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POSSIBLE WAYS TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH REINTEGRATION OF SURVIVORS OF SORCERY ACCUSATION-RELATED VIOLENCE

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Key Points

- Urgent need for health awareness to be conducted on the causes of sickness and death where the bulk of the population are – in rural communities, within the hotspot provinces in PNG.
- Process of reconciliation in reintegration of survivor(s) brings peace and ensures healing of sorcery accusation-related violence (SARV) survivor(s).
- Effective reintegration strategies should guide community leaders and key stakeholders in successive reintegration plans.
- Police, community leaders or a network of volunteers are needed to closely monitor and report on the survivors' status after reintegration.
- Preventative Orders (PO) or Interim Protection Orders (IPO) should be served to perpetrators to prevent further escalation of violence after reintegration and enforced.

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POSSIBLE WAYS TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH REINTEGRATION OF SURVIVORS OF SORCERY ACCUSATION-RELATED VIOLENCE

By William Kipongi

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is among some countries where sorcery accusation-related violence (SARV) has claimed many lives (Hukula et al., 2019). Burning and torturing of women, men and children all over PNG has attracted both national and international attention. Public outcry and civil society advocacy have led to the creation of the Sorcery National Action Plan (SNAP) in PNG (Forsyth and Gibbs, 2017). Despite adoption of the plan, research and media reports show that killing, torturing and burning of sorcery-accused victims remain alarming. There is a growing number of innocent people who have been physically harmed, lost their homes, families and properties. This indicates that the implementation plan (2016-2026) of the SNAP has not been effective in addressing the issue of SARV (Forsyth et al., 2021). One of the key issues related to SARV is the long-term displacement of people who have been accused, and their families. Displacement is a significant harm arising from SARV. In our study, we found that; in just over 20 percent of cases of an accusation of sorcery made against an individual, several months later that individual no longer live in their home¹. It is important to understand how to reintegrate survivors to the communities where they belonged, so that they can feel secure to return home.

This article is based on a study designed to answer the question of what challenges are associated with reintegrating survivors back into their home and communities. Interviews were conducted with survivors and those who were involved in reintegrating survivors in four Highlands provinces (Eastern Highlands, Jiwaka, Southern Highlands and Enga). The findings reveal that many survivors are not adequately reintegrated and continue to be threatened, re-accused and discriminated. This shows the need for a nuanced and holistic approach to reintegration. If the intention is to improve the integration of survivors in the communities they belonged,

the government should consider addressing challenges within the framework of SNAP using the following ways:

Create more awareness on the impacts of SARV on survivors

Advocacy and communication about bio-medical explanations for sickness and death is essential to addressing SARV. Inadequate awareness and understanding on the causes of illness and death is a major contributing factor to SARV so sustained levels of awareness is vital to combat SARV (Forsyth and Hukula, 2018). It is harder for communities with strong belief in sorcery to accept that deaths are caused by natural causes rather than human agents and continue to torture and kill those accused of practising sorcery. For instance, some village court magistrates from Jimi District, Jiwaka Province, reported that it would be difficult to defend a person accused of practising sorcery under their village court jurisdictions because the majority of the people believe in sorcery as an explanation for misfortune.

Sorcery-accused survivors were found to be successfully reintegrated in areas where regular educational awareness is done on the medical causes of sickness and death. For example; the Haguauro people of Lufa District in the Eastern Highlands Province (EHP) lived in exile for 10 years as a result of SARV in relation to a death, but they were well reintegrated back into their community as a result of continuous awareness done on the medical causes of sickness and death and the pastors condemning the act of killing and harming others as against the basic Christian principle. A similar case was witnessed in the Yago Village of Fayantina Local Level Government (LLG) in Henganofi District in the EHP. The human rights defenders also advocated that it is against the law to kill or harm another person. The positive outcome from such engagements should inform the government and the key stakeholders to allocate more funding and resources into the health sector to roll out more

¹ Research done on Sorcery in partnership with academics at Australian National University, Divine Word University and PNG National Research Institute in four provinces of PNG over four years (2016-2020), supported by the Australian Government in partnership with the Government of Papua New Guinea as part of the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program.

health awareness programs in collaboration with church groups and human rights defenders in the target areas.

Promote reconciliation which has been recognised as important in the implementation plan (2016-2026) of the SNAP

There is a need for public apology either in words or through sharing of meals with the accusers and perpetrators. It is important for government officials, community leaders and the general public to witness the reconciliation event whereby the perpetrators say sorry to the accused. Through this public act of contrition, the accused are fully accepted back into the community as a normal person and not as a sorcerer. This can be done in a church or at a public arena. According to the survivors, public apology and public reunion with the perpetrators assured them of their security. Reintegration without reconciliation leaves open the possibility of fear, threats and re-accusation. If reconciliation is not done, or inadequately conducted, this makes it harder for survivors to be fully at peace in their homes once they are brought back into the community they belonged. They are still afraid not only of the perpetrators but also others, who might possibly re-accuse them.

Findings from EHP and Enga illustrate two contrasting reconciliation approaches and outcomes. A reconciliation ceremony between two clans in Lufa District of EHP occurred after 10 years of conflict as a result of SARV. The occasion was officiated by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and many people attended which led to a peaceful reintegration of the clan members back into their community. There was another reconciliation event between two clans who fought and lost many lives and properties as a result of SARV. The case was brought to the attention of the open member elect and the community leaders. In front of the government leaders, other stakeholders and neighbouring communities, the perpetrators apologised to the accused and they made peace. Afterwards, those who fled in fear went back and settled in their homes.

In contrast, several survivors from Enga were not given the opportunity to reconcile with their perpetrators through payment of compensation and a public apology, and the survivors still feel unsafe. Village court magistrates in Enga recommended that some form of reconciliation is needed even after compensation demands by village courts (Gibbs et al., 2021). In most cases where survivors have not been adequately reintegrated, they continue to face accusation and discrimination. Despite legal proceedings, reconciliation adds value and meaning in reintegration (Urame, 2015). Reconciliation should be encouraged and must be seen as a

vital component of the process of reintegration to put an end to resurgence of SARV.

Provide forum for sharing of lessons about successful reintegration strategy

Reintegration of survivors occurs differently in different places, and it is clear that some are more successful than others. Some survivors who have been reintegrated into their communities continue to face threats, isolation, discrimination and accusation. They also report not being so clear on the process or strategy of how and where to seek assistance when re-accused. Survivors who are re-accused when someone is sick or dies in their communities are not safe.

Our study found that successful reintegration stories often involve survivors being protected by their community leaders. For instance, village leaders and peace mediators of Dambex community in Jiwaka and Naru-Gor in Chimbu were praised by survivors for protecting them because their leaders uphold one of their community by-laws that says, “one should not accuse others of sorcery”. The role of community leaders is crucial in facilitating reintegration of survivors in areas where government services like village courts and police are not available or too far to reach. Police and other government officials’ support is also critical. For instance, a survivor from Goroka was visited regularly by the police Family Sexual Violence Unit and now she is at peace in her home.

There is a need for monitoring and evaluation to be conducted in an orderly manner

The ‘Legal and Protection’ theme (sub/sec.3.3.3) of the implementation plan (2016-2026) mentioned about the setting up of a network of volunteers to report on and monitor situations of survivors of sorcery-related issues. This had not been done and up to now, survivors have been left on their own in the communities. This was seen in the SARV prevention awareness video entitled ‘Everybody’s Business’, where survivors freely expressed their situation in the interviews. One said: “My movement is monitored so I always stay at home”. The other one said: “I was accused again when a baby got sick after I visited, so I paid K100 compensation and so I am afraid to go out”. This indicates that survivors are not okay in the community. If no one reports on survivor concerns, how can they be supported and protected? Survivors often face isolation, threats and discrimination in their own communities. Many of those in leadership positions interviewed had not visited survivors in their communities.

Reintegration works better in situations where community

workers and leaders make it their business to visit and monitor the situation of survivors. In remote villages, it would be appropriate to form a network of communication to bring the concerns of survivors to the relevant stakeholders. It would be helpful for both survivors and key stakeholders if the situation of the survivors is monitored and reported.

Encourage the use of Legal Preventive Order (Court) to protect SARV survivors

Legal and Protection is the third of the four themes in the SNAP (2015) under which government repealed Sorcery Act 1971. The second objective under this strategy, sec.3.2.6 of the SNAP states: witness and victim protection legislation to be drafted and enabling institutional mechanisms developed. This aspect has not been widely implemented and the safety and security of survivors is often at high risk. The majority of the survivors who were reintegrated were not issued preventive orders. They live in fear of the possibility of being accused and attacked at any time.

Survivors should be issued an Interim Protection Order or Protection Order from the court to protect them from further accusation and torturing.

There is evidence of support for survivors of SARV in cases where preventive orders were issued. For instance, a village court in Enga issued a verbal preventive order to a clan who tortured two women accused of practising sorcery. People disobeyed the order and so police went in the early hours of the next morning and arrested 18 people (July 2019). This deterred people in that community from the continuous threatening of the accused. In Jiwaka, a husband who accused his wife of sorcery and assaulted her was served an IPO and that keeps her safe, well away from the violent husband.

Perpetrators should be penalised for breach of Court Order without fear nor favour

Under the Preventive Jurisdiction of the Village Court Act 2014 section 51, breach of a preventive order is guilty of an offence liable for fine not exceeding K1,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months. However, none of the interviewed survivors requested village court magistrates for preventive orders after being accused and tortured. They instead pursued their cases with police with the assumption that village courts would not do much since SARV cases are labelled under criminal offences. On many occasions, police have failed survivors by not arresting perpetrators and even releasing those in police custody. For instance, in Enga seven perpetrators were arrested following a SARV case (Jan 2018) in which the former Chief Justice Sir Salamo Injia was

attacked. But the perpetrators were released on unknown grounds. Issuing court orders and penalising those who breach orders would protect survivors and deter perpetrators from imposing further accusation and torture.

Way forward

- Health awareness is important in highlighting the impacts of SARV on the survivors and their families to minimise the incidence of further SARV.
- The Melanesian way of bringing peace and reconciliation needs to be adequately incorporated into the process of reintegration of survivors to their communities.
- A consistent strategy is needed to empower community leaders and individuals to facilitate reintegration of survivors to their communities.
- A network for communication is needed in areas where survivors are reintegrated to closely monitor and report on the status of survivors.
- Magistrates should serve Protection Orders or IPOs to prevent further accusation and violence.
- Those who breach court orders should be held accountable with appropriate actions taken against them.

A holistic approach to effectively reintegrate SARV survivors needs to be informed by a nuanced understanding of the challenges of implementing the SNAP 2015 and its impact on survivors.

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