

IN SOUTH AFRICA

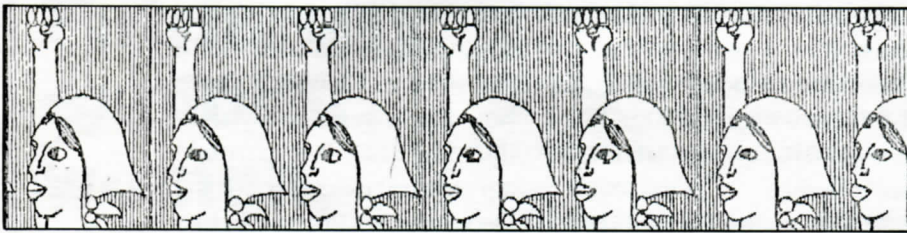
**UMLAZI
WOMEN
ARE
WAKING
UP**

African law sees women. Slowly we will learn other things which affect women." Workshops are held every third Sunday of each month.

The lawyer who talked about women and the law gave the Umlazi women a shock. They found out that the law does little to protect the interests of married women. The husband is given the right to make important decisions for his wife.

One woman said, "I cannot believe how unfair the law is towards women. What are we going to do about this?"

Another said, "There is much to do about a new South Africa. It is up to us to make sure that these unjust laws go so that South



A group of women from the township of Umlazi outside Durban formed a group called Phaphama Club. "Phaphama" means "wake up." The members are neighbors who meet monthly to discuss their problems and how to solve them. They also share their personal joys and griefs with one another. Since these meetings started, two women have had babies. They collected money to buy baby clothes. The occasion gave them time to talk.

A club member said, "Coming together has given us a chance to learn different things. We have organized workshops. One was on child abuse. We called a social worker to tell us about this. Another workshop was on women and the law. A lawyer told us how the South

Africa will be new for women as well."

The women felt strongly that it is they who have the responsibility to ensure that a future South Africa has new, non-sexist laws.

"How are we going to make sure this happens?" one woman asked.

Another answered, "Let us come together, bring in more women. We must share ideas. If we do not, we will be left behind."

The Phaphama Club members have realized that women are always being left behind, locked in their houses by housework and child care. Knowledge of their rights gives them the confidence to challenge unfair laws.

— from *Sister*

**CASH
FROM
CHILI
FUELS
CHANGE**

IN A
PAPUA
NEW
GUINEA
VILLAGE

When Monica Otto was born, her father rejected her. He was a chief. He needed sons to protect the clan land. A daughter was nothing. What he didn't expect was for his spirited wife to bundle the baby and take her back to her family village. It was no simple thing getting his wife back. She was the daughter of a chief. Monica's father had to pay double bride price before his wife returned, hugging the baby she wouldn't give up.

But being back in the village didn't improve Monica's status. She was expected to respond to every whim of her brothers and her father. That she could cope with. Her father's refusal to pay school fees was something else. In his mind, only men needed education. Again, Monica's mother came to the rescue. She planted extra gardens. For every kilo of *kaukau* or greens Monica lugged to school, the mission sisters gave her 10-*toea* credit to cover her fees. After years of her and her

mother's hard work, Monica graduated from the university. She is an agriculturist.

At 25, she is married and has five children. Monica is still driven. She is still haunted by the need to make a contribution to her village that would win her father's approval. "Very few educated women go back. But I have to. I have a tender heart for my village. I am trained in rural development, and I want to do something for my village."

Eighteen months ago, Monica left her highly-paying job as a planner in the National Finance and Planning Department. She went back to her Sepik River village in Vagiput, a four-hour drive out of Wewak, Papua New Guinea.

"When I left the village at seven, my people were subsistence gardeners, hunters and gatherers. Today, they still live the same. Many have never tasted ice water. Some of the children only had one pair of pants."

Seeing the poorly dressed children and the women laboring over *sago*-making made her even more determined to bring change. She bought top-quality Birds Eye chili seeds from Laloki Research Station and taught her village women how to grow the new crop. Their first harvest was 240 kilos. By the second harvest, yield had increased to 740 kilos.

Monica found an export agent, bought the chili for K80 a ton and shipped it. The cash

crop was such a success. Ten neighboring villages are now planting chili.

Vagiput women are triumphant. They have brought more cash into the village in a year than the men ever did. And they have a better village life because of it.

The women formed a women's club for the first time. They built a large bush-material, open-sided community hall. At the back of the building is the village's first trade store and office for chili marketing.

The village also built what Monica calls a demonstration house. Traditional river houses are one large open room, but Christian influence calls for bedtime modesty. Vagiput's model home is much like old Sepik houses, having a large open area. The difference is that it has two separate bedrooms.

In addition, the women bought an oven, water tank and three sewing machines. They want to learn to cook more varied meals and to sew their children's clothes.

Women contributed much of their chili profits. Monica contributed K3,000 of her profit for marketing the chili. The women insisted that the men make a contribution. They gave their construction labor and 10 fat cattle.

Materina Maggidambul and her children harvested the biggest chili crop. For her, the big pay-offs are the trade store and seeing children grow healthier day by day. "When I first came back the children were vomiting. And there were so many stomach diseases. Now that we have clean water from the tank, this has reduced," says Monica.

For Materina, life is much changed. "We used to work hard at making *sago*. We worked hard at carrying *sago* to market. Sometimes, we made little money or had to bring it home. It was a life of bartering or selling fish and *sago* to buy *buai*, salt and to pay school fees."

Chili, says Materina, allows them to earn so much more and to give much more to their children.

What is the chief's response? Monica says her father is proud and supportive now. But he still has fears. If the projects she started fail or if they deteriorate after she returns to city life, he

warns that this will bring shame to him and the family. He also is concerned about rascals from jealous nearby villages, hurting her or sabotaging her vehicle.

Monica is not afraid, she says. "I feel so proud of the women. I am so glad I came back. I wish more educated women would come back."

Her future aim is to train the villagers to manage the projects themselves. That will ease her father's concerns.

To finance her village development program, Monica started a cafe and used-clothing store in Wewak. "That's how I help support my family." She also does parttime agricultural extension for the Department of Primary Industry.

— from *Nius Blong Meri*,
Papua New Guinea Women
Speak Out