's roles can be performed on a monthly or yearly basis. For example, a house is built every five to six years. However, it must be acknowledged that men do play a big role in gardening and animal husbandry but it is often targeted at cash. This supports the argument that women's work is for family's consumption while men's work is for cash.

In conclusion, one of the respondents said, *nima keni maoai oko riorio raea ke* "a house without a woman is easily and clearly identified" meaning that a house that does not have a girl/woman may be dirty, lack the basic essentials such as food, water, firewood and is in disorder.

# CHAPTER 4. WINDS OF CHANGE

*No'o wausi, ikoru hi keni, koru o'oa ke ha'ania hi mane koru. Koru tautau rihī o'oa ke. Koru horihori keni o'oa ke ma koru oaoa rai ha'ania hi mane koru ke.*

*Ke ana manī kaoani a hau ene, ana horoa ohota paina e rau, sia ikoru hi keni koru pīi siho hihua mania hi mane koru.*

*Tarīhana 'horoa naina rao, hi mane koru kira raupu koru hana bisinis ana kira. Tara'ae ta'au ana ihihua pauna koru hurataha ana hau aeaena koru e apu. Rara mane ka tauto'o no'o ana rapena koru ma pata ka rau. Totoraha naina e ha'ani koru kane siriina e.*

*Siriina e, ma ririoha nau, erio mara ikoru hi keni, koru ka tarae hane ru'u taea hi mane koru, urihana wausi. Eia rete ma koru ka rao o'oa ha'ania hi mane koru ru'u urihana wau si.*

**From a prominent kastom Are'Are woman**

**Translated.**

*In the distant past within the traditional set up of the Are'Are society, we women were on an equal footing with the men. We participated equally in feasts and bride price transactions and we participated equally in decision making processes with the men.*

*But just in the last century during the second world war and colonisation era, our status has dropped dramatically from our men.*

*Since then, our men have used our bodies as their business through compensation. From the tip of our hair to the sole of our feet is considered tabu. If any man touched any part of our body, compensation is demanded immediately. This is still applied today.*

*Today, as I observe women, I noticed that we, women are changing and will reverse the trend to what we were before colonial era. Our status is improving and if we continue to progress as I see it now, we will be at the same level with our men in the future.*

## 4.1. Introduction

This chapter will focus its discussion on two major issues. Firstly, it will look at the catalysts for change as identified by the women, and secondly, it will examine the impact

change is having on Waisisi women and men's life style and their roles within their family and community.

Colonialism, as defined by David Drakakis (1992) is "the establishment of control by one society over another" (Drakakis 1992:18) and it occurs for economic and political reasons. Brookfield (1972), added another definition in which he defined colonialism as "a thoroughgoing, comprehensive and deliberate penetration of a local or "residential" system by the agents of an external system, who aim to restructure the patterns of organisation, resource use, circulation and outlook so as to bring these into a linked relationship with their own system" (Brookfield 1972:1). Solomon Islands was discovered to the Western world by the Spanish explorer, Alvaro de Mendana De Neyra, in 1569. In 1893, Solomon Islands was declared a protectorate of the British empire up until 1978 when Solomon Islands gained its independence (Mamaloni 1992:11-13). Colonisation of the Solomon Islands paved the way for outside forces to infiltrate and bring about change to the many traditions and values of the indigenous people, one of which is the Are'Are people, and in particular to the women. Colonisation brought along with it new systems of governing and administration, new religions, new life styles and social structure and new values.

Out of the many changes that are currently taking place in the Waisisi community, women have identified three main issues to be the prime contributors to their changing roles and life style. These are church influence, education system and introduction of cash into the community. As stipulated in the above story, the Waisisi women have been affected in two forms. One, that a woman's body has become monetarised as a business by the men and for the men in the form of compensation. It is understood from the outset that in the Are'Are culture, traditionally a woman caught in any form of misconduct such as promiscuity, stealing and adultery is killed and put to death immediately. This death penalty can be supervised by either a man or woman of close kin. She has no room to negotiate nor defend herself. Death penalty was practised for women as well as men. Under colonial rule and church influence, death penalty was replaced by other forms of punishment. One of these is compensation practised at individual, family and clan level. Women in particular are expected to keep themselves from men. The woman's body, that is, from the tip of her hair to the sole of her feet, must be well looked after. Should any

man touch any part of her body, her brothers, uncles and husbands in the case of married women, demand compensation right on the spot. Women as victims of crime do not benefit from compensation. On the other hand, if a married man is caught in committing adultery, he will compensate to his children and wife in order to restore relationship. If a son is caught, dating with a young girl, negotiation between the two families must take place, resulting in marriage. Compensation in this context has always been in the form of payment of shell money and pigs. Today inclusion of cash ranging between ten dollars to thousands of dollars has been added to shell money. The amount of money demanded in compensation depends entirely on how serious the problem is and what part of the body has been violated.

Secondly, the women's status during and since the colonial era has dropped and their workload increased. It is understood that during the colonisation period, men were recruited and trained to be administrators and leaders by missionaries and colonial administrators while most women were left back in the villages or, for some who made it with their husbands to the towns, were taught to be silent and be a housewife. Waddell (1993) argued that,

“regardless of what they observed of the role of women in the occupied territories, the foreigners attempted, with a good deal of success, to recreate in the colony a replica of the society which they had left behind in the mother-land. The foreigners, it should be noted, were almost without exception members of the middle and upper classes and for them it was not all proper for women to go out to work; the women's place was in the home and her main role was to bear and raise children”(Waddell 1993:26-27).

The exclusion of women from the recruitment and training programs of the colonial administrators and their suppression by colonial ideologies, made women a second class citizen and of low status. Their work as producers was not considered as real work and was not valued.

In discussing this further, the following section will examine the different catalysts that have led to the changing roles and life style of the Waisisi women and how this is affecting their lives on a daily basis at a family and community level.

## **4.2. Catalyst For Change**

The causes of change in the roles of the Waisisi women and their lifestyle are described as the influence of Christianity, the education system and the introduction of cash to the community. According to the women's perspective, these catalysts for change are foreign and came from the outside world (*wau asi mai ma wau haka mai*). *Wau asi mai* means from the deep sea to the land and *wau haka mai* means from the ship and or from the urban towns to the rural village. This implies that any changes that are currently affecting the lives of rural women are results of things that have come from the outside of the village to the inside of the village. This has contributed very much to their present status and roles which make them work tirelessly hard each day to provide and sustain their family needs.

### **4.2.1. Rural Women and the Church**

Charles Forman (1984) states that Christianity first came into the South Pacific at the beginning of the nineteenth century and presented a very strong masculinist image; for example, the Catholic missionaries were unmarried priests and brothers. The first Protestant missionaries were men although some were accompanied by their wives. As the churches began to expand and develop throughout the islands, male missionaries dominated the administration and governance of the work while their wives had no formal roles in the work and were limited to house work. With such a scenario, island women had no role models to observe and follow as far as women's participation in the church leadership is concerned (Forman 1984:155). Towards the late nineteenth century, women missionaries started entering the mission fields in large numbers.

For Solomon Islands, the first European women to set foot on the shores of the isles were the missionaries. For example, the Catholic nuns arrived in 1901; Florence Young, who

established the Queensland Kanaka Mission which was known as the South Seas Evangelical Mission (SSEM), arrived in 1905; the Anglican women missionaries arrived in 1906 and the first Methodist women missionary in 1907. James Boutilier (1984) noted that since the female missionaries first set foot in the Solomon Islands in the early 1900s, the number of female missionaries from overseas, such as Australia greatly increased.

One of the main tasks of the female missionaries was to engage in the field of education. In response to that need, some island women were trained at the Norfolk Island mission schools organised by the Melanesian church. They and various churches also established girls' schools locally in different parts of the Solomon Islands. For example, they established the first girls' school in Ngella in 1906 and the second one in Boromole, later moved on to Siota and much later to Bungana. The SSEM also placed emphasis on educating young girls. In 1906, they had their eyes on establishing Onepusu as a coeducational boarding school and later on established a separate school for girls at Afio in South Malaita.

While the establishment of these girls' schools was highly appreciated, girls' learning was limited to sewing, hygiene, cleanliness, bible class, childcare and homemaking, targeting at making them a good pastor's wife. It is through the female missionaries' work in education that the formation of women's groups was established in the communities. Margaret Joliy (1991) discusses this process as being the "domestication of women" as observed in Vanuatu. She added that local women's strenuous work outside the home identified them by the Presbyterian missionaries' wives, as "beasts of burdens" with no value and degraded. Instead, they taught the local women how to sing, cook, sew, do laundry, iron and starch clothes, which is a replica of their life style in their own country. The domestication of the local women devalued their status, power and the value of their work and knowledge of the land and the forest (Joliy 1991:27-40). This ideology also led to the establishment of Women's Departments by the various governments in the South Pacific, for example, the Women's Development Division in Solomon Islands.

Women gained great skills in the areas taught at school and in particular caring for their children and husband. However, empowering them through developing their skills in leadership and confidence building was ignored, thus making them invisible, submissive

and devalued. The female missionaries did not pass on to the women their own breaking with traditional gender roles. As Boutilier noted,

“Female missionaries fulfilled not only their traditional roles as wives, housekeepers, cooks and educators but also male roles as carpenters, overseers and supercargoes” (Boutilier 1984:185).

Women were taught the feminine roles by female missionaries but they failed to teach them some of the necessary male skills such as being confident and assertive that they themselves acquired in the course of their mission work. Teaching on feminine roles re-emphasized the importance of women’s traditional roles but excluded women from information and the power structure of the church. Marie Tulip (1990) argues that,

“Women and women’s experiences as told from their own perspective have been absent from the structures of power and the symbol systems, as well as from the formulating process, and not just absent but deliberately excluded by a theology based on patriarchy” (Tulip 1990:230).

The patriarchal theology emphasized by missionaries corresponds very well with the patriarchal colonial power structure imposed on the women in the community and both systems formed a strong base for women’s subordination, submission and exclusion.

Rose Kara Ninkama (1987), argues that the patriarchal theology presented by the missionaries, ignored the very fact that Jesus gave attention to women. Jesus did not treat women as subordinates or sex objects but as full human beings. He involved women in his mission and responded to their problems appropriately (Ninkama 1987:130-131).

Today, the two prominent churches operating in the Waisisi community are the Roman Catholic church and the South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC). The Roman Catholic Mission has the second highest population in Solomon Islands. It was first established in 1845 but later was closed down for a couple of years due to hostility and hardships. It became well established 45 years on. Since 1962, two dioceses are operating: the Dioceses of Auki/Malaita and the Diocese of Honiara. Almost all Catholic priests are still

missionaries from overseas while almost all catechists are Solomon Islanders. The Catholic church plays an important role in education, training and health. They are influential in the political arena of the nation in contrast to other churches and take a strong stand against different methods of birth control. More importantly as noted by Mansfield Ernst (1994), “the Catholic Church in the Solomon Islands is also probably the most accommodating of all the Christian religious groups towards traditions and customs” (Ernst 1994:121)

The SSEC, originated from Queensland, Australia, through the Solomon Islands Sugar Plantation labourers in 1882. It was first called the “Kanaka Mission”. In 1904, it was established in Malaita under the name the “South Seas Evangelical Mission” (SSEM). In 1964, it was established under its current name and became independent from the mission in 1975. SSEC has the third largest population in Solomon Islands, out of which 47% are from Malaita while a significant number are also found in Guadalcanal, Honiara, Makira and other provinces. They also play an important role in the areas of education, training and health in Solomon Islands. The SSEC are very strict and do not allow its members to drink alcohol, chew betel nut or smoke. Ernst (1994) argues that they are more influenced by the charismatic and fundamentalist thinking from the USA and Australia (Ernst 1994:122; Forman 1982:49-54).

Today, however, as observed in the Waisisi community, women’s attendance at church is higher than the men is, women lead morning and evening worship more than the men and women’s participation in all church activities is also greater than the men. The areas in which women’s representation and participation is outnumbered by the men is in the decision-making positions in which women felt inadequate and lack skills in managing such positions. On the other hand, those positions are exclusively for men.

In my consultation with the women, 72% of the women had held some responsible position within the church but it was noted that the positions they had held were limited to that of feminine roles and their women’s group activities. Some of these are :- Sunday school teacher, deaconess, president, treasurer or vice-president of their women’s group, choir leader, prayer coordinator, bell keeper and sunshine leader, that is caring for the aged, sick and disabled people. At Surairo for instance, one of the women was once an assistant pastor of the church while the other was a secretary. Both women took up those

positions due to men's declined response to hold such positions and work commitment. Apart from the two, almost all church decision-making positions within the church structure are dominated by men.

However, women are very positive about their roles within the church. In support of this, one of the women leaders reflected on women's contribution within the church: *Today as I see it, women and men are the same. Some women are very wise and have leadership skills. They are very confident in public speaking and contribute actively in meetings compared to the men. If women progress in this manner, I hope in the future, women will become leaders too within the church.*

#### **4.2.2. Rural Women and the Solomon Islands Education System**

The introduction of the formal education system is another legacy of colonialism and its impact on the changing roles of rural women is very significant. Firstly, it does not complement the traditional system in which girls learn and acquire skills from the mother, through practical hands on experience, instead it removes the girls from their mother and their community. Secondly, the curricula that is taught at school is foreign and thus excludes the mothers and the community's input into their children.

The initial education policies of the colonial education, were in response to two major concerns: one, the missionaries' desire to convert the people to Christianity and two, the colonial government's desire to spread skills and knowledge as well as the western attitudes necessary for the new exchange economy. It was through the missionaries' effort that women had their first encounter with the ethics of Christian education. It must be noted that missionaries encountered many difficulties, as parents were reluctant to send their women and girls to school. Girls were expected to learn from the mother and to assist the mother with the household responsibilities. Boys, however, were sent to school without any difficulty. Parents preference has resulted in more boys than girls in school. Women were taught home economic topics and how to read and write. The Catholic mission for instance held high regard for girls education and established schools for girls such as Tangarare and Visale, resulting in more girls attending school. The SSEM also

encouraged girls and women to attend school and thus established two girls' schools apart from Onepusu, one in San Cristobal and another one in Afio, South Malaita. Jeanette Little (1995) added that women were punctual and regularly attended class in Onepusu compared to the men. This was because female missionaries were the teachers and leaders within the mission (Little 1995:84-86).

In the early fifties, the missions and the colonial government tried to educate people beyond learning to read and write. They aimed to equip them with the types of attitudes, skills and knowledge necessary for leadership and the modern world. It is from this point onward that education began to focus on elementary training for boys and girls. Churches established boys and girls school, thus opening the way for girls to go to school (National Office of Skills Recognition 1995:2; Little 1995:81-88; Forman 1982:187-189).

Today, the education system of the Solomon Islands consists of three levels, which are the primary, secondary and tertiary. The primary education consists of six grades (1-6) and the entry age ranges from 7 to 9 years. At grade six, an assessment test is used as a cut off point to select pupils to form 1 at secondary schools due to limited spaces. For example, the 1991 statistics showed that out of a total of 6,780 students who sat for the form 1 test, only 1,940 were selected and out of that total, 716 were females. This showed a progression rate of 29% overall, when broken down by gender, 25% for females. Rural girls are often disadvantaged in this assessment test as boarding secondary schools have limited facilities for girls. This results in a higher number of girls pushed out of the formal system, meaning that most of the girls will end back in the communities while some may have an opportunity for further education through the non-formal system administered by the various churches.

An Educational Policy Review Committee Report by Francis Bugotu of a research carried out in 1983 on the education system of the Solomon Islands, with its findings on the question "Education for what", gave the groundwork for the establishment of the two types of school currently operating at the secondary level. These have also increased the number of girls entering secondary school level although they are still outnumbered by boys (Bugotu 1986:41-50).

The secondary education was offered in two types of school which were primarily boarding namely, the national secondary schools(forms 1-6) and the provincial secondary schools (forms 1-3). Recently, a third type has emerged to cater for the increased number of students at grade six and these are called “community high schools”. The community high schools are day schools and cater for the rural population by and large which signals a rural/urban split. There are two assessment tests that are carried out, one at form 3 and the other at form 5 at the secondary level. This results in a small number of students getting through to the tertiary level. It is been noted that the higher the level, the lower the number of girls and in particular the rural girls.

At the tertiary level, Solomon Islands College of Higher Education provides certificates and diploma courses on nursing, teaching, marine, administration, secretarial, accounting and other technical fields. Degree courses are also becoming available. A large number of students attend tertiary training in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Australia, New Zealand, England and Canada.

Extension courses are also made available through the University of the South Pacific centre based in Honiara. For those who cannot make it through the formal system, the churches have provided an alternative through estabhshing rural training centres such as Kaotave Rural Training Centre administered by SSEC and St. Martins Rural Training Centre, administered by the Catholic mission, both on Guadalcanal province while Afutara Vocational Centre is administered by the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) and is located on Malaita province. These centres cater for the “pushed out” of the formal system to fall back on (Solomon Islands Education Statistics Bulletin No:11/92).

The non-formal education system run by the churches and non-government organisations are recognised by the government and is seen as one of the most effective means to train rural women. But this is not happening due to lack of resources in terms of staffing, finance and policy direction (UNICEF 1993:77).

It is interesting to note that in my discussion with the women, I found 59% of the women reached primary schooling, 3% received home reading class while 38% did not attend school at all. Some of the reasons were that parents stopped their girls going to school,

girls stay at home to assist mum, some girls were considered too big to go to school, lack of access to schools and their parents fear of promiscuity which denigrates the family. In support of those reasons, the following comments were noted :-

*I only reached class four and my parents stopped me continuing due to lack of money for my school fee.*

*We lived in the bush, my sister and me were not allowed to go to school except my brother, whom we have to drop and pick up after school. If he doesn't want to go to school on some days, we would use the dog to chase him. But dad never encouraged me and my sister to go to school.*

This has resulted in 35% of the women lacking skills in writing and reading. Despite women's willingness to organise and implement their programs within their women's group, lack of appropriate knowledge and skills hampers their future development and their advancement.

#### **4.2.3. Introduction of Cash into the Community**

The debate on "export-led economic development" strategy versus the "people-centred development" in the last decade for the "third world" has been a challenging issue. Sen and Grown (1987) argued that unless women of the poorest poor or the oppressed are involved and their points well considered, any development planned by the so-called the "experts" will not benefit them. Sen and Grown added that women of the poorest poor must participate in any development that aims at improving their living standard for three reasons. One, that women constitute the majority of the poor, the disadvantaged and the burden bearers of development. Secondly, women's work dominates the survival and ongoing reproduction of human beings in all societies, thus the basic needs of human beings depend entirely on their untiring hands. And finally, women's work is not only confined to meeting basic needs but has expanded to the technological advanced industries (Sen & Grown 1987:23-24).

The Waisisi women are no different to that of other women in the “third world” who are affected by the so-called “export-led economic development” strategy for their country, Solomon Islands. During the Pre-colonial era and the colonial period, women have engaged in trade in the form of the barter system. For example, women exchanged a basket of taro for fish, a piglet for a string of shell money or a basket of kumara for a basket of sea shells. While this is still practised today at a minimal level as observed at the Siua local market, modern cash is taking its toll on this barter system and on the lives of the rural women. From my consultation with the women, the introduction of cash into the community has affected the women and the community in two forms. Firstly, the sense of sisterhood and communal spirit that once was enjoyed by the women and the community is now slowly phasing out and is slowly being replaced by payment of cash. Today, as repeatedly told by the women, cash is paid before someone, either a relative or anyone in the community can help you with your work. This is very different from before, in which relatives and people in the community are sensitive to each other and help each other without being asked or paid in cash. This change is well demonstrated in the following story:

*I live in the village with my children while my husband works in Honiara. My leaf hut kitchen was worn out and needed to be replaced. So I went and cut sago palm leaves in the forest and sew them up with the canes. I cut the posts and the sticks to replace the rotten ones for the main frame and the walling. I stood up the kitchen frame including the roofing and wove the sago palm leaves to the roofing. I did all these work by myself without any assistance from anyone. The only bit I couldn't do was the very top of the roof which is often done by men. I paid one of the men to do that bit for me. I then do the walling and now we are using the kitchen. I build the kitchen by myself.*

Women have sadly echoed that *cash is replacing the communal spirit that we have enjoyed in the past. It seems that people do not help each other any more. Cash must be paid before someone can help you.* This makes life quite difficult for women who do not have the cash to pay someone and the work required is beyond their capacity such as building their house.

Secondly, women have little access to cash. Their main source of income is limited to the sale of their food produce at the local market fortnightly, labouring for people with cash and copra making. For them, getting cash comes at a greater cost for only little money. That money is allocated mainly towards meeting the basic needs of her family such as school fees, clothing, food and community fundraising activities. To elaborate further on the workload carried by women to gain access to cash in copra making which is the main income opportunity, I will discuss the copra making processes as observed and participated in during my research. Copra is made from mature coconuts.

### *Copra Making Processes by Women*

*Firstly, they must brush and clean the coconut plantation(s) and collect coconuts into heaps of 300-600 coconuts per heap. The number of heaps depend very much on the size of the plantation. If it is a big plantation (60-100+) coconut trees, then there would be more and bigger heaps. This process takes 3-7 days full time work, that is from morning to evening.*

*Secondly, they must cut the firewood for drying the coconuts using an axe. Cutting firewood is often thought of as men's job but I have observed that women too do this job. It involves cutting logs, mangrove trees and other hard wood that burns very well.*

*The third process is the main task of copra making and it involves splitting each coconut fruit with an axe and using the copra knife to scoop the meat out into a copra bag. Men are usually hired to do this task. I have observed that 5 heaps of 300 coconuts each heap, takes a full day (9am-5pm) to complete, by a group of five people. The women will then carry on their back the bags of fresh scooped coconut meat which would weigh at around 40+ kilograms per bag to the canoe. The women carry one bag at a time and it would take them 3-6 trips to carry all the bags. They will then paddle the canoe of copra to an air dryer and unload the bags of copra onto the air dryer. Drying of the coconuts take 3 nights and 3 days using very hot heat produced from the wood.*

*Fourthly, as the coconuts are dried, they will then be packed very tightly in a copra bag, a process named as **namasia** and is weighed. During the period in which I carried the research, the Commodity Export Marketing Association was buying copra at 48 cents to 60 cents per kilogram for first grade copra. As has been informed, a bag of copra is valued at approximately SI \$40 (AU\$15) per bag. Sometimes it could be higher or lower as it depends on the weight of the bag of copra.*

*In all, copra making takes two to three weeks to complete the whole process.*



The coconut tree



Collecting coconuts



Splitting the coconuts



Scooping the coconut flesh



Carrying coconut flesh



The copra dryer

Most copra making processes are carried out by women, but the processes such as cutting firewood, scooping the coconut meat and packing the dried coconuts requires men's assistance, hired at SI\$10 per day. Men's assistance is required to speed up the processes and get the work done in time so that others who queue up to use the dryer can have their turn as well. I observed a particular example of copra making by two girls and the following is my analysis.

Copra making took them approximately four weeks of hard work to get the copra saleable. They hired four men at SI\$10 a day to assist them with some of the processes in the making of the copra. The final product resulted in 15 bags of copra amounting to almost SI\$600. After receiving the payment, deductions were made to the following :- four hired men at SI\$10 per day each, SI\$20 for use of copra dryer, SI\$20 for use of a friend's axe and the remaining which was around SI\$300 (AU\$120) is shared equally between them. At the end of approximately four weeks of hard work, each of them was rewarded with SI\$150 each. While they may rejoice with the money earned, I would argue that the reward is quite small compared to the load of work that is being involved. Making a profit by the women in copra making is a factor that is never considered. Whatever money that is received is considered real money for their hard work. Whether they make a loss or a profit, it does not really matter. Despite this, copra making is and will continue to be the main source of income for the Waisisi women.

### **4.3. The Impact of Change on Rural Women : For Better or For Worse**

87% of the women said that their roles are changing, and not only that but their lifestyle too is changing. These changes come in different forms. According to the Waisisi women's perspective when asked how do they perceive change, the following issues have signalled change for them: people's changing life style; use of cash; individualism; loss of cultural values; western influences; urban influences; education; population growth; mere laziness and Christian influence.

People's changing life style means that some people live in better upraised houses, and iron roof housing, drinking tea, eating rice, noodles and tinned food. People's diet has changed dramatically in the last ten years.

Use of cash in the work economy leads to prevalence of individualism.

There is a loss of cultural values in terms of lack of respect to parents and sometimes the elderly.

In addition, Western and urban influences introduced unaccepted behaviour and practices such as consumption of alcohol (homebrew), use of videos, hair style, and wearing of trousers.

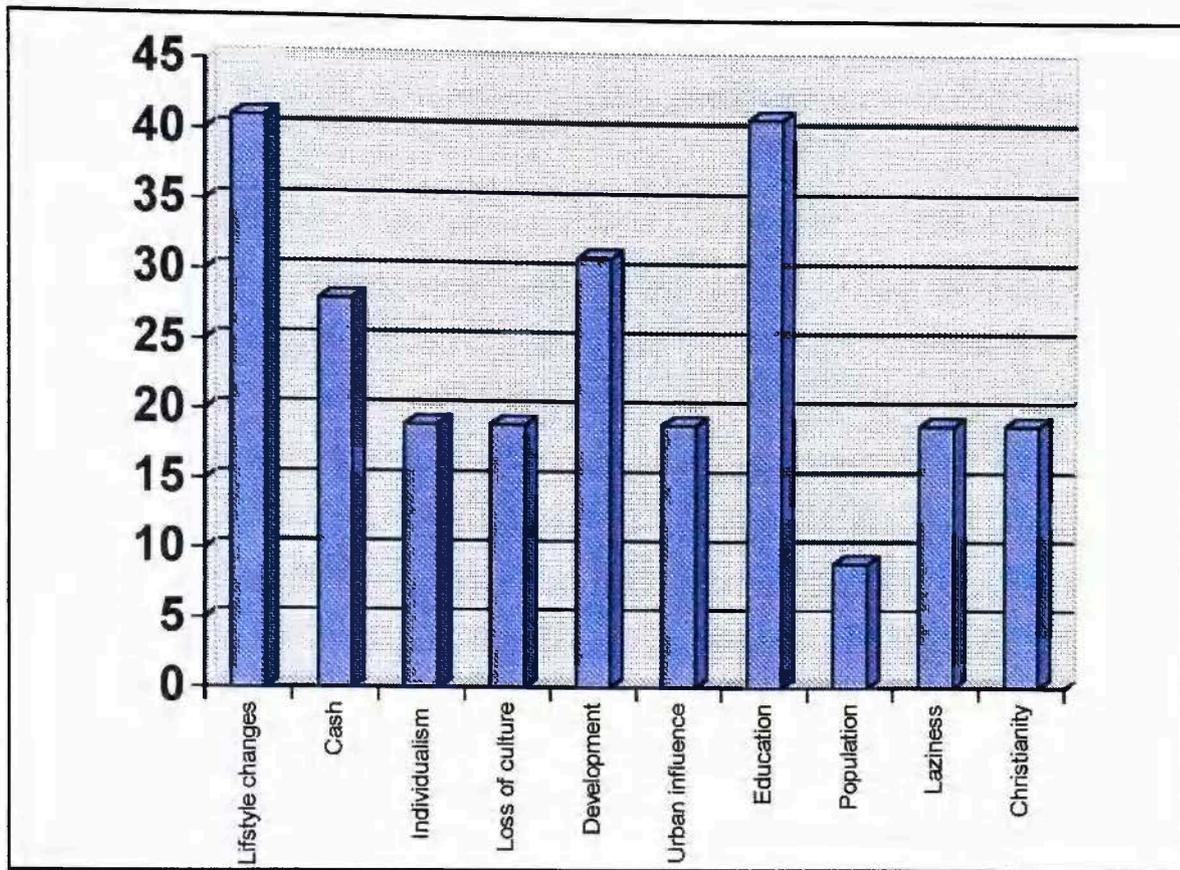
Education, which emphasises classroom learning of subjects that are foreign and is targeted at employment in the urban areas rather than the rural subsistence life style has excluded women's input into their children's future.

Christianity controls and rules the people's lifestyle and brought a whole lot of new ways of worship and how the villages are administered.

Population growth, which results in big family size is also putting pressure on women's workload and mere laziness also poses extra responsibilities for members of the family.

Women's perception of these changes are well demonstrated in fig 1 below.

**Fig 1. Dynamics of Change as identified by the women**



(This does not total up to 100% as women were given the opportunity to tick more than one answer). According to their observation, 56% said that the changes to their life style and roles became prevalent in the 80's and onward while 13% said it was prevalent before the independence day which was on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1978. The fact that changes become prevalent in the 80's implies that Solomon Islands is a young country, and is undergoing fast social change. Some of the mothers were very surprised and concerned to see that some of the changes are being manifested through their children very rapidly. They have expressed their inadequacy in knowledge, skills and authority to handle their children compared to their own generation's childhood.

The change of roles and life style poses both negative and positive impact on the women's lives. The positive impact of change as identified by the women are :- firstly, women are

becoming independent, compared to before when they were often dependent on their husbands in performing certain roles. For example, some women cut big trees in their own garden, some women make copra without any assistance from the men, some women take active roles in building their family's house and most women earn cash through hard work, marketing and feeding of pigs rather than being dependent on their husband.

Secondly, I observed that almost all the women I spoke to are very confident in themselves. Some participated constructively at meetings and are very good in public speaking despite men's presence. They are quite powerful in their areas of expertise and represents women's concerns and programs at meetings honestly and productively. They don't feel threatened by their men's comments and jokes but challenge them in the same manner. Their confidence is demonstrated not only through their speech in meetings but in their daily work both in the private and public sphere. They also participate in community/church programs, in which they often comprised the majority. They are now performing almost all of the tasks that were previously performed only by the men.

Thirdly, women have said that their living standards have increased tremendously compared to that of their traditional lifestyle. For example, they now live in raised houses and for some, permanent houses. They use plates and spoons instead of leaves. Children now wear nappies instead of leaves. Women no longer use menstruation huts nor strictly observe some of the cultural taboos as before. Women no longer use delivery huts but deliver in the hospitals. Children are well clothed and have equal access to education despite their gender and if the children receive good education, they will in the end get employed, a bonus to the family to assist with family expenses. These improvements mean an increased health status for the village population and increased education opportunities for both the children and the mother.

Finally, women are now given greater roles within the church domain as compared to when church was first established in the community. It is understood in my discussion with the women that, leading the weekly morning and evening worship in each village is dominated by the women. Even on the Sunday main program, women's involvement is much higher than the men. Women can now organise church women's rallies and administer women's mission teams to other villages and communities with little assistance

from the men. Women are playing a powerful role within the church and without their contribution, church activities in the village will die their natural death. They are now becoming agents of change in all decision making bodies of the church in the village and are looking forward for a greater role in the future.

Having discussed the positive impact of change on the Waisisi women's roles and status, I will now look at the negative impact as observed and told by the women. While the negative impact of change seemed minimal at this stage, women have expressed great concern that attention must be rendered to addressing these issues and behaviours so that it will not be passed on to the next generation. The issues and behaviour raised by the women are :- firstly, the issue of individualism and cash dependency which is already discussed above. However, women felt that individualism and cash is creating a gap between the families who "have" and "have not". The sisterhood values of helping each other is being slowly phased out and women warned that unless it is addressed, women and families will become very individualistic rather than communalistic and caring for each other. The gap between the "haves" and the "have nots" will create social problems in the community, resulting in women talking about each other, stealing, youth problems and teenage pregnancies. The women have voiced out that these problems are already in existence but to a minimal rate. These problems are already exerting pressure on the women's load and more importantly is the fact that these women are not well prepared to solve and cope with it. It is going to be a worrying episode for the mothers even into the future.

Secondly, the women have observed that their children's behaviour and attitude is very different to that of their own childhood. They said that children are becoming very disobedient and losing respect for their parents. They can answer back to the parents and disobey their order. They also lose respect for each other in terms of gender. The cultural values and norms emphasized by parents and elderly people is largely ignored or given little attention. Some children are lazy and lack necessary skills in areas such as house building, canoe building, gardening and craft making. Some children are leaving school very early in life and see no hope in their education career. For girls in particular, wearing trousers in the village publicly is seen as an offence and the mothers get offended and ashamed of such practice.

Thirdly, frequent pregnancies, resulting in having too many children in a short period of time is exerting pressure on the women's roles. A large family size means a greater workload and greater financial need to feed, clothe and educate each child. In addition, women are not receiving appropriate training programs either from the government or the non-government organisations which should have equipped them to handle pressures of today. They lack skills in areas such as leadership and family health which could be helpful. They do not have a meeting place of their own, no other means of transport except by paddling the canoe to the nearest clinic or to any meeting organised for women along the coast. Sending their daughters to Honiara to work as a "house girl" or "house maid" as a source of income for their family is an option that is strongly undesirable. In support of this one of the women said, *I do not want my girls to go to Honiara for house girl. I want them to stay at home with me and perform some of my roles. They are my helpers.*

Finally, women's lack of skills in reading and writing, leadership and organisation makes them feel inadequate and unfit to take up leadership roles. Thus, the administration of their women's group as well as that of the community and the church often rests upon the few hands of those who have the skills. In my observation of the Surairo women's group election for new office-bearers, most women refused to take up responsible roles due to lack of writing and reading skills, constructive thinking and public speaking. Some women's feeling of inadequacy is still in existence and this is creating a feeling of inferiority and subordination within them. This is an issue that can be addressed through training and practice.

#### **4.4. The Changing Roles of the Rural Women and Men of Waisisi Community**

The women have unanimously agreed that their roles in the areas of productive, reproductive and community management which was discussed earlier, have changed. Women are taking on extra roles on top of what they used to and those emphasized by *kastom*. In doing so, most of them have expressed that the responsibilities are greater, heavier, and worrying. The heavy workload experienced by women comprised the

following: firstly, women are now taking equal responsibilities for cutting big trees in their own garden, building and maintenance of their house and taking leadership roles in managing their family, jobs that were previously assigned to the men. Secondly, women can now earn money through copra making, sale of garden produce, piggery and labour. Thirdly, girls have access to education, through both the formal and nonformal system, placing women in a better position to have access to employment which will generate cash into the family cycle. And finally, women take an active role within the church, either be it preaching, decision-making or church cleaning. Women's involvement in the decision-making processes of the church gives them autonomous power to influence the church and bring to the men, women's issues of concern.

On the other hand, men's roles have changed greatly as well, as observed by the women. Some men can now wash the dishes, carry water, cook for the family, sweep and clean the house, cut firewood, garden and harvest of garden produce. Furthermore, they are also taking active role in childcare and giving of wisdom to the children. These changes are greatly welcomed by the women and as one of them commented, *my workload is not heavy because my husband is helping me with all my work in the home and also in the garden*. Men's participation in women's productive, reproductive and community management roles is seen as a development that women will embrace not only for today but for the future as well.

#### **4.5. Conclusion.**

The Waisisi society including its rural women and men are undergoing fast social change. Their roles and lifestyle is changing, presenting some impact on their lives. While colonialism in the form of new introduced values and systems through the colonial administrative governing system, education system, religion and development strategies, the results observed have been both negative and positive to women and men's roles and lifestyle.

From the positive perspective, women are and will continue to take active roles in their family and church/community not only in their roles as producers, reproducers and

community managers, but also in the decision-making processes. Some have gained great confidence, wisdom and understanding and are playing very influential roles in presenting women's views and issues at the decision-making positions. Their influential roles may be seen as a challenge to the men or alternatively as equal partners in development.

However, women's active roles in decision-making positions and economic contribution, has created additional roles. This is putting pressure on their time and limited skills. It results in working for longer hours for little money, increased workload and struggles to meet the family's basic needs. In addition, the changing attitudes and behaviour of the younger generation is also an added worrying development that they must attend to, and often it is regarded as beyond their power unless the men are involved.

The men's roles, on the other hand are also changing. They are now becoming partners in the women's domain as producers, reproducers and community managers. While few women have commented that they do not want to see men do such jobs as washing, cooking and house cleaning as it denigrates their status, the majority of the women welcome the changes as it is to their advantage. However, it is being observed that the younger men are lacking some of the skills necessary and emphasized by *kastom* such as house building which they must acquire. The older men must take the responsibility to pass on those skills.

The present transition period is very significant for both the men and the women in regard to their different roles. Their active response to the changes taken place now in their roles and lifestyle will shape the roles and lifestyle of the next generation.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

Rural women are a very important resource to the Waisisi community. Their presence characterises life and sustenance in any household. They form an effective method of communication, in which information can be disseminated to the present and next generation. They owned a wealth of knowledge and wisdom but it is restricted to shaping up the child for his/her future. Their wisdom and knowledge has been largely ignored and under-utilised by leaders and decision makers both at the community and national level. They are sometimes excluded from committees, in the political arena and policy making level. They are often the implementors of decisions made by the so-called “Leaders” who are mostly men. The rural/urban split and gender gap presents a communication dilemma in which the rural women are denied information, knowledge and power. If women are the first teacher to a child in shaping her future destiny, how much more should they participate in shaping the future development of a community and a nation? One of the questions asked during the consultation with the women was, “Has your Area Council Member and Member of Parliament held any meeting with your women’s group in the last five years? The following answers were noted-:

*No, he drinks beer and plays kura most of the time.*

*No, he goes to Afio for meetings but never reports back to us, so we don’t know what all the meetings are about.*

*No, if he (MP) comes to the village, he only meets with the men.*

*No, the last time I saw him (MP), I had four children, now I have six children and I have not seen him yet.*

It was interesting to note that none of the women said “YES” to the question. Similar responses were also noted for the Solomon Islands National Council of Women and Women and Development Division. These negative responses indicate that rural women are often ill-informed and lack information about their government, their environment and the changes that are happening to their livelihood. It is assumed that if rural women are

well informed and become part of the decision makers network, government, churches and community programs might well be implemented effectively.

Secondly, rural women's significant roles are not limited to that of production, reproduction and community management, but encompass many roles that were previously carried by men. This implies that women's load has increased and more importantly are given greater responsibilities than before. Today, they are becoming agents of change to their advantage as well as to their whole community. They participate actively in all activities and programs both in the private and public sphere in their community. When asked, how do they rate women's position within the community structure, with 1 lowest and 5 highest, all the women consulted ticked 4s and 5s, stating comments such as *today, women are the same as the men. We work together in many activities that were previously done by the men. We sit with them in meetings and make decisions with them. Without women, men cannot do anything.* If women continue to take on extra responsibilities, they need to be assisted in terms of funds, appropriate skills training and support by responsible authorities.

Thirdly, Waisisi women's low literacy and access to little cash do not threaten their participation and the value they have in their work output in their community. They have pride in their wisdom, skills, willingness and hardworking spirit. These make them a valuable resource in their community. Higher education qualification is not seen as an ultimate requirement that they must possess but can be an added benefit which enables them to perform even better in their decision-making roles within their family, church and community. Should they be given equal access and preference to better education, their full potential contribution to their family, community and the nation will be exhibited.

Finally, the changing roles of the men as observed by the women is seen as a positive change towards women's development. It renders support for women in their roles as a producer, reproducer and community manager but at the same time strengthens women's input in the decision-making positions in the church and the community.

In conclusion, women's roles are changing. The changes poses negative and positive outcome for them as well as the men. While the positive changes could be applauded as improvement for them, it has given them additional roles, making them work extra hours and into the night. They have expressed that their loads are heavy and many but they must be performed so that life will go on each day. This re-emphasises that women are strong, healthy, skilful, willing, knowledgeable, wise and an important resource for the community.

Rural women are not just mere women but a valued important resource to the family, community and the nation.

## **CHAPTER 6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTIONS**

The women have strongly expressed that this research findings and its documentation should not be treated as a mere document which is read and filed away in boxes and filing cabinets, but a document that will have some impact on their lives, either in their roles as women or in their women's group activities and the community. Because it is the first research ever carried out with them, it must be owned by them and used as a guide to implement some of the recommendations in their programs. It is in respect of their expression that I intend to include this chapter. I grouped the many issues raised by women into three categories: support services, essential services and communication and linkages.

### **6.1. Support services**

The women have expressed their inadequacy in handling many issues that are observed in their community in regard to the children and the young population by and large, these issues are results of change. Some of these issues include lack of materials for Sunday school teaching, children exiting primary schooling, problems of young girls sent to Honiara for house girl and consumption of home brew.

To address some of these issues, women suggest the following recommendations :-

\* That there should be relevant programs established for young boys and girls who have been pushed out of the formal education system and are left in the community, which will equip them with necessary skills to be self-reliant and at the same time contributing actively to their family and the community.

\* That the women's group program be improved and expanded to accommodate the young girls needs and aspirations, equipping them to handle issues of today. In so doing, it will also bridge the gap between the young and the older women, strengthening their relationship and support for each other. Some of the programs suggested are :- culture, agriculture, sewing, family health, leadership, planning, organisation and income

generation. In addition, the Sunday school teachers also need training to equip them to manage and provide relevant programs for the children.

## **6.2 : Essential services**

During the period in which this research was carried out, I have observed that firstly, the allocation of teachers for Kopo primary school was lagging behind, resulting in an indefinite cancellation of the kindy classes. Secondly, the Rohinari clinic is under-resourced to meet the health needs of its population. Thirdly, the women lack a meeting house (women's hall/centre), transport and proper toilet facilities and sanitation. It is being noted that as the Waisisi community continues to expand, women's toilets are being pushed further away from the village, the mangrove trees that shelter them are being cut and cleared, leaving women exposed to the public. To address these issues, women propose the following recommendations :-

- \* That the responsible authority for the Kopo primary school administers the allocation of teachers properly before the commencement of the school.

- \* That Rohinari clinic be well resourced with proper facilities, required drugs and nurses and that regular visitation be carried out to the communities.

- \* That the women construct their centre which will accommodate their meetings and weekly activities, children's programs and equipment. Installation of a water supply especially for Kopo community and construction of proper toilet facilities for each village are also necessary.

## **6.3. Communication and Linkages**

Despite women's closeness in a rural community, women felt that there is need for exchange of skills and knowledge amongst members and each women's group and there is need to keep in touch with women and women's organisations both the government and non-government organisations at the national level. Women have identified that sharing

of information and connecting to a wider women's network will empower them through knowledge and information. In addition, it will also open up opportunities for women and young girls to attend further training either in Honiara or elsewhere. To do this, the following were women's recommendations :-

- \* That the women be linked up to their responsible Church women's desk, nongovernment women's organisation and the government women's department at the national level.
  
- \* That women establish a resource centre so that information could be shared amongst its members, children and the community.
  
- \* That women document their history and stories from their perspective which has been absent from literature and books. Documenting their stories will strengthen their power in *ha'ananauha* to the next generation but more so, to the modern writing of history. It will also empower the women and at the same time give them credit and recognition.

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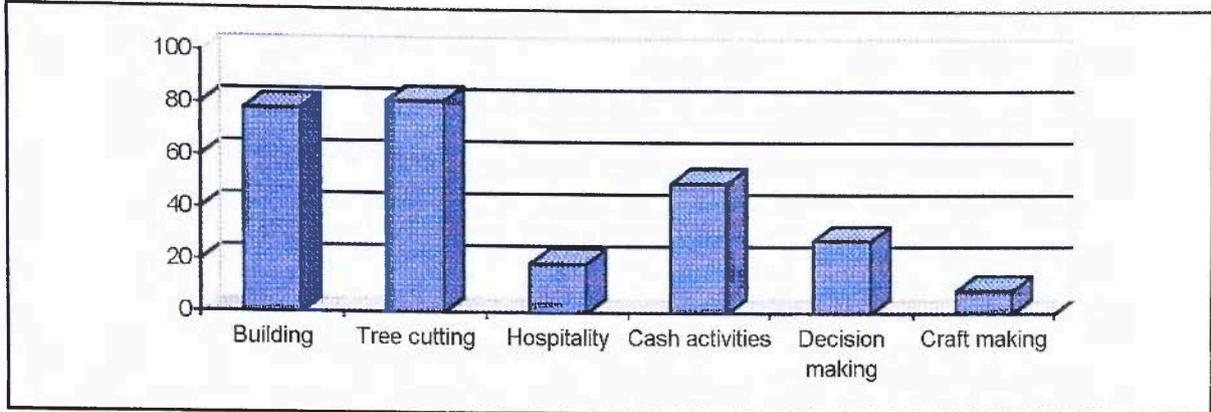
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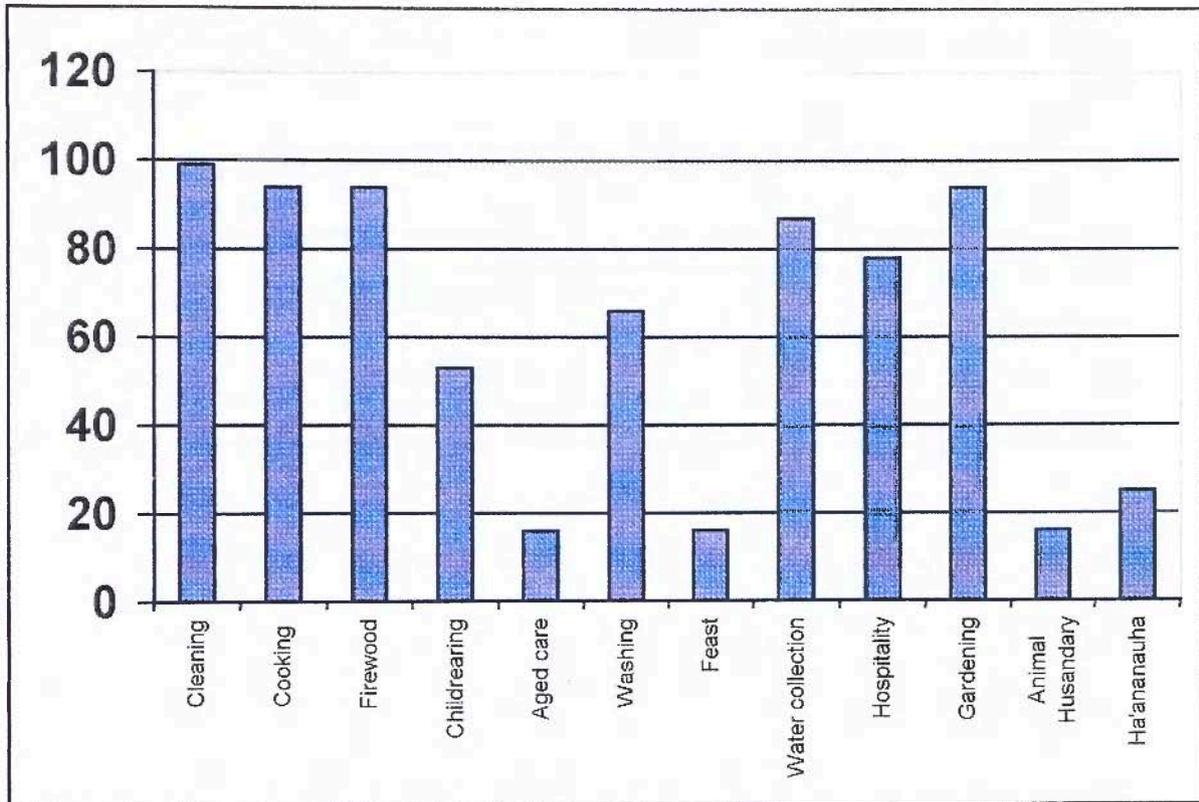
## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A. Graphs

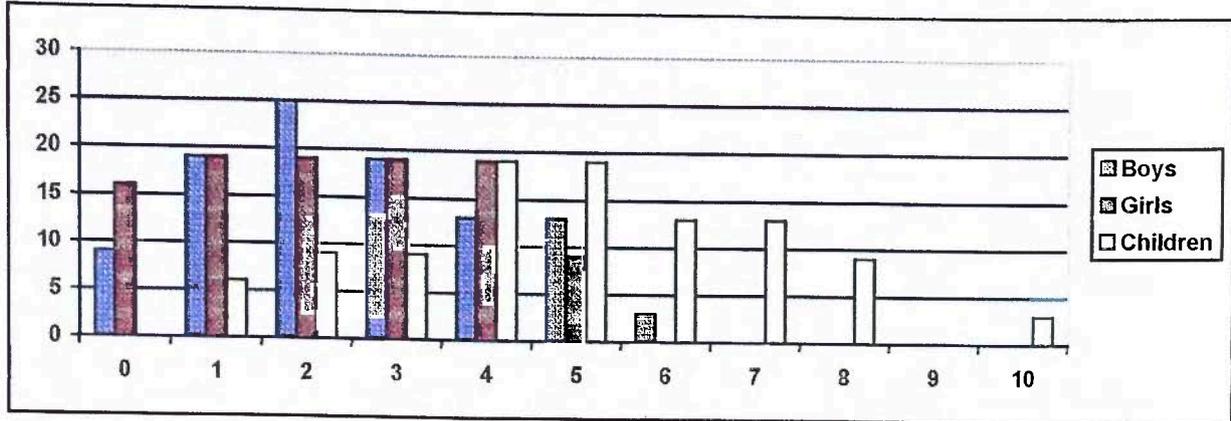
**Fig. 2 Men's roles emphasised by *Kastom***



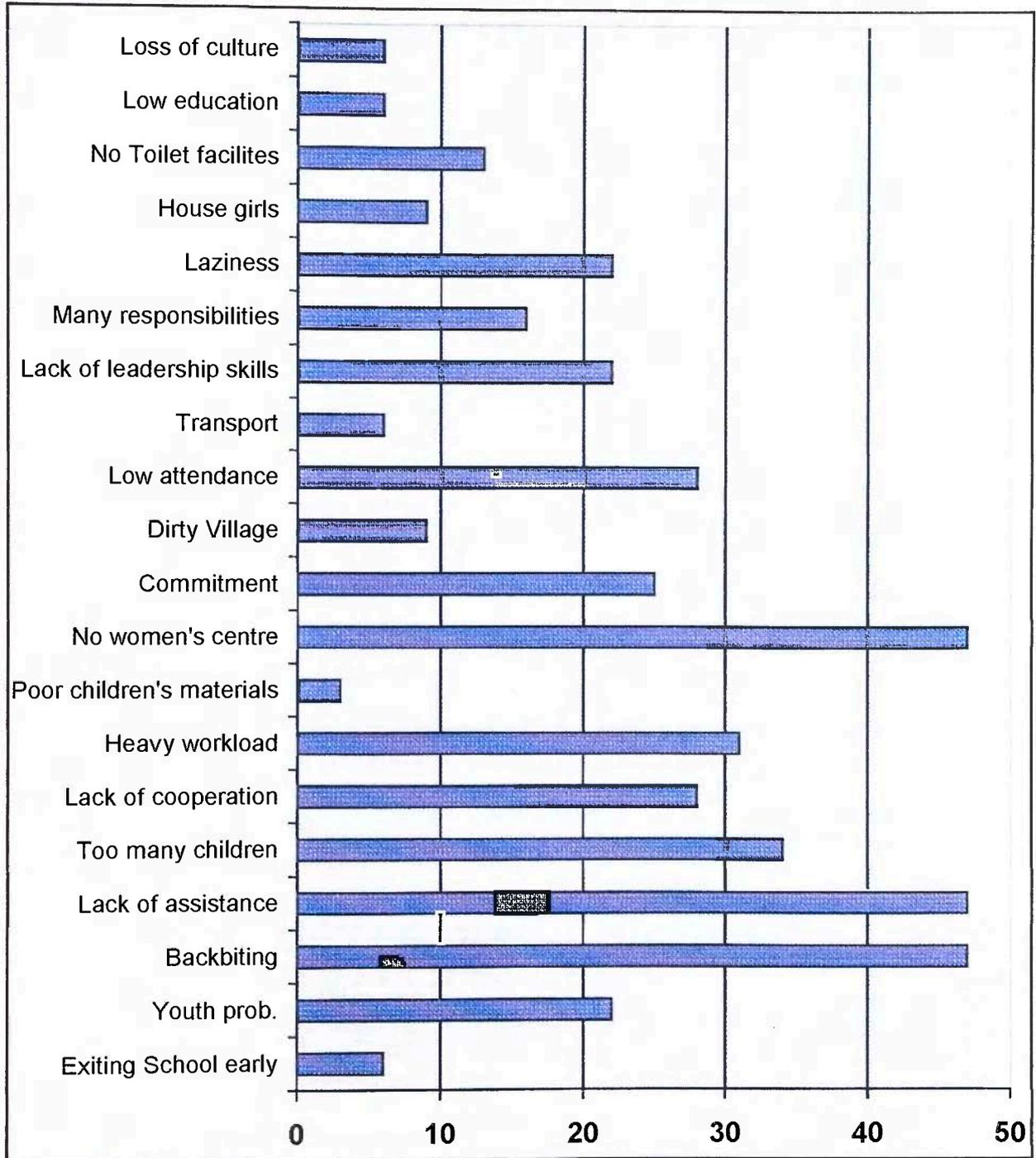
**Fig. 3 Women's roles emphasised by *kastom***



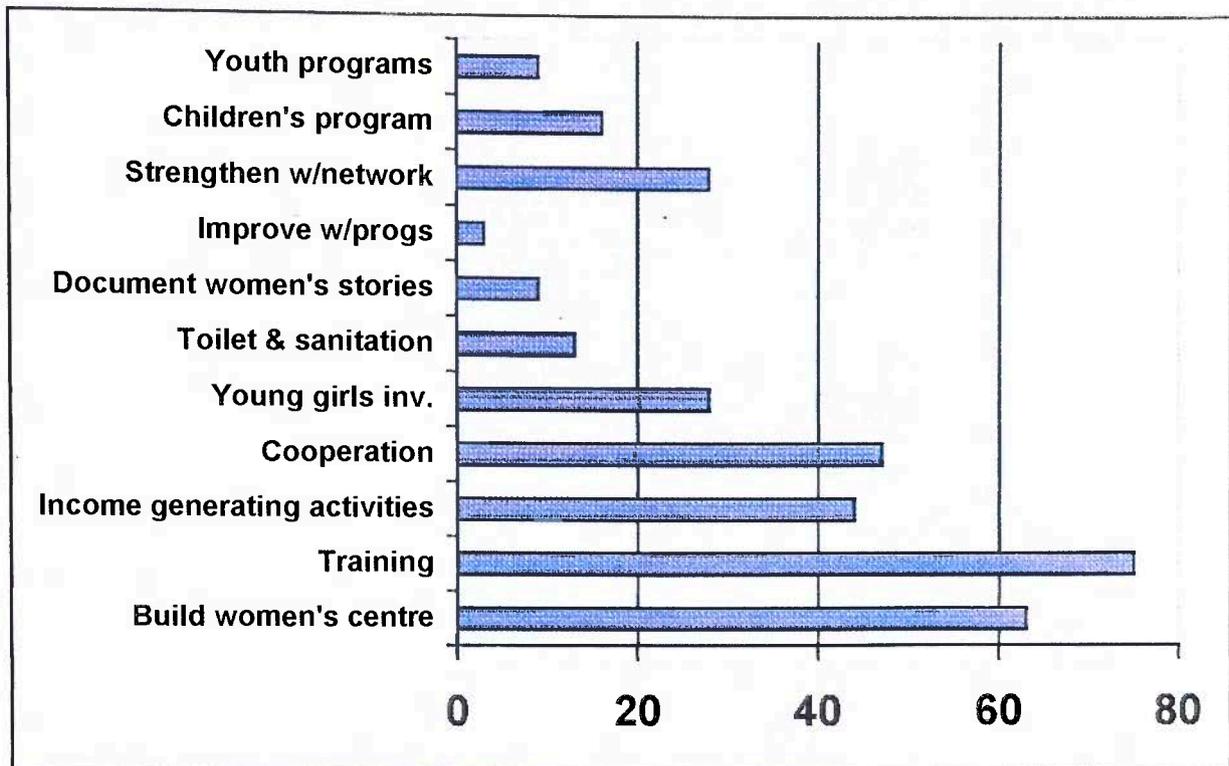
**Fig. 4 Number of Children per woman**



**Fig. 5 Problems identified by the Waisisi women**



**Fig. 6 Recommendations identified by the Waisisi women to address the above problems**



## Appendix B Photographs



Inter-Island air  
Transport



Coastal transport  
by outboard motor



Village transport  
by canoe



Paddling a  
Canoe at  
Waisisi



Kopo Women's  
Group



Caring for  
children by  
older children



Husking a  
coconut



Communal work  
cutting sago palm



Taking  
time out

Appendix C.  
**WAISISI RURAL WOMEN'S QUESTIONNAIRE**

Number [ ]

Date.....

Name of Village .....

Age group : 25-30 [ ] 31-35 [ ]

36-40 [ ] 46+ [ ]

Time.....

Under 25 [ ]

I don't know [ ]

Venue.....  
.....  
.....

**A. WOMEN'S ROLES**

1. What are your expected roles **as emphasised by kastom** and to the best of your knowledge? List them in order of priority.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. Do you perform these roles? Yes [ ] No [ ] why?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3. How do you know of these roles?

.....  
.....  
.....

4. Are you passing on this knowledge to your children? Yes [ ] No [ ]

How?

Boys

Girls

.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

Why?

Boys

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Girls

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

5. What are the expected roles of the men/husband, sons, daughters and other members of the family **as emphasised by kastom** and to the best of your knowledge? List below.

a Men/husband

.....  
.....  
.....

b Sons

.....  
.....  
.....

c Daughters

.....  
.....  
.....

d Other members of the family

.....  
.....  
.....

6. Do you think these roles are changing today? Yes [ ] No [ ]

How?

a.....  
.....

b.....  
.....

c.....  
.....

d.....  
.....

e.  
(Women).....  
.....  
.....

Why?

a.....  
.....

b.....  
.....

c.....  
.....

d.....  
.....

e.....  
.....

7. What time periods are most significant for these changes? Name events eg. after independence.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

8. What is your attitude to these changes?

Positive

Negative

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

9. List down the negative and positive impact change of roles have on you.

Positive Impact (Better)

Negative Impact (worse)

.....  
.....  
.....

.....  
.....  
.....

.....

.....

.....

10. List down the roles you perform now and that of your family members.

My roles/women

.....

.....

.....

Husband/Men

.....

.....

.....

Sons

.....

.....

.....

Daughters

.....

.....

.....

Other members of the family

.....

.....

.....

11. What is your impression of your roles now?

.....

.....

.....

12. In the absence of your husband, who performs the roles that he does?

.....

.....

.....

13. In your absence, who performs your roles?

.....

.....

.....

14. Any other comments

.....  
.....  
.....

## B. MARITAL STATUS

1. Are you: married [ ]      single [ ]      separated [ ]      divorced [ ]  
                    defacto [ ]      widow [ ]

2. Number of children ..... [ boys.....      girls..... ]

3. If married, was your marriage blessed in the: church [ ] by kastom [ ]  
Church and kastom [ ]      Legal (Magistrate) [ ]      others [ ] specify

.....  
.....

4. When married, did your family receive bride price?      Yes [ ]      No [ ]

Explain

.....  
.....  
.....

5. Who gives bride price?

.....  
.....

6. In your opinion who benefits from bride price and how?

Who?

How?

.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

7. What is your understanding of the importance and meaning of bride price?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

.....  
8. Do you think bride price is still relevant for today?      Yes [ ]      No [ ]

Explain

.....  
.....  
.....

Is it changing and how?

.....  
.....  
.....

9. What is your opinion and relationship with those that do and don't practice bride price?

Those who practice bride price.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Those who don't.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

10. What alternatives are available for those who do not practice bride price, ensuring that family relationships and cultural values are upheld?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

11. What are your views on compensation (totoha)?

.....  
.....

Who benefits and how?

Men

.....  
.....  
.....  
**Women**

.....  
.....  
.....  
12. Is the use of menstruation huts practiced today in your community?

.....  
.....  
.....  
What is your opinion on it?

.....  
.....  
.....  
13. Is pregnancy out of marriage a frequent occurrence in the community today?

Yes [ ] No [ ] Why?

.....  
.....  
.....  
14. How does the family and the community look at the issue and the persons involved?

.....  
.....  
.....  
**Men**

.....  
**Women**

.....  
.....  
.....  
Baby  
.....  
.....  
.....

15. Any other comments  
.....  
.....  
.....

### C. ESSENTIAL SERVICES

1. Level of Education: Primary [ ] Secondary [ ] Tertiary [ ] Short courses [ ]  
No school [ ] others (specify) .....

Activity	Rating					
	poor	1	2	3	4	5 very good
Read		.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Write		.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

2. Do you have access to Kopo primary school resources and facilities? yes [ ] no [ ]  
Explain  
.....  
.....  
.....

3. Is there any adult education available in the community?  
.....

4. Indicate your opinion on the efficiency of the following services provided at the Rohinari Health Clinic.

	V/efficient	efficient	poor	v/poor
Access to nurse	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Supply of medicines	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Clinic facilities	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Medical's visitation	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Referral services	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Is there any health education provided at the clinic or in the community?  
.....

5. Have you heard about the Solomon Islands National Council of Women? Yes [ ] No [ ]

If yes, what do you know about them ?  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

6. Have you heard about the Government Women and Development Division? Yes [ ] No [ ]

If yes, what do you know about them?  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

7. Has any officer from the above two organisations visited your group in the last five years?  
Yes [ ] No [ ]

8. Which community/women's organisation visited your group in the last five years?  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

9. Discuss the activities carried out by the organisation/s.  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

10. How helpful is your Area Council Member towards women's group activities? Describe  
.....  
.....  
.....

11. How helpful is your Member of Parliament towards women's group activities and issues? Describe.  
.....  
.....  
.....

12. Any other comments.

.....  
.....  
.....

## **D. RURAL WOMEN AND THE CHURCH**

Name of Church.....

1. Your level of attendance in church.

Daily [ ]      Few times in a week [ ]      Only on Sundays [ ]      Important times only [ ]

Others - specify [ ]

.....  
.....

2. What are your roles within the church women's group and the church organisation?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3. Have you held any responsible position within the church women's group and the church organisation? Yes [ ]      No [ ]

If yes, what position ? .....

What activities did you perform?

.....  
.....  
.....

If no, why?

.....  
.....

4. How much support does your family and the congregation give towards your work?

.....  
.....  
.....

5. What is the general attitude of men towards women's participation and programs in the church activities?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

6. Do women participate in making decisions within the church structure in your community?

Yes [ ] No [ ]

Explain.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

7. Is there any issue within the church you would like to see changed or addressed?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

8. Any other comments

.....  
.....  
.....

## **E. RURAL WOMEN AND THE COMMUNITY**

1. What are women's roles within your community outside the family and the church? List down.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. Do you hold any responsible position in your community other than your family and the church? Yes [ ] No [ ]

What position (s)?

.....  
.....

3. What problems do women face in your community?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

4. How might they be addressed and by whom?

How?

Whom?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

5. How do you participate in the community decision making body? Explain.

.....  
.....  
.....

6. Where in the community structure is position of women?

.....  
.....  
.....

Rating  
Lowest 1 2 3 4 5 Highest

7. What changes would you like to see take place for women in the next ten years?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

8. What programs do you see essential for women for the next ten years?

.....  
.....  
.....

9. How would these programs be implemented and by whom?

Programs

By whom?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

10. Any other comments.

.....  
.....  
.....

## **GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are your perceptions of your traditional roles and life style?
2. What are your perceptions of the modern life style and roles?
3. What barriers do you perceive for women in the next ten years?
4. How would you address those barriers?

## WAISISI MEN'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Village .....

Age group : 25 -30 [ ]

31-35 [ ]

36 - 40 [ ]

41 - 45 [ ]

45+ [ ]

Under 25 [ ]

Date .....

Venue.....  
.....

1. How do you perceive your kastom roles and expectation? List them.

.....  
.....  
.....

2. Are those roles changing? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Why?

.....  
.....  
.....

3. What factors lead to the change of roles?

.....  
.....  
.....

4. Which of those roles are being performed today and which ones are not?

.....  
.....  
.....

Why?

.....  
.....  
.....

5. What are your perception of the roles performed by women?

.....  
.....