Matrilineal System in Bougainville;
The cultural solution to Land Tenure and Security for women

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Introduction
After a 10 year civil war, which was instigated from the destruction of the environment, and now at a time when the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARB) is starting from scratch to develop a government that can protect the rights of its people, this seminar-workshop has prompted the issue of the love for the environment and land which the people of Bougainville are so passionate about. I am so thankful for being invited to represent my mothers, sisters and daughters as well as my fathers, brothers and sons at this Global Seminar-workshop on Indigenous women, climate change & Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation.

The issue of climate change and REDD is not something that is well understood or appreciated by many in the ARB. The Bougainville Crisis has left the region with the struggle of establishing a government with limited Human Resource and Capacity in regard to delivering or implementing priorities of the Autonomous Government as well as those that are recognized globally (such as MDGs and the REDD).

With the many changes taking place in the ARB, the issue of protecting the environment is paramount. Climate change is real, and the people of ARB are already facing the effects of this, with droughts, floods, rising sea levels, sinking islands, change in production of crops, increase of pests and diseases to crops, increase in respiratory illnesses in people and the more commonly felt change in temperature and weather patterns.

With more the 98% of people living as subsistence farmers on the 97% of customary land, the access to information of global issues that affect their livelihood is not available, neither is it understood, giving ignorance the upper hand of being the main tool for destruction of a healthy and happy society.

In my presentation I will present on some mechanisms that help protect and promote Land Tenure and Security through the empowerment of women, and their roles in the indigenous way of life. I believe that by studying these mechanisms of the society, we as a Global community can find some entry points to addressing the issues of climate change, REDD+ and the negative pressures of the industrialized world.
With around 97% of ARB land being “Customary Land” and 3% belonging to the State, there is a great need to get the indigenous women to identify ways of better protecting their land and resources and promote activities that sustain the conservation of their environment for generations yet to come. There are many challenges women face which continue to undermine their ability to adequately manage, preserve and protect their natural environment and resources for the benefit of their children and their communities. Environmental issues continue to arise and need addressing. Some of these in ARB are:

1. Mining (Panguna Mine, Tore Mine)- Women not being exclusively included in decision making.
2. Cultivation techniques (Slash and Burn, and long term fallow – clearing of more land for cultivation purposes)
3. Industry of Agriculture and Forestry – Need for other economic activities that do not have an impending effect on the Natural Environment but should instead encourage the preservation and protection of the Natural Environment.
4. Conservation of Resources – Women being the “custodians” of land should be given the authority to manage their resources for the future and for the healthy living of their communities.
5. Marine/Reef Destruction – Climate change is also seeing the destruction of the marine life which women heavily depend on for their livelihoods.
6. Gender Based Violence and other Human Rights issues in relation to climate change and land – Women’s rights are violated due to the impact of climate change.

In order to understand how Land Tenure and Security in Bougainville promotes empowerment of indigenous women and the protection of our environment, we must first understand and acknowledge the culture that governs this society; the Matrilineal system.

**Brief Background of Autonomous Region of Bougainville**

Bougainville composes of two main islands – Bougainville and Buka and 166 smaller islands, including the Atolls. Total land area is approximately 9 300 square kilometres.

About half of the land area is mountainous with peaks rising to 1500 to 2400 meters, including several active and dormant volcanoes along with remnants of a geologically ancient plateau of uplifted coral limestone. Vegetation is of thick mantle jungles, cold plains in the mountains, swamps, and flat grassland plains on the coastal plains.

It is suggested that the first humans to set foot on Bougainville – Buka arrived about some 28000 years ago from the North West. Through a few main waves of migration, the people’s languages varied, with certain cultural practices. However, the use of matrilineal system remained in most areas. 
The current population is estimated around 200,000.
Culture
There is about 18 different languages in Bougainville. The matrilineal system is predominant in Bougainville with only the Buin and the Atolls Districts being patriarchal. There are 5-6 main clans; Naubuen – Eagle, NauKaripa – Rat, NauMutana – Moon, NauKahi- Dog, NauTahi- Sea, Amara – Heron in the Matrilineal society.

Because of the diversity of languages, these clans have different names in different societies, and variations of totems that are used to identify the clans throughout the region. The use of totems assist greatly in identifying relationships with clans from the north to the south.

The Matrilineal System in Bougainville
Bougainville is mainly a matrilineal society, except for a few areas (Buin, & Atolls) where they are patriarchal. This system means that a person’s lineage is traced through the maternal ancestry. It also means that customary land is inherited and passed on through the mother’s lineage.

The matrilineal system works on the mutual respect and appreciation of women and men as bilateral partners in decision making and development. Women’s opinions are not disregarded or overlooked. Women are not seen as mere objects. They are seen a valuable instruments in protecting and promoting the inclusion, welfare and interests of the family as a whole, this includes the land that sustains them all.

Being a woman, she is concerned for the wider or extended family. She is concerned for the continuity of the clan and family lineage. She is also concerned for the availability of resources that can sustain the livelihood of the clan and family. She accommodates the needs of the wider and extended family and clans and thus, contributes to decision making in regard to the mechanisms that must be promoted to maintain overall peace and for the community.

Unlike the predominant Patriarchal systems found in the world, the matriarchal or matrilineal societies promote the security of both men and women through a system that facilitates consensus and appreciation for all members in the society. Through its structures it is a system that promotes a fair distribution of resources for the sustainable livelihood of people in its community.

If we are to protect our environment, the earth that we gather our source of security and joy from, we must search through our past to understand the mechanisms that our ancestors used over thousands of years when they lived in unity with the spirits of the land and mother earth herself. The land and all its beauties were connected with the people through spirituality and respect. Today, as we find ourselves battling to find ways of protecting our earth and environment from destruction that mankind has brought on itself, let us take time to reflect on our perception of the relationship we have with the land, mountains, forests, seas, rivers, and especially with our brothers and sisters who stand beside us in finding a solution to protecting our mother earth and us all who depend on her for our sustenance.
Disregard of culture causing the destruction to environment

However, there is a great concern that the matrilineal system that was the basis of governance over the last 28,000 years in Bougainville, may be lost with the intrusion of the all too assuming patriarchal systems that dominate most societies of the world. The pressures of these foreign social systems automatically exert their mechanisms on our society without considering the relevance it has to the values of the indigenous people of the land. A fine example of this was the Panguna mine.

The mining company Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia had consultations with the men only. When riches beyond the understanding of the common villager was negotiated, greed took over those heading negotiations which then further led to the exclusion of women and the clan folk. This eventually resulted in the children of the land being frustrated and provoked as for over a decade they witnessed the destruction and mutilation of their land, the pollution of their rivers and seas, the airs, and all along being denied their rights to benefits of the mine and recommendations of reviewing the copper mine agreement. Being protectors and defenders of the land, going to war with the Mining Company was the only option they had to make the Mining Company listen to their grievances, thus, leading to the Bougainville Crisis which lasted well over 10 years and resulted in the death of over 10,000 lives.

Some of the pressures are found in everyday situations from as soon as a child is born, in registering the child, through the education system and even so in the government policies and structures where women are being left out. Currently the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) & Autonomous Bougainville Administration (ABA) is working towards developing a Land Policy, which is aimed at integrating traditional mechanisms from this society. The process has just started with consultations with communities within ARB. This will lead to a land summit and other series of workshops before a Land policy can be drafted.

The loss of the use of certain mechanisms in our culture is affecting the way we respond to issues arising in our community. Some reasons for the loss of cultural knowledge and values include:

1. Influence of other cultures and systems
   - First European contact - 1767
   - Colonial influence – 1886
   - Mission – 1900
   - 2. Mining (BCL) - 1972
     - Culture shock as people had to quickly experience a new way of life which was totally different to theirs. The values that came along with the mining operations had an effect on the people.

3. Brain drain
   - Education and work outside of Bougainville has led to Bougainvillians losing some of their local history.

4. Irrelevant education
Chiefs have not been given appropriate education to tackle the sudden changes occurring in their communities. Thus they are now not effective in their communities.

5. Crisis

- Lead to deterioration of certain values as new values evolved from the war. “War Lord attitude”, Greed, Need for Security, etc.

**Traditional Mechanisms used to identify land boundaries and custodians**

1. Boundaries – rocks, trees, rivers, creeks, reefs, water pools etc
2. Feasting ceremonies - “wakokwa”(washing of feet and face), deaths and marriage ceremonies, etc
3. Initiations – chief baby’s first touch of land, 1st visit to the gardens, UPE, etc
4. Burial sites
5. Traditional Agreements (MOUs); alliances with other clans as guardians of land.
6. Authority of Chief in the village.
7. Legends and Clan totems

**Reasons for utilizing these mechanisms**

1. Identify boundaries of clan land
2. Communicate the clan history and land boundaries with other communities.
3. Protect land from invaders/enemies.
4. Promote the authority of the clan
5. Maintain a way of recording clan history.

**Results of traditional mechanisms**

1. Less land disputes - clan history and land details was public knowledge through social activities that were carried out. Thus other chiefs and other clans knew and respected the history and land boundaries of other clans.
2. Land was protected from enemies/invaders.
3. Environment was protected.
4. Surplus food and resources.
5. Community was organized and supported each other.

**Effects of not utilizing the traditional mechanisms**

1. Clan members do not know their own land boundaries.
2. Different clans do not know the borders of the other clan lands.
4. Land and resources are left vulnerable.
5. Damage to environment.
7. Communities having a poor standard of living.
Further Explanations of 4 main mechanisms; (1) Names; (2) Clan user rights; (3) Consultations; (4) Planning & Implementing

Use of Names in the Matrilineal System
Bougainvillean societies quickly identify with names from their clan or a clan they are related to. The use of names is a very important mechanism for land tenure in the matrilineal system in Bougainville. This is because all names are products or identities of a particular clan and distinguish land tenure. Names are not given unnecessarily. They are given with intentions of securing certain clan relationships and protecting land tenure.

In the matrilineal system in Bougainville there is no use of patriarchal surnames. The matrilineal culture automatically implies that a name identifies a certain relationship the person has to a clan and to a piece of land. Names are given based on the relationship that child would have with a clan and the land. A name is used as a mechanism to identity/or mark a piece of land or a user right to that land. Thus, names must be used and given carefully. It is not given merely for the purpose of personal identity.

A woman, who is married, does not use any of her husband’s name to identify herself as his wife. Women in traditional times did not use the husband’s name because they are not married into his family or clan (i.e. they do not settle on his land or use the resources on his clans land). It is he who marries into her family/clan. It does not make sense for her to use his name which belongs to another clan. Her relationship with the man is the “marriage”. He is the father of “her children”. But he maintains his lineage with his mother’s clan. A father is therefore referred to as the father of the first born child (name). E.g.: Father of Rita or Father of John.

The children belong to the mother’s lineage, and thus the use of a father’s name as a surname would be implying that they belong to the father’s lineage or clan. The use of a father’s name used as a surname to his children would confuse land tenure and cause more disputes in the future.

Clans can give a name that is theirs to a child of another clan, but this is done under special arrangement and mainly for the purpose of strengthening the relationship and alliance between the two clans. However, all first born children of a family, must be given a name from their mother’s clan. They cannot be given a name from another clan as they are the leaders and protectors of their mother’s lineage and land. Their history and lineage must be seen through their names.

Eg: My grandmother’s children
Grandmother’s name: Ruth Iarabe
Grandfathers name: Simon Kaevorooho

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clan: Naukaripa</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>Rita Mamavi</th>
<th>NauKaripa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Eddie Vateop</td>
<td>NauMutana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Esther Vunari</td>
<td>NauKaripa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Sake Joel</td>
<td>NauMutana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My grandmother refers to her husband as the “Father of Rita Mamavi” (my mother, who is the first born child).

The current use of surnames by many Bougainvilleans is an introduced patriarchal mechanism. This mechanism was used during the 19th century when missionaries and colonial officers began having contact and started working with Bougainvilleans. It is a system that has no meaning in the Bougainville Matrilineal system and actually causes more confusion in regard to land tenure. It even has the possibility of weakening the security of land for women in Bougainville.

Eg: My grandmother’s marriage to my grandfather was arranged by the Missionaries when she was a young girl. She used her husband's name on certain occasions but did not understand why, as it was part of our culture. She noticed it on the address of letters that were sent to her; she was referred to as Mrs. Ruth Keavoroho. After her husband died she stopped using his name. However, she explained that his name was not hers neither was it her children’s, thus they never allowed their children to use it.

**Clan’s user rights to land: A means of security for land and resources**

Each clan is made up of a group of family lineages (bloodline). In Bougainville these are referred to as “baskets” which depict the basket that was used to keep the families shell money. A “basket” is made up of a family lineage i.e. the mothers family line refer to the traditional groupings where resources were invested or incorporated together for the communal use of paying for bride price, gift exchanges, compensations, reconciliations, trade and other cultural activities. Clans of a certain area can adopt other family lineages of the same clan into the area by giving them user rights to their land.

**The land rights in Bougainville include:**

1. Rights to say how the land will be used and who by
2. Rights to plant gardens, build houses
3. Rights to walk across the land, or use it for cultural purposes
4. Rights to lend, sell give away or bequeath in a will
5. Rights to gain land from the death of a former owner
6. Rights to a resting place for the dead

Mechanisms were in place to protect land tenure and these involved the assistance, participation and support in all activities of the clan’s activities. Their settlement on the land was always orally passed on from generation to generation with the practice of participation in clan activities. Any activity done by members of other family lineages must be done with the knowledge and approval of the family who owns the land, and if it is a ritual, then the leading clan must take lead in the activity.
Family lineages own portions of land in an area alongside other clans. Trees, rivers, rocks, burial sites, reefs, pools and ritual areas in the jungle were used as boundaries of land.

Land boundaries are identified by rivers, streams, pools, rocks, trees, reefs and legends.

Other clans who have any business regarding the user rights of another clans land, must discuss with the women first before proceeding with any activity. This could be regarding the cutting down of trees, carrying out rituals, obtaining medicinal plants/herbs from her land, etc.

**Consultations with women and Decision Making**

Women in the Matrilineal system in Bougainville are very much entitled to decision making regarding activities on their land. They know that the land is theirs, and that the activities that occur on their land must be in the best interest of the welfare of all the children of her lineage.

In all clan issues especially with land, all consultations and queries must be done with presence of the women. Brothers, uncles all sit with the Chief Lady and discuss land issues. If and when the Chief lady agrees to certain prospects, the Chief Man (her brother) represents the clan in presenting the decision to those parties concerned. The men are not allowed to make decisions as an individual or a private stakeholder. He must always consult his sisters and other clan members before representing them with a decision.

Unlike a patriarchal society where men inherit land and pass it on to their sons (leaving the women out of the distribution of land) and has little or no inclusion of women in decision
making, the matrilineal system promotes the security of women and the livelihood of both men and women through the governance and ongoing consultation with women. This mechanism supports the livelihood of women and her children in a number of ways,

1. She can decide what she wants to do on her land and instruct or ask her husband and men born to her clan to develop it in that particular way.
2. She can decide who lives on her land with her lineage. Men and brothers therefore, are very respectful towards their sisters and generally to other women as they are mindful that they can be told to leave, if their behaviour is not one that promotes the values that the woman wants to maintain.
3. She can identify certain activities that need to be changed in order to protect her environment Eg: Preserving the forest, tabooing usage or clearing away of an area of the forest or limiting certain fishing activities.
4. The development and benefits on her land are rightfully hers and her children’s (and most importantly her daughters), thus nobody can take it away from them after either the husband dies or leaves. In this regard in a contemporary life, when man marries another woman, the original wife and children are not displaced.
5. A woman having her own piece of land prevents the looking down of a mother – in-law on her. As by her own right, she has her own land. Mothers and daughters in law, get on well, and actually work well together because there is mutual respect for each other as landowners.
6. A mother also accepts her son’s role to serve the clan of the daughter-in-law, this includes him moving to the wife’s clan land to support and develop her land.
7. Sons have a responsibility to visit their mothers and sisters regularly to assist with the business of the clan and family.
8. The uncles are responsible for training and disciplining the sons of his sister, as they must pass on the history and secrets of their mother’s clan down to their nephews.
9. The first born son of the first born daughter is usually given the role of being the Chief Man (spokesman) of the clan. This role is passed from Uncle to Nephew and not father to son.
10. The first daughter of the mother is regarded as the Chief Meri. (Tsunono – Queen/Chieftan). She has a responsibility of addressing the concerns of the clan. She facilitates the care of all the members of the clan by making decisions about her environment and the activities on it.
11. Children born out of wedlock have a place & land from their mothers

**Process of Making a Decision**

When a women feels that there has been violation of one of her rights and especially in regard to her land and resources or family or clan the following are steps that she would usually take to addressing and resolving them;

1. Inform her brothers/ uncles / sons of the problem
2. She would then get their feedback on how to deal with the issue at hand
3. She and the immediate lineage or those supporting her cause, would then send a messenger/mediator to convey the information to the violator(s)
4. Mediation takes place between parties, meetings, and consultations are carried out until a solution is found; either a law is passed, or penalty paid (compensation).

5. Other times, when a clan or group of clan members decide to go to war with another clan, the woman is also consulted for her opinion.

**Women being Planners and Orchestrators of family activities**

Women in the matrilineal system in Bougainville lead the planning, organizing and implementation of most celebrations, feasts, rituals and other activities of the clan. For all kinds of activities, women are consulted. Women lead and organise the tasks that need to be done and inform her brothers and sons of the tasks they must administer out to the rest of the family.

Some examples of these activities include:

1. All initiations (traditional baptism of the child into the clan)
   a. First initiation of born chief when an infant (before he/she touches soil for the first time). 8 months old
   b. Second initiation of born chief as a toddler by taking him/her to sacred pools to wash feet and face. 2 years old
   c. Third initiation of born chief by taking him/her to the gardens and bush for the first time. 4-6 years old
   d. Fourth initiation of born chief by carrying out Tattooing or Scaring on the body of the child. 10 -12 years old.
   e. First Menstrual cycle for young girls
   f. Upe for young men
2. Traditional Engagements of sons or daughters
3. Traditional Weddings of sons or daughters
4. Brideprice and Dowry exchange of sons or daughters
5. Mourning ceremonies/feasts
6. Reconciliations and compensations

**Roles and Responsibilities of Women and Men in a Matrilineal Society**

_The roles and responsibilities of women in the matrilineal society in Bougainville include:_
1. Bearer of children for the clan
2. Mother to her children and all her family lineage
3. Custodian of clan Land
4. Decision maker in all clan matters
5. Teacher of cultural practices, rituals, techniques, legends and clan history to children
6. Keeper and Treasurer of clans wealth (basket of shell money)
7. Planner and orchestrator of clan ceremonies, feasts and rituals
8. Helper for her in-laws and their clan activities

_The roles and responsibilities of men in the matrilineal society in Bougainville include:_
1. Father children for his wife’s clan
2. Provide for and care for his children and that of his sisters
3. Develop land for his wife and that of his sisters
4. Decision maker on clan matters
5. Protector of clan land and resources
6. Teacher of cultural practices, rituals, techniques, legends and clan history to children
7. Implementer of decisions agreed upon by the clan
8. Warrior for clan
9. Helper for his in-laws and their clan activities

**Conclusion**

A woman in the matrilineal society has the power to make decisions regarding the activities of her land. In Bougainville, due to the armed conflict and the exerted pressure of the patriarchal systems of the outside world, on our society, women are lacking adequate information and education on the current global and regional issues affecting their societies. Without being aware of the threats of the outside world on their indigenous way of life, they are unwittingly submitting to norms and practices of a destructive nature. They are not able to make informed decisions to protect their system of governance which promotes and protects their land and environment. Once they lose their system of governance, once they lose their ability to speak out and confidently make decisions about their land, once they lose their land, they lose their sense of security, and cannot protect the land, and they cannot protect themselves and their children.

**Recommendation**

1. ABG and ABA need to establish an institution in the government that promotes and is concerned about the conservation of the environment and the indigenous way of life in Bougainville.
2. Review of Civil Registry in Bougainville so that ABG develops application forms and certificates that are sensitive to the Matrilineal and Patriarchal societies in Bougainville.
3. Lands Division to be sensitive to both the matrilineal and patriarchal systems in ARB when collecting data and developing the ARB Land Policy.
4. Review the current approach of consultations taken at all levels of ABG to ensure that ALL women leaders and their clans are consulted and are kept informed on all issues of regarding the progress and development of their land and people.
5. Education and awareness for both women and men on the environmental pressures on the land, and effective strategies of environmental conservation so they can make informed decisions about their land and environment.
6. Strengthening of the Matrilineal System by creating an institution specifically for promoting and protecting the heritage all people of Bougainville.

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6. Bougainville Women’s Federation -
7. Robin Wilson – Deputy Speaker (House of Representatives, Bougainville Parliament)
8. All my family members from NaKaripa Clan of Teop Tinputz.
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11. Peter Nerau – Pictures (power point presentation)
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