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# **Gender & mining: Strategies for governing the development of women in Lihir, PNG**

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## **Abstract**

The negative impacts of mining on local communities, and particularly women in the Pacific, are well documented. It is acknowledged that mines are notoriously male dominated, and women struggle to be heard in negotiations between communities and mines, as well as to gain the benefits of mine related development. In recent years in attempts to address these issues, there have been calls to examine the interface between gender and mining more fully, and to mainstream gender in all aspects of mining.

This paper takes its lead from recent research that aims to move beyond the ‘negative impacts on women’ of mining (Mahy 2011), to instead examine the strategies and resilience of women in mining locations (Rimoldi 2011). In the case of the Lihir Gold mine, there are two key women’s organisations that work for women’s development: the Petztorme Women’s Association which draws its membership from the Catholic and United Churches, and the Tutorme Association which developed from a Sewing Centre. These two organisations, however, have developed very different strategies to advance the position of women. Through an analysis of this case, the paper argues that gender mainstreaming has not been effectual at the local level in Lihir, and that instead women continue to gain their status from their role as guardians of the future through children, youth and health.

## **Introduction**

In 2004 Lihir women staged a silent protest march in Londolovit town with banners calling for greater involvement in discussions surrounding the review of the agreement (Integrated Benefits Package, or IBP) between the Lihir gold mine and the local community. They presented the Chairman of the review committee with a petition arguing that women had been left out of “all aspects of the planning, decision-making and programming for development issues” (*Lihir i Lamel* 2004:5). This protest was led by the Petztorme Women’s Association, and was unprecedented in the history of Lihir. In part this paper aims to understand the strategies that have been employed by women’s associations in Lihir, and to appreciate why some have been more successful than others.

The Lihir Gold Mine, operated by Newcrest Mining, is located on the main island of the Lihir group of Islands in New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea. With construction beginning in 1995, and production in 1997, the mine is set to continue active mining until

2023, with production from stockpiles for a further 10 years or so. Annual production is in the realm of about 600,000 ounces, with 1 million forecast once the plant upgrade is finished in the near future. Prior to mining, the Lihir Islands were home to 7000 Lihirians, whose livelihood consisted of subsistence production and a small amount of income from cash crops and remittances. Since mining began, the population has increased to some 15,000 Lihirians, about 5000 informal migrants and a further 3000 migrant employees of the mine and its contractor companies. Vast changes have occurred on the islands, including the construction of a township and a ring road, a medical centre and improved education facilities, as well as increased consumption of alcohol and store-bought goods.

It is unsurprising that with these changes there have been both positive and negative impacts on men and women, and on the relationships between them. Two women's associations on Lihir, Petztorme and Tutorme, have developed quite different strategies to advance the position of women. Petztorme has drawn upon international understandings and conventions on gender and development to work for women's development at the international, national and local level. Tutorme, on the other hand, has remained focused on the local level and has gained support from the company managing the Lihir Gold mine. Through an analysis of this case, the paper argues that gender mainstreaming has not been effectual at the local level in Lihir, and that instead women continue to gain their status from their role as guardians of the future through children, youth and health. I begin with an analysis of the broader context of gender and mining.

### **Gender and mining**

Male domination of the mining industry around the world is well documented, and the Pacific is no exception. In recent years, however, a number of studies have demonstrated and discussed women's involvement in the industry, with a key aim being to challenge the hegemonic notion of mining as masculine (Eveline & Booth 2002; Gier & Mercier 2006; Lahiri-Dutt 2011; Lahiri-Dutt & Robinson 2008; Lahiri-Dutt & Macintyre 2006; Moretti 2006).

Mining has also been characterised by its negative impacts, particularly on women. Oxfam Australia notes that the impacts of mining are not gender neutral (2009). There is a great deal of literature that describes and analyses the impacts of mining on women as miners, as wives and as community members. Women have often been excluded from employment, or, as miners, have suffered from poor working conditions, less pay and fewer opportunities for advancement than men (Lahiri-Dutt & Robinson 2008; Sharma 2010).

As wives and mothers, mining has been discussed as having a negative impact on women's psychological well-being in terms of isolation from friends and family in remote locations (Sharma 2010), and also on family life through long working hours and shift work (Chase 2001).

As community members, women have been viewed as bearing the brunt of negative impacts of mining, with little input to negotiations between mines and communities. In the Melanesian context, women have little say in negotiations or control over the compensation that flows into communities (Byford 2002; Macintyre 2002). While Scheyens & Lagisa (1998) aim to show how women resist mining and logging activities, their paper documents much more thoroughly the lack of empowerment in economic, social, psychological and political domains in regards to mining in Lihir and logging in the Solomon Islands, than the ways that women resist.

It is in the context of these negative impacts that there have been calls for gender mainstreaming in mining. Gender mainstreaming is the "process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes in all areas and at all levels [so that] women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated" (United Nations 1997). Lahiri-Dutt has argued that gender mainstreaming is the right direction for mining projects (2006). Yet there have also been critiques of the concept, arguing that women face structural disadvantages that gender mainstreaming is unable to overcome: the approach is still to add women as a concern rather than have gender as an integral part of planning and processes. As Macintyre states,

Whatever gender mainstreaming might be in academic terms, by the time it gets into aid projects or workplace policies it has become 'add women and stir' with nobody prepared to actually do this. (2011: 30)

There are concerns that 'gender mainstreaming', with its emphasis on 'gender' draws the focus away from specifically women's disadvantage (O'Neill 2004; Macintyre 2011). Furthermore it has been suggested that mainstreaming universalises notions of gender that can disempower women even further (Rimoldi 2011).

In recent years a number of analyses have begun to document and move beyond 'the negative impacts of mining' to understand women as agents and as strategically drawing upon mining to improve their lives. Mahy (2011) aims to move beyond the dichotomous representations of women as either indigenous blameless victims of their husbands' sexuality in mining areas or as blameworthy migrant sex workers, to understand the livelihood choices and strategies of sex workers and community women. Lahiri-Dutt (2011) seeks to understand

women's agency in mining, whether this be in terms of how women draw upon mining as one of a number of livelihood strategies or how they act as political agents in protests around mining. Lahiri-Dutt argues that there is a need to appreciate "the enormous evidence of women's agency – in their productive roles in mines and at home, and in their resistance to exploitations of mining" (2011:1). It is these forms of strategy and agency, and the ways Lihir women who employ these are positioned that I wish to explore in this paper.

### **Petztorne and Tutorne: a tale of two associations**

Early in the history of the Lihir Gold mine there was recognised the need for an over-arching women's association to provide a forum for women's participation in decision making and development programs. Hence in 1991 with the assistance of the Community Relations Department of the mine and a female consultant, Suzy Bonnell, employed by them, the Petztorne Women's Association was formed (Membup 2003). Petztorne, meaning "working together" in the local language, was founded on the church structures of the *Katolik Mamas* (Catholic Mothers) and United Church Women's Fellowship already in place in Lihir (Membup & Macintyre 2000). The majority of Lihir villages are Catholic, with 7 United Church villages and a handful of other denominations present in the islands (Hemer 2011). Each village in the island group had its own women's group, with a president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer. The Petztorne Executive comprises a president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer and the presidents of the women's groups of the four churches (Catholic, United, Pentecostal and SDA Dorcas Welfare). Petztorne also has a general body comprising representatives of each ward on Lihir.

In the early years of mining, Petztorne worked with women who were being relocated from two villages in order to allow mining to go ahead. They also began a number of income generating projects: a nursery, market and can crusher in order to provide incremental self-help development for women. The difficulties with this approach and the sectarian divisions in the Association have been well documented by Macintyre (2003), who argues that most women's projects in Papua New Guinea fail due to issues with leadership once external advisors or funders withdraw.

By 2000, when I began work in the Community Relations Department of the Lihir Gold mine, Petztorne was still being supported by the Women's Section of this department to successfully undertake a number of projects and programs with women. While the nursery and can crusher had become unsuccessful, the market was still functional, and earning Petztorne good ongoing revenue. It was at this time that a new project began, emerging out

of a cultural exchange program between expatriate and Lihir women, and the desire for training in sewing skills. A training centre was set up, with an expatriate seamstress able to train Lihir women in sewing skills (see Hemer 2010; Macintyre 2003).

This training centre came to be known as the Tutorme Training and Sewing Centre, and functioned out of a small building provided by the mining company. It was managed by an advisory committee of expatriate and Lihirian women, including myself as secretary. The seamstress became the key trainer, with her salary provided by the mining company as well. Sewing training was taken up with gusto, with some 200 women paying to take classes in sewing by 2002. Many had completed a training sequence, and a select number had found employment with Tutorme. In 2001 Tutorme moved to a new building, once again provided by the mining company, and had taken on a number of commercial sewing projects, such as providing curtains for dormitories and embroidering company logos on uniforms. It was also during this year that Tutorme was registered as an Association, much to the concern of Petztorme women, who argued that having two associations for women in Lihir was likely to be a source of confusion and friction.

Even at this early stage, sectarian divisions within the two Associations, and between them, threatened the continued viability of Tutorme. In 2002 the mining company provided Petztorme with a building of its own, at least partially to placate Petztorme members who were critical of their lack of input into the direction in which Tutorme was heading. While this temporarily appeased most women and provided a much needed office space within the township, tensions between Tutorme, now managed through a Financial advisory committee heavily composed of expatriates, and the Petztorme executive continued.

In the years since 2002, Tutorme continued for some time as a relatively successful sewing centre. Then with the departure of the expatriate manager in 2005 its continued viability was threatened. More recently the building which housed Tutorme was condemned, and while the sewing machines remained onsite and the intention was to relocate these to a new building, in reality Tutorme as a sewing centre is now defunct. In 2009 Tutorme re-emerged on the Lihir scene as a general women's association working for women's development.

### **Local initiatives in women's development**

Both Tutorme and Petztorme have run a number of successful initiatives on Lihir. In its new incarnation, Tutorme has been functional for just over two years, and in that time has focused on health education for women and youth in villages. One of their most recent programs has

been to hire a Theatre group to provide entertaining and engaging education on HIV/AIDS. Tutorme has drawn upon links with the mining company (formerly Lihir Gold Ltd, now Newcrest) for assistance and transport with this initiative.

Petztorne continues to manage the market in the township, and this provides a source of revenue to fund projects. In late 2003 it launched a women's microcredit scheme of loans of K500-K700 charging 10 percent interest, and in 2004 employed a woman to coordinate this project. This seems to have been problematic however, as the credit scheme was put on halt in 2005 and has not been re-launched. Also in 2004 Petztorme was successful in gaining grants from the Local Level Government of K10,000 per ward for women's projects, to a total of K150,000. This money was to be used for vegetable gardens, bakeries, vanilla plants and small market houses to provide ongoing sources of money to women in villages.

On a more political note, in the early 2000s Petztorme pushed for women's representation in local government, leading to the appointment of two women's representatives on the Nimamar Local Level Government. Also, as noted at the beginning of the paper, Petztorme successfully protested for the inclusion of women in negotiations between the community and mining company, and an additional woman was added to the Joint Negotiating Committee to bring the total to two.

Petztorne has also been involved in women's health programs in Lihir. In the early 2000s the Association was a key partner and supporter of initiatives by the Lihir Medical Centre and Women's Section of the mining company as they carried out programs on nutrition in villages around the island group, as well as on health education on population and family planning issues.

The initiatives of Petztorme and Tutorme at the local level have focused on aspects of everyday life understood as key concerns for women. These include gardening, cooking and sewing, even if these are then sold to make small amounts of money. Health is also seen as another key concern for women, as it is women who oversee the health and nutritional needs of their families. As I show below, however, the claims by Petztorme for greater involvement and representation in negotiations signal a more global understanding of gender relations, and of Lihir women's position relative to Lihir men.

### **Petztorne: going national and global**

In the two decades since the inception of Petztorme, the Association has begun to choose to work beyond the local arena of Lihir. At the national level, members of Petztorme have

participated in the two Women in Mining conferences held in Madang in 2003 and 2005, and have spoken about the experiences of Lihirian women with mining (Membup 2003; 2005).

One member whom I shall call Mary has also been sponsored by the Centre for Environmental Research and Development (CERD), a national NGO, as a member of the Mine Affected Women's Foundation (MAWF). Mary was able to attend the 2005 Women in Mining Conference, as well as the 2007 Pacific Women and Mining Conference (Oxfam Australia 2009), and was part of the 2007 Declaration by CERD for no new mines.

Mary has also been able to raise Lihir women's concerns over mining at a global level through overseas travel, interviews and publications. Hence in 2003 she travelled to Portugal for the World Bank's Extractive Industries Review, as well as made a written submission to it in 2004. Mary also travelled to London to raise environmental concerns at the Rio Tinto Annual General Meeting in 2003. She was interviewed by Friends of the Earth International, and her comments about environmental disruption in Lihir are recorded in a 2003 publication as well as on their website. One Petztorme Executive member is also the co-author of a chapter in an internationally published book that documents concern over the risks of large-scale mining projects (Moody 2005).

The Petztorme executive has been active and able to raise Lihir women's concerns to the National and Global level. At the National level in Papua New Guinea, understandings of women in mining have been shaped by global discourses on gender.

### **Gender mainstreaming & the *National Action Plan for Women in Mining***

Papua New Guinea has recently developed a *National Action Plan for Women in Mining 2007-2012* through the 2003 and 2005 conferences on Women in Mining (Department of Mining 2007). Its aim is to draw attention to the issues affecting women in mining areas in the country, and to then set the direction for addressing these issues. The Plan draws upon key international conventions and obligations including the Millennium Development Goals, the Beijing Declaration and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In this, it highlights the importance of gender mainstreaming for the Papua New Guinea Government in aiming to achieve women's empowerment and equality. As outlined in this document, gender mainstreaming in mining is the

equitable distribution of the resources, opportunities and benefits of the development process and addresses gender inequalities in the mainstream of organizational policies, plans and programs, not just as separate, ad-hoc activities. (Department of Mining 2007:3)



There is a clear recognition, then, that gender mainstreaming thus aims to move beyond approaches that add a recognition of women to neutral plans and programs.

The National Action Plan lists eight Goals which are, very briefly, to raise women's education and literacy, to improve access to reproductive health services, to prevent or control communicable diseases including TB and STIs, to increase women's participation in economic, political and social life, to ensure women's associations function beyond mine closure, to ensure sustainable livelihoods, to mitigate or avoid environmental degradation and to promote security and peace in communities. Each of these goals is defined and has objectives, strategies and targets. Many of these involve awareness raising, and numbered or named targets such as a certain number of training sessions held, water tanks at six health facilities, or 10% of women multi-skilled by 2012. It is clear that such an ambitious plan would require high level coordination, and this is acknowledged in the Implementation Framework, yet there is little discussion of how this would actually occur.

Most of the goals in the plan, despite the acknowledged context for the plan, have little to do with gender mainstreaming and equity. So there is very little mentioned that aims for equity, whether this be in education, health or agriculture. There is almost no mention of employment. Furthermore, most of the targets are set (such as a 50% increase in female student enrolment) without any discussion of the communities' needs and strengths prior to the plan.

There is little evidence of any impact of the National Action Plan in Lihir. Despite a number of Lihir women having attended the Women in Mining conferences, no one I spoke to mentioned the existence of the National Action Plan. This suggests at the least that women are not using the plan to leverage changes in Lihir. Of the eight goals mentioned in the Plan, at present some are already occurring, funded and organised through relevant organisations such as the Lihir Medical Centre or Local Level Government. No one carrying out these activities seemed aware that they were fulfilling the goals of the National Action Plan, and it seems quite likely that the goals were being met by accident rather than by design.

There were few calls for gender mainstreaming in Lihir. In the realm of employment there was little activism around equity. Where there was some activism was in terms of calls for representation for women in local politics and on negotiating bodies for benefits of mining, as was noted at the beginning of this paper. Women called for more business opportunities and for the need for access to sources of funding. The ways these became part of local practice, however, was in terms of adding women in to existing processes, the "add women and stir" approach (Macintyre 2011: 30), rather than significantly challenging the

processes or practices themselves. Hence gender mainstreaming and equality had little currency in Lihir where other understandings of gender held sway.

### **Women's status in Lihir: *ertnin* and *sio***

Lihirians are members of both lineages and named clans, with matrilineal descent. Land tenure is claimed to be matrilineal, but is complex and has cognatic tendencies. As argued by Macintyre (2003), in precolonial times it is unlikely that women participated in exchanges in their own right, and even today they assert little control over land or ritual events. Despite this, women could develop the reputation and status of a 'big woman' (*wok tohe*) on rare occasions, and more commonly it was known that the renown of big men rested largely upon their wives and sisters.

Women's status is best understood through the concept of *sio*, meaning the respect shown to someone, or that someone has earned. *Sio* is most commonly used in reference to big men (*a tohe*), to indicate that people respect them as demonstrated through respectful behaviour and providing them with shell money (*a le*) with which the big man could participate in exchanges. Thus the respect shown to a big man would allow for the further development of the reputation of the clan through ritual exchanges.

For women, *sio* was not given to them in the form of shell money. Instead they gained *sio* through the bearing and raising of children, and through production of gardens and pigs, and from these, shell money. For all of these processes, the key term used is *ertnin*, a term that indicates a productive future-oriented practice, often meaning nurturance. Hence a woman would carefully nurture her children, gardens and pigs. As a mother she would aim to have many children, but space them carefully so as they would all grow to healthy maturity. A woman who was highly productive, with large gardens full of yams and pigs grown fat to adulthood was one who was highly valued by her husband, and one who could inspire the jealousy of rival males of her husband. Sometimes she would be the subject of sorcery to inhibit her capacities. Such a woman was one of high status—she had earned *sio*.

It should also be noted, from the foregoing, that women gained their *sio* not through position or association, but through hard work or *pniez*. In Lihir it is understood that benefits can be gained either through hard work, or through relationships or position (such as nurturance or exchange). In the context of mining there has been a backlash against benefits received through position, such as royalties gained as a member of a lineage. This has meant that the moral value of *pniez* (work) as the source of benefits has become more acutely

understood. This point is key to understanding the criticisms of some Lihirian women, as I discuss below.

### **Women's associations and women's status**

In order to carry out many of its programs, Petztorme has drawn upon Lihir women's voluntary labour. This has been one of the weak points of the organisation, in the sense that Lihir women already have many other things that draw upon their time. As many men and young women have gained employment with the mine, the volume of work carried out by village women has increased, meaning that there is even less time available for voluntary communal work (Macintyre 2003). Given that much of the work for Petztorme drew upon existing skills and understandings of women's work, such as growing plants or vegetables for sale or providing health and nutrition information, it has not been a basis of additional respect, nor a source of challenge to conventional notions of women's status. In this way, though an extra obligation for women who are already very busy, this work at the local level has been seen as generally appropriate for women.

Similarly, Tutorme extended this understanding of appropriate women's activities through its sewing training. Most of the women who sought training were able to use these skills to provide for their families in the village setting: only a handful went on to gain employment with Tutorme. The new incarnation of Tutorme likewise draws upon women's time and work to provide further health education for women and youth in the village. At this local level, then, the strategies of both Petztorme and Tutorme confirm and bolster women's status based in their work and nurturance of families, gardens and pigs.

The activities of Petztorme at the national and global level were perceived quite differently. For most women, the travels of women like Mary or other executives of Petztorme were seen not as working for the benefit of Lihirian women. Rather, these were seen as a personal benefit—a chance for them to experience the wider world and for them to gain a name for themselves. Their efforts to raise the concerns of Lihir women at the National and International levels, and their experience with government and non-government organisations have not translated to additional *sio* or respect for them at the local level. Mary, for example, has instead been the subject of much criticism about “doing nothing” for Lihirians while benefiting from her position in the Petztorme executive. Her actions are perceived as benefits, not as morally valued work. Thus Mary has been caught in the disjunction between national and global discourses on gender and mining, and local notions of the appropriate work and place of women.

### **Lihir women's status and gender mainstreaming**

In a context where value is placed upon women's nurturance of children, gardens and pigs, gender mainstreaming actually appears as a threat to these traditional sources of status. Women, through Petztorme and Tutorme, have appealed to other women, and to both expatriate and local Lihir males in their roles as guardians of the future to effect changes at the local level. So this has been an effective strategy in gaining acceptance of programs about health or sewing, to make changes at the market run by Petztorme, or to call for changes to the sale of alcohol. Such activities fit well with the broader understanding of women's position and positively contribute to their status or standing (*sio*).

Yet when Lihir women aim or argue for equality, particularly in the realms of politics and employment, they undercut those understandings of women's status. Instead women then become the subject of criticism and jealousy from other women as they are seen to be benefiting rather than performing morally valued work. It also appears that as they draw less upon those nurturance roles, they have to build their status in new ways. This roughly translates as being seen to be 'doing something', often in various forms of leadership, which may include proposing and organising successful meetings, training opportunities and projects through which Lihir women can benefit. Yet such a definition of success for building status leaves them open to criticism similar to many Lihir men face. Thus Mary and other members of the Petztorme Executive over the last ten years have been subject to charges of misuse of funds or Association property, and a lack of real development for Lihir women. As argued by Macintyre (2003), this model of successful leadership is one where the leader necessarily distributes largess, and if they can't then their leadership, and hence their standing in the community is contested.

If gender mainstreaming as defined internationally implies that women have equality of access to employment, politics and hence sources of standing as men, such a model can be problematic in a place such as Papua New Guinea. As found by Rimoldi (2011) for the Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency of Bougainville, there is a danger in aiming for gender mainstreaming.

By taking on the vocabulary and orientation of international development or welfare agencies (and affiliating with them), this once very grassroots organisation gradually came to believe that it was dependent on aid money for existence. In a sense it looks like a 'buy out' of women's influence and authority intrinsic to their traditional standing in Bougainville society. (Rimoldi 2011:191)

Rimoldi goes on to question what precisely ‘mainstream’ means, and how gender in Bougainville may be shaped in response to these international concerns (2011:191-2).

Where gender mainstreaming implies women gaining equality on terms set by the male norm (Walby 2005), there is a risk that women’s sources of authority can be undermined. This is clearly the case for Lihir, where a woman’s status continues to be tied to her capacity to contribute through the nurturance of children, gardens and pigs. It is possible that these activities may come to be understood as of lesser value by Lihirian men and women if arguments for equality become more commonplace on Lihir.

### **Conclusion**

In moving away from analyses which emphasise the negative impacts on mining on women, it is possible to productively examine the strategies and choices made by women in the contexts of mining developments. The two women’s associations on Lihir have followed different strategies in an attempt to advance women’s positions: both Tutorme and Petztorme by emphasising traditional forms of women’s status, yet Petztorme also appealing to a broader audience and more global understandings of gender and mining. At present it is uncertain how successful each of these strategies will be, but what is clear so far is that Petztorme’s efforts at the national and global levels have not been met with much enthusiasm or acclaim on Lihir, and it is quite possible that the strategy may work against women in the long run to undercut traditional sources of status. Yet women should have a voice and a place at the negotiations table, as well as access to education and employment. Whether gender mainstreaming provides the context and tools to achieve this remains to be seen.

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