

# National Women's Policy: PNG Takes the Plunge

By Eileen Tugum Kolma

**A**round the Pacific women are working with governments to put promises and dreams into the shape of a national women's policy. In the Cook Islands a first draft has been developed and in Solomon Islands between 60 and 80 women are meeting to finalise their policy. Papua New Guinea's policy was approved in October 1992 and women are committed to making it work for them.

The policy is the single biggest achievement in the history of planning for Papua New Guinea women. It is also believed to be the first in the Pacific.

The policy is based on the country's National Constitution which calls for integral human development and equality and participation by all citizens. Its vision is to "increase participation by women as both beneficiaries and agents in the development process and in improving the quality of life for all".

In his address before launching the policy, the Minister responsible for women, Andrew Posai, said, "The goal of my government is equal participation and contribution by the women and men. Our means to achieve this must be partnership". He continued, "Women will not resolve their problems alone.

That means partnership between all levels of government, partnership between NGOs, partnership with families, businesses, churches, the police force. That partnership is necessary for progress." Mr. Posai urged all Papua New Guinea men and women to "fight for general equality with vigour, for the betterment of PNG".

Responding to the launch, the National Council of Women challenged the government to "put its money where its mouth was." Council President Maria Kopkop said, "The Women's Policy is a challenge for the government to

perform according to its promises, that is, to formulate a Budget that clearly and honestly recognises the vital input and productivity of 50 percent of the nation's population."

The policy has not come easy. Those involved in selling it to the public and the government met a lot of opposition. Many men opposed it on the grounds that it might elevate women above men. They had to be convinced that far from lifting women above men, the policy only seeks to create awareness and achieve recognition of women's contribution to nation-building, and to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

The National Council of Women has vowed to use the policy at every opportunity to remind the government of its commitment to ensure that women participate and benefit from developments taking place in the country. Copies of the PNG Women's Policy may be obtained from:

Women's Division, Dept. of Home Affairs and Youth  
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