Does the Diocese of Aitape provide empowerment opportunities for women? An assessment based upon the views of women of the Diocese.

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

John Donnelly

School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning
RMIT University
November 2007
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publications and presentations</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declaration</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location Map</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Gender and the Church</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 The structure of the thesis</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 The importance of the Church</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Was there religion before the missionaries?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 The view of women: what the new religion had to offer</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Other coincident changes in traditional society</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 The importance of religion</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 Theoretical overview of empowerment</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Women’s issues: needs or responsibilities?</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Gender and development</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Paradigms</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Policies within paradigms</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1 Welfare</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2 Anti-poverty</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.3 Efficiency (or integration)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.4 Equity</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.5 The empowerment approach</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 What is empowerment?</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 The ‘power’ in empowerment</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 The ‘empowering’ process and its ‘relativity’</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Empowerment and development</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Culture and empowerment</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10 Empowerment and women</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11 A degree of consciousness</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.12 The Church and empowerment 44
3.13 Conclusion 50

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 4</th>
<th>Research methodology</th>
<th>51</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Coming to the research subject</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Qualitative or quantitative?</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>White male – black female: a valid research?</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1</td>
<td>Positionality, subjectivity and reciprocity</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2</td>
<td>Truth of responses</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.3</td>
<td>Integrity depends on the people concerned</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews (oral testimony)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.3</td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Who were the participants (other than myself)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Ethics and ownership</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Analysis of the data</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 5</th>
<th>Life within the Catholic Diocese of Aitape, Sandaun Province, Papua New Guinea</th>
<th>79</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The analytical framework</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>A brief history of the Catholic Church in the area of the Diocese of Aitape</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>The people and land of the Diocese</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>About women in Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 6</th>
<th>Women’s Voices: the views of the participants</th>
<th>104</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>The Case Studies</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1</td>
<td>Case study A</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.2</td>
<td>Case study B</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.3</td>
<td>Case study C</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.4</td>
<td>Case study D</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.5</td>
<td>Case study E</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.6</td>
<td>Case study F</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.7</td>
<td>Case study G</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.8</td>
<td>Case study H</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Areas of participation and contact for women and the Church</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.5 Making Choices 134
6.6 Spaces of specific identity for women within the Church 136
  6.6.1 The nuns 137
  6.6.2 The Catholic Women’s Coordinator 144
  6.6.3 Catechists and Prayer Leaders 145
  6.6.4 Women’s groups 147
  6.6.5 Lay women (the individual) 149
6.7 Education 152
6.8 Employment 153
6.9 Christianity 154
6.10 The Male Observers 155
6.11 Conclusion 156

Chapter 7 Enhancing Empowerment 158
  7.1 Introduction 158
  7.2 The Gender Equality Wheel 158
  7.3 Using the Gender Equality Wheel to critique the Diocese of Aitape 159
    7.3.1 Engagement of women to come out of isolation 160
    7.3.2 Education and resources 163
    7.3.3 Enhancement of lives in households and communities 165
    7.3.4 Emergence into the public sphere 167
  7.4 An assessment 168
  7.5 Conclusion 169

Chapter 8 What does it all mean? 171
  8.1 Learning from the research 171
  8.2 Limitations 176
  8.3 Conclusion 178

Bibliography 180

Appendices
   Appendix 1 Letter to participants
   Appendix 2 Translation
   Appendix 3 The research participants
   Appendix 4 A celebration of the women of the Diocese of Aitape (CD)
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the women of the Catholic Diocese of Aitape, in Sandaun Province, Papua New Guinea. To these women who work hard and long for their families and who still have time for caring for people such as myself and my family, I thank you. In particular, thank you to those women who, as informants in my research, willingly shared their knowledge with me.

I also dedicate this thesis to my wife and my children without whose patience and support I could not have completed this task.
Publications and Presentations

Parts and aspects of this thesis have been, or are about to be, published in peer reviewed journals as papers under titles reflecting the nature of the topic concerned.

1. ‘What has the Church done for women?’ This paper is drawn from Chapter 3 (Theoretical overview of empowerment) and Chapter 6 (Women’s voices: the views of the participants) of the thesis.

Donnelly, John 2006 ‘What has the Church done for women?’ Catalyst, vol. 36, no. 2, pp.159 – 182.

2. ‘White, Anglo-Celtic male – Black, Melanesian female: a valid research situation?’ This paper is drawn from Chapter 4 of the thesis, Research Methodology, and is to be published in November, 2007 by the Divine Word University, Madang, Papua New Guinea.


3. ‘Women and their new religion’. This paper is drawn from Chapter 2, The Importance of the Church, Chapter 5 The Catholic Diocese of Aitape and Chapter 6 (Women’s Voices, the views of the participants).

Donnelly, John 2008 ‘Women and their new religion’ Catalyst, vol. 38, no 1

The following papers have also been presented at conferences.

- What has the Church done for women?
  Presented at Academic Symposium, RMIT University, Melbourne, September 2005.
  Presented at Gender and Development Conference, University of Missouri, Kansas City, USA, March 2006

- White, Anglo-Celtic male – Black, Melanesian female: a valid research situation?
  Presented at Academic Symposium, RMIT University, Melbourne, November 2006.

- Women and their new religion.
  Presented at Academic Symposium, RMIT University, Melbourne, August, 2007.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the women who so willingly allowed me to inquire into their lives and who shared their thoughts and life experiences with me. These women, my informants, are the most generous of people.

I also want to thank the people of the Diocese of Aitape, National and Expatriate, for providing me with the opportunity to experience life in rural Papua New Guinea and to discover an exciting new world.

Thank you to my supervisors, and there has been a number due to changes in circumstance and employment. However, I must mention Dr. Sallie Yea who provided much encouragement and direction in the early days of my writing. Special thanks must go to Dr. Matthew Clarke for his encouragement, direction and support and particularly for his determination to see it through to the ‘end’. And to Janet Hunt, whose insightful feedback and encouragement, made me feel that what I have done is truly worthwhile.

Thank you to my dear friend Trevor Matthews for giving his time so willingly to edit this document for me.

And to my family, particularly my wife Jenny, thank you for being so patient over the years.

NOTE: all photographs, the author.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AOG</td>
<td>Assembly of God church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APO</td>
<td>Aid Post Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAW</td>
<td>Commission on the Advancement of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOA</td>
<td>Diocese of Aitape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAD</td>
<td>Gender and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDI</td>
<td>Gender Related Development Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEM</td>
<td>Gender Empowerment Measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMIC</td>
<td>Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLG</td>
<td>Local Level Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ofm</td>
<td>Order of Saint Francis Minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WID</td>
<td>Women in Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWI</td>
<td>World War One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWII</td>
<td>World War Two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the effect that the Catholic Diocese of Aitape in the Sandaun Province of Papua New Guinea, and by implication, the Catholic Church, has had on the lives of women, as assessed by women of the Diocese themselves. Much research has been done into how women can be, and/or become, empowered through development project approaches and through the agency of development agencies and people. Many such projects have been relatively short lived and have also been sector specific. If such projects are seen to have an impact upon the lives of women, a long standing institution such as the Catholic Diocese of Aitape which has such a great influence on the lives of the people living within the Diocese could also be expected to have an impact upon the lives of women.

Women reflecting upon their own lives and the lives of their mothers and grandmothers and what differences there are and how the Diocese/Church has contributed to these changes has provided the data for analysis within this thesis. Based upon the reflections of women, selected as being representative of the women of the Diocese, the Diocese and the Catholic Church have indeed contributed to a degree of empowerment for women that these women may not have otherwise achieved within contemporary Papua New Guinea society. The various teaching, policies and practices of the Diocese and the Church have enabled a greater freedom of association, movement and opportunity for women to individually and collectively become empowered to some degree.

The patriarchal nature of the Church hierarchy and the interaction between the Church and the Diocese however remains a barrier to true gender equality across all aspects of the Diocese and Church. While this remains so, increasing localisation of the Church within Melanesian society may well mean that gains made by women through the agency of the Catholic Diocese of Aitape, need to be defended from erosion by a more Melanesian version of that same Diocese.
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone: the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and any editorial work, paid or unpaid by a third party is acknowledged.

___________________________

John Donnelly

Date: ______________________
Location Map

Diocese of Aitape
CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction
When I first went to Papua New Guinea with my wife and two young children, it was
my expectation that in the remote area in which we were to live, I would see women
as second-class citizens in a ‘man’s world’. It is generally accepted that throughout the
world women are less well off than men in that they generally have less access to
resources such as land, income and credit, and less access to services such as health
and education. Certainly in the developing world the situation of women’s
disadvantage is more pronounced than it is in the developed world. The disadvantage,
particularly as it is seen from a western perspective, is often more deeply entrenched
in the cultural norms of society and behaviour and attitudes; it is the unquestioned
norm (Gilbert et al. 1982; Mandie 1983; Mantovani 1999). Indeed women are
expected to play particular roles in society and these roles are often rigidly adhered to
by women and enforced by society. These gendered roles of women are seen by the
society concerned as less valuable than men’s roles and the women performing those
roles are themselves of less worth (Mandie 1983; Avalos 1995).

My expectations reflected the experiences of others:
“(t)he friar missionary was walking across a river with a group of village
people. He noticed that women were in the front and the back of the
group. This surprised him as usually women bring up the rear when
walking with men. After crossing the river he commented on this unusual
happening. His male companion answered simply and with no
embarrassment, ‘But Father, there are crocodiles in this river’. The friar
understood that crocodiles usually attack someone at the head or end of a
group and if it happened this time a woman would be taken. The women simply accepted their positions” (Bourke 1994, p.2).

Although I did not witness this exact occurrence, I did observe women who did all the heavy work, all the caring work, all the house work and then contributed to the communal work alongside the men. The men on the other hand involved themselves in political discussion, money earning activities (if possible) and generally anything from which they might gain some material advantage. I also saw women who as well as performing the tasks mentioned above, and despite being married to men who appeared to conform to the stereotype just described, at times showed remarkable independence of will and action.

The obvious and often written about stereotypes show women always deferring to men; girls waiting on their brothers and older males; male violence against women (especially wives), even in public; the separation of men and women at public gatherings, meetings and church services; the lonely figure of a woman at dusk or later, with her heavy load of garden produce or firewood or water or all of these and accompanied only by small dependant children, are the images by which the women of Papua New Guinea are known (see Macintyre 1987). These images may not tell the whole story (see Mantovani 1999; Beben 1990; O’Brien 1984; Mandie 1983).

Carlyon (2002), for example, tells the story of her Papua New Guinean grandmother, a woman who displayed extraordinary courage and independence of thought and action that was simultaneously outside of the accepted norm for a woman, but so admired at the time by men and women of her family and village. Carlyon’s grandmother travelled far, on her own, from her highlands village to Madang to be with the man of her choice, a white man. She did this at a time when women rarely travelled away from their village and then only with a chaperone, and women married according to prearranged unions.

Carlyon’s grandmother, like some of the women I observed, are some of many women who do not properly conform to the western anthropological stereotype of a woman completely subjugated by men and in particular by the men most closely associated with her (Mantovani 1988). So despite the obvious, outward and daily evidence of the different and separate lives of men and women and the apparent lower status of
women in this society where I and my family had come to live for the next 26 months, I came to recognise an aspect of public life amongst women that I had not expected: women prepared to speak out publicly about an issue of concern; women organising themselves to raise money for public facilities and services such as schools; and women organising themselves politically. When I saw women in these roles they generally were in relation to the Church, the building and/or the institution. It seemed that when activities in relation to the Church were concerned, some women demonstrated levels of competence and confidence in public that someone such as myself would generally not observe. This may be because the Church related activities are more public than much of the rest of a woman’s life in this remote, rural part of Papua New Guinea. It is this nexus of the Church and empowerment of women with which this thesis is concerned.

1.2 Gender and the Church

There is an abundance of literature describing projects and policies intended to empower women and subsequently raise their status (see Sepoe 2000; Rowlands 1997; Batliwala 1993; Afshar 1998; Scheyvens 1995; Schuler 1986). Such projects are aimed at improving the empowerment of women relative to that of men (Afshar 1998) and are in sectors such as credit and income, politics and health. Objective measures of women’s empowerment are not always comparable to the subjective measures of empowerment, applied by women, that is the observed (Mantovani 1988). Such comparisons might be the number of women in managerial positions or in parliaments (UNDP 2006). The culture of one or more of the societies being compared may not easily allow women to fill these roles and the women concerned may support this status quo (Mantovani 1991; Beben 1990). This is not to suggest that such a situation is therefore good or bad for women, but it does question the emphasis that such measures give to directing interventions on behalf of women.

For many development agencies and donors, empowerment for women comes through specific interventions such as capacity building of women and women’s groups to enable them to organise themselves financially and politically. Projects such as microcredit target women so that they can exploit their entrepreneurial talents to earn income independently of men. Such projects are generally for a specific time/funding
period and are very often concerned primarily with the immediate, practical needs of women even if their intent is more strategic (Afshar 1998).

The social and physical environment in which women live will also have an impact upon their lives. The relationships between individuals and groups, and the expectations of the individual by the broader society as well as the expectations of society by the individual, especially those expectations arising from the person’s sex, are critical in determining the life outcomes for individuals and these relationships and expectations are cultural (Mantovani 1988; Sepoe 2000). These relationships and expectations are cultural because they arise from the system of ideas that has been inherited from and is shared by the group to which individuals belong. Events and interventions that impact upon these ideas will be the main, strategic influences that determine the relative levels of empowerment within that culture (Mantovani 1988, 1999). When gender is mainstreamed within a culture, men and women will benefit equally.

The term ‘gender mainstreaming’ has become common in development and relief work since the Fourth United Nation’s Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in 1995. Multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and bilateral agencies such as the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) all have gender policies and guidelines for the reference of persons and organizations wishing to source development and/or relief project funds from these agencies1. It is now a requirement that all project proposals show how the project will impact upon gender roles and relationships, how they will improve the situation of women in relation to men and how all the outcomes, direct and indirect, will be assessed.

The Beijing Platform for Action (PFA) states that “…governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively” (Beijing PFA, 1995, para 79). There is a realisation of the need to ensure that gender inequalities that exist are addressed, and

---

1 For example, gender policies for these agencies can be found at [www.ausaid.gov.au/gender](http://www.ausaid.gov.au/gender), and [www.worldbank.org/gender](http://www.worldbank.org/gender)
that the resultant effects of any interventions upon both men and women have not been as universally successful as one might have expected. This is especially so within organizations that are in the business of working for the good of both men and women. Otherwise ten years on from the Beijing conference so much effort would not still be going into getting organizations to fully consider the probable effect of their interventions on gender relations. Many non-government organizations (NGOs) are still endeavouring to mainstream gender within their activities and within their own organisations (see James-Sebro 2005; Sepoe 2000). The Beijing Platform for Action and subsequent United Nations reports such as the 2003 Gender Mainstreaming Report from the UN’s Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, expressly spell out the need for the consideration of gender issues by all people and organizations including governments, when implementing actions and devising policies. Even governments such as the government of PNG which developed their own ‘Platforms for Action’ following the Beijing conference, have done little to act on their rhetoric.

Despite an explicit reference to equality in the constitution of the Independent State Of Papua New Guinea, government policies and in the case of the Papua New Guinea, the government’s own Platform for Action arising out of the 1995 Beijing Conference, and Papua New Guinea being a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) little has changed in Papua New Guinea to enhance the role and status of women in general. As Dickson-Waiko points out, early rhetoric to give women equal rights and access was stated in Point seven of the “Eight Point Improvement Plan’ which called for, “…a rapid increase in the equal and active participation of women in all forms of economic and social activity” (Dickson-Waiko, 2003, p101). Women however have continued to, “…suffer from neglect and to be confined to a now entrenched private and domestic sphere” (ibid). The government of Papua New Guinea provides a budget for the National Council of Women and for Provincial Women’s Councils in all provinces. These councils although initially enthusiastic, have become relatively ineffective and are constrained by small budgets and huge logistical barriers in travel and communication (Dickson-Waiko, 2003). Any serious effort to mainstream gender at a government level has been, and remains, mostly rhetorical.
This brief background to the thinking in relation to men, women and gender in the context of development is intended to provide a perspective from which to view the impact of the Catholic Church, under the auspices of the Diocese of Aitape, and its work with the people of the Diocese. The effect of the Diocese upon the lives of women as seen and considered by selected women who participated in this research is then viewed against the Diocese’s consistency or otherwise with development thinking in relation to men, women and gender.

Within the Diocese of Aitape, the Catholic Church’s doctrine of equality, based upon the Biblical teaching that all people, regardless of race or gender, are created equal in the image of God, has been at the centre of the Franciscan practice within the Diocese since its establishment in November 1966. Even before this time the Catholic Mission in this part of Papua New Guinea, also under the care of the Franciscan Friars, was explicitly concerned with ensuring the best for the people based upon their own priorities and objectives (Duggan 1983). The Friars did not use the phrase “gender mainstreaming” but they did understand that women’s as well as men’s needs were important and took specific actions to ensure that they were addressed. The legacy of this approach to mission activities by the early Franciscans within the Diocese of Aitape and its contribution to the degree of empowerment felt by women within the Diocese of Aitape, is the central focus of this study.

Other institutions such as Provincial Women’s Councils are not active within the diocese of Aitape’s geographic area. The Sandaun Provincial Women’s Council is located in Vanimo, the Provincial Capital which is remote from Aitape and the Council is not active within the Diocese according to key women informants of this research. For this reason the Provincial Women’s Council is not included in the discussion.

The overall aim of this thesis is to explore, through the views of women of the Catholic Diocese of Aitape, whether the Diocese and/or the Catholic Church contributes to the empowerment of women within the Diocese. In this context the thesis examines three specific areas: firstly, what is meant by the term empowerment and what is the theory of development that may result in empowerment (and
development) of women; secondly, based on case studies of women within the Diocese, how do women themselves see the effect of the Diocese upon their lives (and their level of empowerment); and thirdly, using the views of women, what assessment can be made of the Diocesan performance against an accepted method of assessing gender related development outcomes.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 constitutes the introduction to the thesis.

Chapter 2 of this thesis looks at the role that religion plays and has traditionally played in the lives of the people of both Melanesia in general and of the people of the Diocese of Aitape. Chapter 2 also shows how Christianity and more specifically the Catholic Church, has been so readily accepted into the lives of the people of the Diocese of Aitape.

Chapter 3 discusses the term and concept of empowerment and how it has been used in relation to women in developing countries. The discussion grounds this research in the literature pertaining to empowerment as both a term and a concept so as to provide the basis for the subsequent chapters. The chapter begins with a discussion of women’s issues as needs or responsibilities and goes on to discuss the topic of Gender and Development under the critical and equilibrium paradigms (Moser 1989; Scheyvens 1995) within which agencies operate when attempting to address the broad issue of gender in development programs. Projects within the equilibrium paradigm aim to bring about some equality between men and women, while the critical paradigm has as its aim empowerment of women ultimately bringing about their own improved equality with men through improved equity within their own society.

The policies that drive actions within these paradigms are also discussed in Chapter 3. Policies ranging from a purely welfare approach through projects driven by anti-poverty policies, gender equity, improved efficiencies through improved systems and technologies, to the policy of empowerment whereby women are enabled to help themselves (Moser 1989) are all discussed within the context of women in developing country situations. The Diocese of Aitape and the Catholic Church is not a focus of this discussion but the chapter notes how the Diocesan approach to development has generally been in line with the progress of development theory. The philosophy
underlying the interaction of the Diocesan Church as directed by the Franciscan order of priests is described here. The philosophy directing relations between clergy and the people is an important aspect of the behaviours of people observed by the author, giving rise to this research. A philosophy of respect for the people and their customs and desire to ensure ownership by the people of their development and their Church have laid a foundation for a positive impact of Church-influenced contemporary culture on gender relations and on women in particular.

Chapter 3 also looks at the issue of culture and how it dictates gender relations and subsequently the relative power of men and women – levels of empowerment – is also discussed in terms of the extent to which the anthropological view of a cultural setting as described by members of another culture is accurate or otherwise (see Sepoe 2000; Kabeer 1999; Mantovani 1988; Scheyvens 1995).

Chapter 4 outlines in more detail the impetus for the research, and describes the research methodology used and reasons for the choices made regarding methods of data gathering. In this chapter the context in which the analysis of the data is conducted -the analysis framework- is also outlined.

A history of the Catholic Church within the Diocese of Aitape is briefly outlined in Chapter 5. The land, the people and their lifestyles are also outlined to give the reader a feeling for the place and the people, their geography and demography. This chapter also contains a discussion of women in Papua New Guinea in general, their roles in society and how they see themselves, compared with descriptions to be found in literature by others belonging to non-Melanesian cultures. Authors such as Sepoe (2000), Mosse (1993), Mantovani (1991, 1988), Beben (1990), Strathern (1987), Mandie (1983) and Narakobi (1980) all question to some degree the descriptions and assumptions made by western anthropologists and claim that such writings do not accurately describe the situation of women either now or in times past.

The views of women who participated in the research are presented and analysed in Chapter 6. This information represents the views and opinions of women themselves, of their lives and the influence and effects of the Diocese of Aitape and the Catholic Church upon them. The chapter then analyses this information and relates it to the
current Catholic Church of the Diocese of Aitape; what it does for people in general and women in particular; the role of nuns within the Diocese; positions for women, occupied by women; and opportunities for women to make choices.

Chapter 7 uses recognised gender assessment tools to make an assessment based on the views of the women in the case studies of the Catholic Diocese of Aitape in regards to the way in which the Diocese deals with gender within its sphere of influence. This chapter also contains conclusions from the research and endeavours to put these into perspective in terms of what they mean for women, firstly within the Diocese of Aitape, and more broadly for women in Papua New Guinea and similar social and economic circumstances in developing countries.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 8, summarises the thesis as a whole and highlights what can be learned from the findings of this research to inform those interested in assisting in the empowerment of women and ultimately contributing to gender equality.
CHAPTER 2  THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH

2.1 Introduction
This thesis is not directly concerned with religion. Rather, it is concerned with women considering their own lives and making comparisons between their lives and the lives of their mothers and their grandmothers. At this point, this thesis seeks to distil how these differences might be attributed to the Diocese of Aitape and the Catholic Church. So whilst it is a secondary concern, it is useful for this thesis to begin with a discussion of the role of religion in the lives of the people of the Diocese of Aitape and their disposition or otherwise towards religion.

2.2 Was there religion before the Missionaries?
The Diocese of Aitape is located in the Sandaun Province of Papua New Guinea and the people of the Diocese are Melanesian. Melanesia, the region and the people, is a grouping of islands and people with a huge amount of diversity. It includes the nation states of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and New Caledonia. The people are grouped into language groups totalling over 1200 different languages (Rowsome 1985). It is not possible to say that Melanesians share a single way of life or a single religion but there is enough shared experience in the lives and cultures of these people to call them Melanesian (Rowsome 1985; Narakobi 1977; Mantovani 1977). The spirituality of the people encompasses all life experience (Strelan 1977).

Religion was not something brought either to the Aitape Diocese, or to Papua New Guinea for that matter, by Christian Missionaries. “The Melanesian is born into a spiritual and religious order” (Narakobi 1977, pp.8-12). Indeed as indicated above, Melanesian people have a very spiritual and holistic worldview that is closely tied to their daily lives.
Jannsen (1971) describes traditional religion in Papua New Guinea as pragmatic and horizontal because it encompasses people’s day-to-day lives, the environment in which they live as well as their past and their future. The involvement of ancestors and other spirits in the functions of life such as food crops, fertility and decision-making is more involving and in partnership than the top-down practice of Christianity whereby God dictates to the masses. Importing another religion to supersede the traditional could be seen as a complete disregard of not only the traditional religion, but also the people who owned and had practised that religion for perhaps many centuries.

Lukas (1983) and Brennan (1983) agree that religion was, and still is, alive and well in Papua New Guinea before the Christian Missionaries arrived. Lukas argues that the religion his people practised and which is still in practice today, is more relevant because it can be traced back through the people’s history. The people know the meanings of and the reasons for their rituals and beliefs and it is not a divided religion like Christianity. Brennan counters this with the argument that Christianity is a universal religion and although he concedes that Christian religions have devalued, depersonalised and dehumanised Melanesians, this has been the result of the way in which missionaries have imposed Christianity rather than Christianity itself. A fear of God has been the focus of the message to the neglect of laughter and life.

There are now many denominations of churches within the geographic scope of the Aitape Diocese, all purporting to be Christian, and all claiming to be the one true path to the Kingdom of God. The Catholic Church is the longest serving however, and is the main provider of health and education services to the people, regardless of a person’s personal religion, in the geographic area that is the Catholic Diocese of Aitape (see Table 4.1). It is the Catholic Church and the Catholic Diocese of Aitape in the Sandaun Province of Papua New Guinea that is the focus of the following discussion.

2.3 The view of women: what the new religion had to offer
A common thread amongst all the participants in this study as to how they compared the new Christian religion of Catholicism to their understanding of the traditional ‘bilip long ples’ (local belief) is that the two have a lot in common. Even younger
women whom one might think are far removed from the traditions of their ancestors expressed this belief.

Catholic missionaries first arrived in the Aitape area in the form of German Divine Word Missionary priests and brothers in 1897\(^2\). They established a Mission on the island of Tumleo a short distance off the coast from Aitape and in 1997 a large centenary celebration was held in Aitape town and on Tumleo Island. Perhaps because of the novelty and the mystery of these new people and their ‘cargo’\(^3\), the local people embraced the new practices and teachings while the outward signs of their own religion were destroyed or discarded in what Mantovani describes as the, “‘tabula rasa’ method, bulldozer method” (Mantovani, 1993, p.19). Today many of the Catholic clergy of the Diocese encourage the people to incorporate many traditional rituals and ceremonies into regular Catholic ceremony (Bourke 2000). Almost every church service attended in a Catholic church in the Diocese of Aitape has some form of traditional celebratory or ritual component. For example, at the ordination ceremony of a priest in his home village, the local people integrated their local ‘singsing’\(^4\) activities into the formal ceremony. A significant part was when men performed a drama depicting what the Missionaries had brought to the people. Items were brought to the altar and a narrator related their meaning and significance to the audience. These included the Bible (the Word of God), the Pidgin language (a common and unifying language), the coconut (the tree of life), education (white man’s knowledge) and health care (white man’s health care). This would seem to suggest a beneficial impact upon the daily lives of the people resulting from the new religion from the perspective of the converted, in contrast perhaps, to the dehumanising and depersonalising view expressed by Lukas (1983) and Brennan (1983).

Some women expressed a view that the Catholic Church maintained many of the established institutions of their customs. The Haus Tambarans or Spirit Houses of the men and the women, the houses where ceremonies were held and secrets and the ancestral masks were kept, were strictly segregated. Women were strictly forbidden to

---

\(^2\) All historical dates and data relating to the Catholic Church in the Aitape area and Diocese of Aitape are taken from ‘History Of The Diocese’, www.global.net.pg/diocease_of_aitape/history.html

\(^3\) Cargo is the local term for the manufactured and processed goods belonging to the missionaries that the missionaries brought with them and which were and often still are foreign to the local people.

\(^4\) Traditional, celebratory singing and dancing, also sing sing.
enter the men’s Spirit House. If a woman violated this taboo it could mean that she would be immediately executed without any form of inquiry or explanation sought (Duggan 1983). These segregated buildings were seen to be replicated within the Church in the form of the priest’s houses and monasteries and then later the convents of the nuns. The celibate life of the priests and brothers and nuns also reinforced the sexual antagonism between males and females in Melanesian traditional life (Mantovani 1993). The sexual taboos and the public social roles of men and women in Melanesian society were reinforced by these new arrivals. The patriarchal nature of the Church reflected, and in some ways reinforced, the patriarchy of the emerging contemporary society of post contact Papua New Guinea (Sepoe 2000; Bourke 1999). Although patriarchal, the new religion was not segregated. Men and women attended together in the same space for their new organised worship. Men and women also had access to the same rituals within this organised worship in that they could both access the Church’s sacraments and in more recent times women could often play a more active role in the conduct of the rituals. This has been, to some degree, a gender neutralising experience within communities.

The pictures and icons that adorned the churches, ‘the new non-segregated Haus Tambaran’ was seen to perform the same function and representation as the ancestral masks of the old Tambaran. These were the ancestors of the white missionaries and they must be more powerful than ‘our’ own because of all the ‘cargo’, material goods, these new missionary people brought with them.

The new religion also had decoration and pageantry, as did traditional rituals. That a man would be the central character in the new rituals was also not unusual and roles were found for other men to perform while women and children formed the bulk of the onlookers to these new rituals. The irony of the condemnation and destruction of one lot of idols and beliefs and the acceptance of another seemed to be lost on both the converter and the converted. Nevertheless the local people, at least outwardly, happily accepted their losses and gains.

A number of women interviewed noted that the new religion was the same for all, whereas traditional religions varied from place to place. This new belief was uniform in appearance and in its message. When people travelled, or when a woman went to
live in her husband’s family lands, there was a familiarity about the religion in what was often a new environment. At the ordination mentioned above, the Pidgin language was recognised as one of the significant things brought to the people by the missionaries: it was a common language. Before the missionaries arrived (taim bilong bipo), and it was much later in the inland (the bush) than on the coast, the groups were divided by language and ritual. The missionaries had broken down significant barriers between the various language groups.

2.4 Other coincident changes in traditional society
It needs to be remembered that while Christianity was making inroads into the lives of the people of Aitape Diocese many other changes were occurring. The rate and extent of these changes varied widely depending on the accessibility of people to approaches by newcomers. People on the coast saw many more changes earlier and at a faster rate than people in the bush, a situation that continues today. The arrival of the missionaries quickly followed the arrival of the colonialists who themselves brought many changes to impact the lives of those with whom they came in contact. From the time of this first contact new institutions have emerged, a process continuing to the present. Such institutions as a police force enforcing a uniform law; army symbolising a nation state; political parties as part of a new form of government; schools and universities dispensing new forms of knowledge; companies, local and multinational, bringing cargo and extracting and exploiting natural resources in a completely foreign manner; banks where cash, the new measure of wealth, appears to come from. All these, including the Church, from colonial times until the present, have, according to Mandie (1983) been established by, and still are dominated by males. All of these institutions have meant radical changes to traditional society, with the exception of the Church for the reasons outlined above. Even money, a measure of wealth and a concept not foreign to the people of Papua New Guinea, is a different wealth to the traditional wealth and value structures. Mantovani (1991) shows how traditional exchange goods, which often were perishable, only had value when given away as they then incurred favour and the receiver would reciprocate at a future time. Cash, while it can be used in traditional exchange systems, actually increases in value (with interest) if it is retained; it is more valuable to keep cash, which is a complete reversal of traditional means of wealth creation.
Mandie (1983) outlines a disenfranchisement of women over time brought about by colonial authorities and later by development agencies dominated by Western males who brought with them the ideology of male superiority (see also Mies 1986). Employment for money was offered to men who moved into the cash economy while the unpaid labour of women meant that the status of women declined as society attached less value to their tasks. Barnes (1982) reinforces this idea by showing how government resources and policies have been directed to the commercial, cash producing areas of activity while no resources at all are directed to food production for families, the production area dominated by women. The latter affects the vast majority of the population of the country while the commercial sector is only marginal to most people. Women dominate the sector upon which the country is most dependent, food production for domestic consumption.

The changes that have taken place in the Diocese of Aitape, as outlined above, are not uniform in their coverage, of either the geographic area or the population. The extent to which they have impacted upon communities and social relationships also varies. The impact of these changes is more readily observed in coastal communities than in communities in the bush. The further from the coast the less impact these changes have had on communities within the Diocese of Aitape (Bryant 1983). The one exception to this general rule is Christianity; its impact and coverage appears to be uniform. Christianity throughout Melanesia, “is global in scope whereas custom is place-specific and therefore potentially divisive” (Douglas 2001, p.4).

2.5 The importance of religion

While not everyone in the Diocese of Aitape is Catholic, it would be difficult to find someone who does not belong to one or another Lotu (Christian denomination or Church). According to Douglas, Christianity for a Melanesian “…is neither foreign nor imposed nor a separate existential domain but an indigenised daily spiritual experience and a powerful ritual practice” (Douglas 2001, p.2).

It is sometimes difficult for the outsider to recognise the Christian religion as practiced by the Melanesian. Douglas (2001) says that almost every Melanesian she knows takes the efficacy of prayer for granted and invokes it constantly. “The power of prayer is immense amongst these people…. Their spirituality and belief makes it
so” (personal communication between the author and an Australian nun who has lived with the people of Aitape Diocese for over 50 years). Religion plays such an integral role in the lives of Melanesians that they find it unbelievable that there are those who ‘do not believe’ (Douglas 2001).

The constitution of Papua New Guinea states, “our noble traditions and Christian principles that are ours now”; and the national anthem declares “…praising God and rejoicing to be Papua New Guinea…” Douglas (2001) sees religion as being an integral part of the governance of modern Melanesian states and cites numerous examples of the invoking of Christian religious rite across the spectrum of government, law and order and commerce.

2.6 Conclusion
This chapter has highlighted the significance of religion in the lives of Melanesian people and how they embraced the arrival of Christianity. Rather than being something foreign and therefore something to be rejected or treated with a large degree of suspicion and apprehension, the arrival of Christianity helped to create a degree of unity amongst the disparate groupings that made up Melanesia and more specifically Papua New Guinea. This is also the case for the area that became the Catholic Diocese of Aitape.

The new religion that is Christianity came to the Diocese of Aitape initially as Catholicism, and like Christianity as a whole, it had a unifying influence. This chapter has also shown how the coming of Christianity had an impact on the practice of religion according to gender. Men and women now share religious practice while still having specific religious roles intertwined with traditional gender roles. Women now often have duties related to the Church, such as cleaning and washing while still bearing the full load of their family’s care.

The next chapter discusses the concept of empowerment and how empowerment is understood within the context of this research.
CHAPTER 3 THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF EMPOWERMENT AND THE CONTEXT FOR THE RESEARCH

3.1 Introduction
The way in which an agency sees its role in assisting people in the less developed world is critical to the action taken or the intervention and its outcome. The approach can be a charitable one with a focus on addressing immediate needs or it might be a more strategic one that, while not forgetting immediate need, also looks to address the underlying causes of disadvantage. The success or otherwise of these approaches will depend not only upon the aims of the action but also upon the time, place and the culture within which the action/intervention takes place (Mantovani 1988).

This chapter discusses the way in which women have been historically, and are currently viewed by various agencies (multilateral, bilateral or non-governmental organizations) involved in funding and/or implementing development programs or projects) development activities. The various approaches and paradigms that have prevailed at various times, and their merits, will be briefly discussed followed by a fuller discussion around empowerment as the means by which women can best be assisted in the development process.

3.2 Women’s issues: needs or responsibilities!
Boserup’s (1970) seminal work brought a realisation that women did not necessarily benefit from modernisation and that perhaps productive resources needed to be directed to women-specific projects. Boserup noted that women are important economic actors within their communities and not just passive recipients of men’s largesse. It was this productive role of women and gender based inequalities that
brought about a change in thinking regarding the involvement of women in development programs (Beneria and Sen 1982; Scheyvens 1995). The United Nation’s Decade for Women, which began in 1975, saw a number of major conferences dealing with the position and role of women across the globe and a raising of awareness of both governments and development agencies to the needs of women (Tinker 1990). Despite the decade-long focus on women and a revolutionary change in thinking towards women by development agencies, the general literature shows only a slightly improved position for women relative to that of men in some spheres of well-being and the position of women worsening in others.

“(I)n a world facing massive resource depletion and a growing population, it is often women whose burdens are increased because it is they who must search for hours for fuel wood, or walk several kilometres to find a clean source of water, or who must plant their crops on increasingly infertile soil. Women’s access to various services, particularly medical care, credit and education, is also much more limited than it is for men” (Scheyvens 1995, p.8; also see Evans 1990 for similar views).

In an effort to ensure the inclusion of women in the development process, there has been a focus on the role of women and their responsibilities/duties within the household and the community and how these duties might be addressed to improve the efficiency of the task and to ease the burden on women, thus increasing women’s productivity. From a development perspective the issues for women were initially centered on their responsibilities only and not on their responsibilities in relation to those of men. There was not an acknowledgement that the gendered roles are the result of the subordination of women by men and it is the gender relationship that is the primary issue for women. “It seems apparent that if one wishes to understand women’s disadvantaged position in any society, a study of gender relations is necessary” (Scheyvens 1995, p.9). The way in which a society dictates the role that the sex of a person will have on that person’s position in that society, is the basis of gender relationships. “Gender relations refer to the gender dimensions of the social relations structuring the lives of individual men and women, such as the gender division of labour and the gender division of access to and control over resources” (Sepoe 2000, p.22). Different societies have differing ideas about how men and
women should behave, highlighting the widely varying socially gendered constructs for people who are sexually the same.

That women have the caring responsibilities such as health, food, water and child care generally means that any improvement in their situation can mean improvement for all because women are focused on providing for the basic needs of the community (Bunch and Carrillo 1990; Heyzer 1985). Women’s roles in community management, through activities such as the preparation of feasts or the organization of village water supplies, were not seen as productive because although they require women’s time, they are difficult to equate to paid work (Moser 1992). Nevertheless, any improvement focuses on easing a work burden and increasing productivity.

As Scheyvens (1995) points out, there is a dilemma in that those who might gain most benefit from change are least likely to have time, opportunities or means to be able to identify and act on their interests. For women to look beyond cooking, sewing, and health when identifying needs, they need to be aware of the way in which the politics and economics of gender relationships affects them. “It is extremely difficult to separate the oppressions of patriarchy, capitalism, nationalism and other political systems; in reality they are inextricably interlinked” (Scheyvens 1995, p.22). The subordinate position of women can render them ignorant of the origins of their situation. If a woman has no experience outside of her daily set of housekeeping tasks, she is in no position to analyse the reasons for her predicament or to even realise that her life experience is not how it is for all women (Kabeer 1999; Afshar 1998; Batliwala 1993).

When Boserup wrote about the economic situation and contribution of women, their low levels of political participation received little or no attention. The ability to exert influence in decision making locally, regionally, nationally or in the home is significant in determining resource allocations. Exerting such influence is a form of political participation and this participation is as relevant to the individual as community political participation or participation at the institutional level (Sepoe 2000; Kaushik 1993). The ability to exert this influence is also linked to opportunity and the social environment in which the person lives. The social environment of persons with that ability or in the process of attaining that ability is a critical part of what this research is about in relation to the women of the Catholic Diocese of Aitape.
In the development context, class and even ethnicity need to be considered when determining the needs of women (Mantovani 1988; Kabeer 1999; Scheyvens 1995). There are many issues that, although they apply to all women, impact more upon poorer women. An issue such as security may be due to lack of lighting at night, lack of transport or private toilet facilities. A woman from a wealthier background may have the same security concern but may have access to facilities that reduce her risk (Sepoe 2000). Security in this instance is therefore not just an issue of gender per se. Almost all situations faced by women are impacted upon in ways similar to the security issue outlined.

The difference between the ‘practical needs’ and ‘strategic needs’ of women (see Moser 1989) is an important one for development agencies and governments to consider.

“Although most development initiatives concentrate on meeting the practical needs, …. it is also essential that strategic interests, which arise out of the structural patterning of life chances, are addressed if long term development goals focusing on overcoming women’s subordinate position are to be achieved” (Scheyvens 1995, p.29).

Development must be directed beyond the practical needs of a woman’s domestic role and it is here that women’s organisations and grassroots movements can play a part in the achievement of development. Through the process of conscientisation women become more attuned to the need to influence the decisions which impact upon them. This can happen through the formation of women’s local groups that enable them to be active in politics at the community level, which is the first step is seeing that strategic needs are addressed (Sepoe 2000). There are many women’s groups throughout the Diocese of Aitape and many of them are associated in some way with either the Diocese, the Church or both.

The recognition that women’s practical needs had to be included in the development process led to the Women in Development (WID) approach to development programs to target the needs of women. However, as discussed, gender relations are a critical consideration in addressing both the practical and strategic needs of women. This means that the interests of men also need to be considered during the planning process.
to ensure that the planned outcomes, although impacting upon gender relations, do not negatively impact upon them. The recognition that the gender relationship has a real impact on the strategic needs of women is manifest in the Gender and Development (GAD) theories and approaches to development in contrast to the Women in Development (WID) approach that addressed practical needs. From the earliest days of the Diocese the practical needs of women were recognized by Diocesan officials, and measures were taken to address them (see Chapter 5). How the influence of the Diocese of Aitape has affected gender relations is a focus of this research. The following discussion highlights the various approaches to addressing women, and more importantly, gender, within the development process.

3.3 Gender and Development

To discuss in detail the various theoretical approaches to development and how development to women is beyond the scope of this study and marginal to this thesis as much of the discussion would be historical. However some discussion of GAD at this point is worthwhile, as it is an attempt, in theory, to look at the development process from a qualitative social impact perspective as well as a more quantitative outcomes approach. The policy approaches to development can also be discussed within the context of GAD and these are relevant to this thesis.

3.3.1 Paradigms

GAD has emerged since the 1970s and is one of several branches of development theory to have evolved during the period from the early 1950s to the present. Although its acceptance may not be universal among major donors, multilateral agencies and international banks (Scheyvens 1995), agencies such as AusAID and USAID\(^5\) have gender as a high profile issue in the delivery of their aid funds. Development agencies seeking funding must demonstrate how their projects affect both men and women and generally should aim to have gender equality as an end result. But as development agencies are focused on meeting practical gender needs while ignoring strategic gender interests they only “... deal with the symptoms, but not the causes, of women’s subordinate position in society” (Scheyvens 1995, p.34).

---

\(^5\) AusAID, the Australian international aid agency, and USAID, the United States international aid agency, have produced gender and development guidelines for those wishing to access funds for development programs/projects. All project proposals must show how the gender issue is impacted by the project.
Scheyvens (1995) looks closely at GAD by way of two policy approaches that she refers to as the ‘equilibrium’ (predominant) paradigm and the ‘critical’ (alternate) paradigm. The major difference between these two paradigms is that the equilibrium paradigm assumes, “... the existing system operates in people’s best interests…”, whereas the critical paradigm “… sees society as being in conflict rather than equilibrium, due to class, ethnic and gender struggles” (Scheyvens 1995, pp.34-36).

Under the equilibrium paradigm GAD policies, while recognising the relatively poor position of women, and acknowledging the obstacles to women’s development such as tradition and attitudes, are focused on lessening the ‘burden’ on women.

“Under the equilibrium paradigm change is planned only for the purpose of improved efficiency and it should be gradual, rather than aiming for transformation …. Due to the wide acceptance of this rationale even the most sympathetic thinking on women’s position still focuses on remedial action” (Scheyvens 1995, p.35).

Policies grounded in the equilibrium paradigm cannot then hope to address the subordination of women. On the other hand, policies within the critical paradigm aim to change the status quo. So whilst ‘efficiency’ is the common term associated with the equilibrium paradigm, the phrase ‘social justice’ is associated with the critical paradigm (Scheyvens 1995).

Moser’s (1989) classification of approaches to women’s development into welfare, anti-poverty, efficiency, equity and empowerment could also be grouped into the equilibrium and the critical paradigms (see Figure 3.1). The welfare, anti-poverty, and efficiency approaches sit within the equilibrium paradigm because they are focused on addressing a specific need or situation such as poor health, lack of ready access to water or a similar identified problem, by providing medical care or digging a well. The equity and the empowerment approaches sit within the critical paradigm because they are aimed at addressing the causes of many of the problems faced by women in particular but also problems faced by men. The causes of lack of income, poor health, lack of access to resources and political participation are addressed through education.

---

6 Although Moser has used these headings to describe approaches to women’s development they could be used to classify approaches to development per se.
provision of credit and market access, land reform and capacity building of local communities to address their own problems and advocate on their own behalf.

As mentioned above the equilibrium paradigm has been the dominant approach to development and expressed through Moser’s classification of welfare, anti-poverty and efficiency it can be seen that outcomes from a development project are more readily achieved and quantified within this paradigm. Outputs such as how many wells were dug, how many medical centres were built and how many patients were treated are easy to quantify. Under the critical paradigm, where more qualitative outcomes associated with concepts of equity and empowerment are likely to be the goals of development projects, success is more difficult to measure, particularly in the short term.

**Figure 3.1**

Moser’s classification of development approaches grouped under the Equilibrium Paradigm and the Critical Paradigm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equilibrium (predominant) Paradigm</th>
<th>Critical (alternate) Paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-poverty</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Movement in Diocesan approach to dealing with people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author’s own work.

In the developing world where these paradigms are applied, the critical paradigm is seen to challenge culture because it seeks to change the power base from a male-dominated and male-dictated culture to a shared male-female culture. When culture is seen to be challenged, opposition can be found from even those who might be thought likely to gain from changes. “While it is true that certain women, mainly elites, benefit from the dominant …. patriarchal system, this is not true of the majority of women ….” (Scheyvens 1995, p.36). When given the chance, most women seek to change

---

7 Also see Korten (1990) for a similar classification of approaches to development interventions undertaken by NGOs.
those aspects of what is called ‘culture’, which foster the vested interests of men over women (Mantovani 1991; Scheyvens 1995).

3.4 Policies within Paradigms

The equilibrium and critical paradigms outlined by Scheyvens’ and Moser’s five development policy groups provide a good framework within which to discuss development as they relate to and impact upon women and such a discussion is relevant to this thesis. There has been a change in approach by many development agencies from a welfare approach to assist people, to an approach that is focused on helping people help themselves to achieve their aims. This change has been one of progression and this progression can be seen in this discussion. However the progression as described here (see Figure 3.1) should not be seen to suggest that all of these approaches to development are not still in use either separately or concurrently. In relation to the institution that is the Diocese of Aitape, this progression, as depicted in Figure 3.1 and in the discussion that follows, reflects the change in attitude and approach by the Catholic Church through the auspices of the Diocese towards the people of the Diocese of Aitape when the Church tried to assist those people in a developmental way.

The Church used to, and in some instances still does, endeavour to address physical and material needs of groups of people by providing monetary and technical resources with little if any input by or accountability to the people concerned. There have been many projects implemented by the Diocese over the years where the intention was to make life better for the people, but the projects have been implemented without the beneficiaries having any real input to planning or contribution to the resources used. For example, a cattle breeding project which provided a yearling bull and a heifer to young men who spent some time in learning to care for the cattle is no longer in existence nor are there any ‘cattle projects’ to be seen in the areas where the beneficiaries of this project live. The intention behind the project was to provide a source of dietary protein in the form of beef to people who suffer from a lack of protein in their diet. However, the cattle became a source of status for the men who had them. The objective was that cattle would be bred and selectively harvested. However, the men subsequently took no or little responsibility for the care of the cattle, as animal care is traditionally women’s work, and the cattle caused problems in
gardens and did poorly in difficult terrain. Men subsequently sold most of the cattle for a monetary return. Very little of the meat was eaten by women and children and the project is no longer active nor is there any lasting benefit. Beef cattle farming is not suited to the topography of the area nor to the lifestyle of the people. The project was a ‘white man’s’ solution to a local Melanesian problem. In recent times the efforts of many within the Diocesan hierarchy have been to give people the opportunity to help themselves on their own terms by providing an environment in which they can better use their skills and customs to enhance their lives. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

3.4.1 Welfare
Welfare as a relational concept arises from a concern regarding a person or persons and their situation. The whole development era which began in 1949 with President Truman’s inauguration speech, was as a result of a realisation that the welfare of the world’s poor needed to be addressed for their well being and security along with the well being and security of the well off (Truman 1950).

The welfare approach to development and women arose in the 1970s, and continues today, as a response to the observed disadvantages faced by women in the development process. The types of ‘welfare’ programs implemented focus on the traditional gendered roles and involve home economics, crafts and child and maternal health (Rogers 1980; Moghadam 1990). Programs in these sectors, although useful, reinforce stereotypes of women as dependent and homebound mothers (Tinker 1990). Such programs provide assistance to women for their reproductive role and are generally in the informal education sector. One view of this situation is that it not only entrenches the dependent and subjugated position of women, but also overtly prevents them from contesting places within the formal education sector thus giving more opportunities to men (see Scheyvens 1995; Rogers 1980; Moghadam, 1990). Knowledge gained by the women in such programs pertains to their present and local situation, whereas men have greater access to knowledge pertaining to modernisation of a world beyond the local. The end result is that women become efficient mothers.

8 Based on the author’s own observation and experience.
dependent upon men for anything beyond the household role; they are passive recipients of aid unable to be change agents (Scheyvens 1995).

However, if a women’s health and that of their children is improved, and if women have the opportunity to gain knowledge, especially if it is in a group environment, there could also be some real positive benefit for women. Women could begin to share ideas, seek further knowledge and begin to develop a degree of consciousness that might otherwise be denied them. The welfare approach may not be the best approach for women’s longer term benefit, as outlined above, but for some women the benefits may still be real.

The welfare approach, operating in a gender-segregated environment, is politically safe for governments and agencies as it does not have women competing with men for what is on offer. It is also relatively easy to justify to donors because it can be shown to have an immediate impact upon for example, the health status of children. Welfare programs are more easily evaluated to show that planned outcomes were achieved. This can improve the standing of agencies in the eyes of donors because it is “…a simple and politically safe agenda which development agencies find difficult not to follow” (Scheyvens 1995, p.39).

3.4.2 Anti-poverty
Moser (1989) claims that the anti-poverty approach to development policy reflected a shift in donor thinking in the early 1970s, away from economic growth towards redistribution to meet basic needs. This approach recognises the inequality between men and women but attributes this inequality to poverty and not to the subordination of women (Young 1990; Scheyvens 1995). With this understanding of cause and effect, the way to address the effect, in this case the poorer situation of women, is to eliminate or at least alleviate poverty. Projects aimed at increasing the efficiency of women’s productive work, or improving the rewards for productive work and new income generating activities, aim to reduce poverty but may in fact increase the workload of women or be such that women do not have the time to take advantage of new opportunities. More often than not these opportunities are to earn income from domestic skills and handcrafts rather than from saleable skills, for example carpentry, gained from formal training. Many projects failed due to lack of access to secure
markets and raw materials and because women’s reproductive roles prevented them from participating fully. The anti-poverty approach was subsumed by the efficiency approach during the United Nation’s Decade for Women (1976-1985) (Scheyvens 1995).

The anti-poverty approach is currently enjoying a resurgence in the new form of credit schemes. Many of the World Bank’s Poverty Reduction Strategies are centered around micro-finance schemes specifically targeting women. These schemes make small amounts of money available to women on credit so that women can establish themselves in some form of income generating activity. In this sense these schemes also have an element of the efficiency approach in them.

3.4.3 Efficiency (or integration)
According to Sen and Grown (1987) the efficiency approach gained favour at a time of economic uncertainty and recession throughout the world. Agencies like the World Bank discarded other approaches in favour of policies aimed at structural adjustment. If women could be integrated into systems which had benefited men, this would be the answer to increased efficiency. Scheyvens quotes from a 1992 UNDP sponsored training module for Pacific Island planners which casts women as resources and economic assets. “The key issue … is ultimately an economic one: misunderstanding gender differences leads to inadequate planning and designing of projects, resulting in diminished returns on investment” (Scheyvens 1995, p. 41).

The emphasis of the efficiency approach seems to be on how to best utilise the women themselves to meet the development ends rather than using development to improve the conditions of women. By improving the efficiency of women in areas such as health, subsequent expenditures in these areas can be less than otherwise required or even reduced. Scheyvens (1995) also points to the addition of the environment to the list of women’s caring roles and notes that women are targeted by social forestry projects for their cheap labour.

By integrating women into more general development programs rather than targeting them separately, agencies can argue that women are not being marginalised by the development process and that women’s needs and the whole issue of gender has been
‘mainstreamed’ \(^9\). The mainstreaming of women’s needs may result in better value for money spent from the agency’s viewpoint, but if the outcomes such as education are aimed at productivity rather than social justice, then they may do nothing to change the dominance of men over women. Scheyvens (1995) points to the World Bank’s encouragement of girls education and claims it is based on the rationale that it will help to lower birth rates and therefore assist economic growth. The inclusion of women on various committees that form part of a development project is also seen as a sign of equality even if the presence of women on such committees imposes a greater work burden upon them.

Jain (1990) cites the Self Employed Women’s Association of Ahmedabad as demonstrating that using economic efficiency arguments to bring women into development is not the best way: “… the largest and most dramatic use of women’s energy has been to resist and therefore there is a case for not integrating them into development but for reordering development so that it is acceptable to women” (Jain 2000, p.145). Rebutting this approach as suitable for women, Boulding says: “(t)o cooperate with being integrated into the present international order is to destroy all hope for a different future” (Boulding 1981, p.18).

The welfare, the anti-poverty and the efficiency approaches are a part of the equilibrium paradigm. They aim to work within the existing social structures ignoring prejudices of class and ethnicity hoping that modernisation will work for all in these times of globalisation, without acknowledging that the social as well as the economic ‘playing field’ is not level, either globally or locally.

### 3.4.4 Equity

The equity approach grew out of the work of liberal feminists in the United States who, recognising that women in the Third World lacked access to education, health services, political power and many public resources, aimed to achieve equal rights through positive discrimination and legislative change (Jaquette 1990; Buvinic 1983).

“…The approach is based on four main premises:

---

\(^9\) Mainstreaming has recently become a dominant term in the language of development agencies and planners alike. According to Scheyvens (1995) it has won the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Womens Fund (UNIFEM).
1) women have productive roles;
2) Western measures of economic activity fail to acknowledge the value of unpaid work;
3) because motherhood is glorified in Western societies, a psychological barrier to paid work for women is erected;
4) the income gap between men and women’s work has widened because women have been relegated to the traditional sector” (Scheyvens 1995, pp.44, 45).

Proponents of the equity approach therefore wanted to see women’s present work valued and to see new and diverse opportunities for employment opened up to women.

Equality of men and women is a major goal of the equity approach. However even legislated equality does not necessarily translate into equality in practice either in the home or in the workplace or the broader community. In pursuing equality the equity approach makes the assumption that men are the natural beneficiaries of development under the policies of other approaches when in fact all men may not benefit from development as is assumed. A question posed is, “…with what group of men do women desire to be equal?” (Scheyvens 1995, p.45). This approach also begs the question, do women just wish to be equal with men under the law, the policies and systems of the present system or would a new system be more beneficial to both men and women? As Scheyvens points out (1995) the approach is ethnocentric in that it is predicated on the assumption that development as determined by the West is the ‘way to go’ for all. She also claims that ‘hard data’ provided by quantitative and scientific methods supporting the anti-poverty and efficiency approaches were far more convincing to planners and donors than the qualitative techniques used by the proponents of the equity approach. Also, “concepts of women and development were quickly incorporated into documents of various United Nations agencies as soon as they were articulated in economic rather than equity terms” (Tinker 1990, p.31).

3.4.5 The Empowerment approach

Although problematic as a term when a consistent definition is required, empowerment is flexible enough to accommodate variations in geography,

---

10 In Papua New Guinea the equality of men and women is explicit within the country’s constitution.
demography, ethnicity, class and culture when used to describe a ‘movement’ or to identify a goal (Batliwala 1993). It can also be used in gender issues be they of socially constructed gender (that is roles in society are based upon the sex of the person) or pertaining to biological sex (that is the sex of the person at birth). It is not surprising then that many development agendas originating within the Third World by and for women, have empowerment as a major objective or goal.

The concept of empowerment can be applied at any level, to individuals or groups regardless of class, creed or ethnicity, and can come from within or be induced from an outside source.

“The concept of empowerment has become popular as a goal and has become part of the development lexicon at the same time that the focus on individualism as a desirable trait has increased and consumerism and personal achievement have become cultural goals” (Rowlands 1998, p.11).

Rowlands’ view on the rise to prominence of empowerment at first may appear to be from a Western viewpoint, while Sen and Grown (1987) would have empowerment entering the development debate by way of the writings of Third World women.

The empowerment approach to development sees women as change agents, agents changing policies, programs and activities in a way that they desire, at a speed that they determine and into a system that they design. The empowerment approach questions the approaches to women’s development without demanding that they (women) become part of a designated, Western development program (Moser 1989). The empowerment approach gives women the opportunity to be part of the goal setting, the planning and the implementation, and also the opportunity to share in the outcomes because it places a value on their knowledge and demands their involvement. The empowerment approach seeks to identify the underlying causes of need, disparity and subjugation and then sets out to transform society from within by redistributing power and providing women with choices (Scheyvens 1995; Kabeer 1999).

As a policy approach to development, the empowerment approach assumes that women have little or no ‘power,’ which may not necessarily be the case. What may be true is that forms of power once possessed by women are no longer effective due to
the loss of traditions (Mantovani 1988; Scheyvens 1995). For example, the role of women in the rearing and disposal of pigs in Papua New Guinea has changed from being one of integral involvement to now being irrelevant as a result of monetisation and the sale of pigs by men (Minnegal and Dwyer 1987). Women do not need to have this power returned; they need to have a legitimate level of power in the new arrangements. This power can only come if women are given access to the skills relevant to the new system and the empowerment approach and its proponents endeavour to enable the development of these skills either within the individual or within group organizations (Sepoe 2000; Mantovani 1988).

The empowerment approach does not assume that only women are disadvantaged and that all men are advantaged by the existing social structures, and proponents of this approach in seeking to redistribute power, take account of men’s roles and contributions towards social justice (Kabeer 1999; Afshar 1998). This ‘awareness’ of men can help to ameliorate antagonisms that may arise in homes, families and communities as power is renegotiated. Strong support structures need to be in place for women in these potentially antagonistic situations (Scheyvens 1995).

The empowerment approach is not widely supported in practice by development agencies and Third World governments because it challenges the status quo. The irony is that the language of the empowerment approach and empowerment itself is readily espoused by these same governments and agencies. Of Moser’s (1989) five approaches to development policy, the empowerment approach is the only approach which is really inclusive of women and any other group suffering oppression and subordination. This thesis looks at the social environment created by the Catholic Diocese of Aitape and the opportunities it has created for women to work, to organize, to exert influence and to make decisions: in other words, to become empowered.

3.5 What is Empowerment?

In development literature there are many references to empowerment of groups including gendered, landless, social groupings of various kinds and the poor in general. Rowlands even describes the term empowerment as “a word for our times” but then asks, “but what does it mean?” (Rowlands 1998, p.1).
In the preceding section the empowerment approach to development as a policy framework was discussed. The following discussion is to define what is meant by the term empowerment itself. The word needs some deconstructing to tease out meaning as well as contextualising it to give relevance to whatever group or whomever person it is referring. This section attempts to give meaning to empowerment in the context in which it relates to this research project: does the Catholic Diocese of Aitape contribute to the empowerment of women? In answering this question it is the intention of the author to contribute to filling a gap in the literature on development by showing how an institution such as the Catholic Diocese can, by acting consciously or unconsciously, empower women in a remote region in the developing world.

3.6 The ‘power’ in empowerment

The notion of being empowered seems to infer that one has a degree of power in relation to the power of others and that becoming empowered means gaining power relative to the level of power or powerlessness one had before becoming empowered. Kilby (2004) says that empowerment is about individual responsibility and autonomy. Kabeer (1999, p.437) describes empowerment as, “... the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability….(it) entails a process of change”. Kabeer also notes that the ability to make choices is dependent upon three dimensions resources, agency and achievement: access to, or the support of resources; choices made need to be prompted, facilitated and supported by the agency or processes within the woman’s environment; choices need to lead to positive outcomes/achievements so that women can move on to make other choices.

Batliwala (1993) also describes empowerment as a process resulting in a realignment of power relations and control over the sources of power. But if empowerment is a process it is also the result of that process. Empowerment is both a noun and a verb. Whether empowerment is couched in terms of gaining or losing power, or in terms of being able or unable to make choices, empowerment is linked to disempowerment. It would seem that to become empowered one must first be disempowered to some degree. The level of empowerment of a person, what empowerment is and what is required to become empowered can vary from place to place and from time to time (see Afshar 1998, Kabeer 1999). The starting point in the process of empowerment thus varies between people or bodies as well as in terms of time and place. It is a
continuum along which bodies find themselves at various stages in their lives and is dependant upon all the other influences acting upon them and within their world.

When it is the empowerment of a particular group of people that is under consideration, their level of empowerment is relative to that of other groups with whom they associate. In the case of the empowerment of women, their level of empowerment will be affected by their relationships with men because power is a significant component of relationship (Rowlands 1997; Sepoe 2000). Gender relationships are therefore an important aspect of empowerment.

Power usually means ‘power over’ something or someone and if someone gains power it would seem that someone else must lose power. Rowlands (1998) and Kabeer (1999) however, talk of other forms of power as well as ‘power over.’ They speak of ‘power to’, ‘power with’ and ‘power from within’, all of which allow for different meanings for empowerment. However, whether power comes from within or without, the resultant level of power must be a result of some influence or action, probably external to the body, which has undergone a change in power level. But the body has nevertheless participated in the influence or action either willingly or unwittingly.

Figure 3.2 shows a diagrammatic construction of how empowerment is ‘built’ from a very low individual base level to a high level of political power. This depiction of the building of empowerment by Schuler (1986) uses the terms of individual and collective consciousness at what she shows as the lower levels or the beginning of the empowerment building process. The levels of consciousness used by Schuler in Figure 3.2 can be equated with Rowland’s and Kabeer’s levels of power. Individual Consciousness can be equated with ‘power within’ and Collective Consciousness can be equated with ‘power with’ and ‘power to’. It is the lower level of the empowerment continuum, as depicted in Schuler’s model shown in Figure 3.2, the gaining of individual consciousness and the progression to collective consciousness that this research is concerned with.

Friedman (1992) describes three types of empowerment: psychological, social and political. Psychological empowerment relates to the state of mind and the way in which this state of mind results in a sense of identity, self-esteem and confidence
level. This psychological power is similar to Rowland’s (1998) and Kabeer’s (1999) ‘power within’. Such empowerment may result in a person becoming more able to express their feelings, desires and opinions or even to seek assistance or advice in relation to issues they see as having some impact upon them. Such empowerment could be the first step in a progression from a powerless state. Social empowerment is the same as ‘power with’ as described by Rowlands (1998) and Kabeer (1999). Social empowerment involves interaction with others, to share or to take some form of action in relation to something, some issue or activity of common interest. Social empowerment could also be the same as Rowland’s (1998) and Kabeer’s (1999) ‘power to’ in that the individuals give power to the group and conversely the group gives power to the individuals who make up the group; a dynamic important to successful social interaction. Social empowerment is a logical next step after psychological power in the progression from the powerless state.

Political power is the next step in this progression and is the equivalent of Rowland’s (1999) ‘power over’. Political empowerment may be individual or collective and is a more powerful form of social empowerment. Political empowerment, when it bestows political power enables the individual or the group to not only have an influence over issues affecting themselves, but also provides the opportunity to have an influence over issues affecting others. Scheyvens (1995) says that it is at the social and political empowerment stages that efforts to effect changes in the wider society are most effective. Scheyvens (1995) uses Schuler’s model of building empowerment to emphasise the importance of inputs into this progression from a powerless state to a position of political power.

This model refers to consciousness at the individual and collective level and highlights the effect of other influences or inputs into this progression to political empowerment. These influences are those alluded to above as external influences or actions and could be influences such as family or individuals in the family.
The community and/or members of it could also be a contributing influence to the degrees and levels of empowerment of individuals and groups within it. From a relatively young age in traditional societies in Papua New Guinea, boys were greatly influenced by their older peers and adult men into becoming powerful, both mentally and physically, in relation to women (Beben 1990; Mantovani 1993). Such influences included stories and education, and also specific rituals and rites conducted to ensure the young man clearly knew his role in life as a male and how his relationship with women should be.

“In Melanesian societies, sex differentiation in the form of male dominance is symbolically expressed in … rites. The flutes and the bullroarer are said to have been stolen from the women and are used by men as a means of deception and subjugation. Nose, ear, tongue and penis bleeding are said to be a means of releasing contaminating female influences” (Beben 1990, p.70).

The secretive nature of knowledge held by men that could not be divulged to women, was manifested often by the ‘spirit house’ where only initiated men could go. This knowledge of the rites and the spirits could only be held by men and if a woman invaded this area of men’s lives she did so under the pain of death. From the male perspective this was a positive and assertive means of ensuring a male had supremacy over a woman. This process had an impact on women as well, for even though they were not privy to the detail of the rituals and ceremonies of the men the messages
were clear: these rituals are for men only and it is from these that men gain the power which makes them superior to women (Beben 1990). Mantovani (1993) says that the process by which young women were educated as to their role and position in society was not as overtly aggressive as that for young males but it was assertive so that women could feel sure of what power they had. The various taboos and living arrangements as practiced by communities and understood by men from their perspective and by women from their perspective gave rise to what Beben describes as “sexual antagonism…. relationships between Sepik men and women are characterised by incessant rivalry and exploitation” (Beben 1990, p.49). (The men and women of the Diocese of Aitape are Sepik). Such a situation would suggest that both men and women possess a degree of power or empowerment, and it is a result of their life experience in their community.

Schuler’s model in Figure 3.2 shows no inputs that might facilitate the transition from the individual consciousness level to collective consciousness level. The inputs required could be inputs such as those described by Beben (1990) and Mantovani (1993) and in more recent times such inputs could be those that have replaced (if this has happened) the traditional; e.g. school-based education, Christian religion and direct contact with people from other areas and cultures. Schuler’s model could be modified (see Figure 3.3) with inputs (‘power to’) depicting the possible sources of the empowerment that moves the ‘body’ along the empowerment continuum from individual consciousness to collective consciousness.

The Franciscan Friars from the early days of their involvement in the Diocese of Aitape explicitly set out strategies to ‘improve’ the physical lives (health, education, economics) of the people of the Diocese. The Friars established a Decalogue of Development and a Summary of Resolutions regarding Development (Duggan 1983). These ‘statements clearly demonstrates the friar’s, and by default the Diocesan, commitment to empowering the people to be active participants in whatever activities, programmes and projects that the Diocese initiated or was involved in as an institution. The Decalogue of Development and the Resolutions regarding Development clearly state the need for the people to be involved and have ownership, that the friars and all missionaries must ensure that the people’s voices are heard, that the people are not imposed upon and that all effort must be made to ensure that time is
available to enable an understanding of the people by the missionaries and an understanding of the missionaries by the people (see section 3.12).

The inputs into the empowerment process between the levels of Individual Consciousness and Collective Consciousness shown in Figure 3.3 are the type of inputs required by the Decalogue of Development set down by the Franciscan Friars in the late 1940s (see Duggan 1983).

**Figure 3.3**

**Building Empowerment II**

![Diagram of empowerment levels and strategies](source: author’s adaptation of Schuler’s model.)

3.7 The ‘empowering’ process and its ‘relativity’

The states of, or levels of, empowerment as outlined by Rowlands (1998), Kabeer (1999) and Friedman (1992) could also be described as ‘where a person is at’ at any given moment or their position on the empowerment continuum. Between these moments is the progression from one level or degree of empowerment to another. Batliwala (1993) says that empowerment is both a ‘process’ and also a ‘result of that process,’ indicating that there are different levels of empowerment and that one can be ‘empowered’ to varying degrees, but regardless of the degree, one is still empowered. The level of empowerment attained by a person could then change over time as one became more or less empowered. This would indicate that empowerment is very much a relative thing, relative to a previous level of empowerment and relative to the level of empowerment of others. In Schuler’s model, the individual consciousness level
could have an infinite range within it, as too could the collective consciousness level. These are not discrete categories and are relative to what was before and what comes after. Even political empowerment is not discrete as it too will be relative to the environment in which it exists.

Afshar (1998) says that empowerment is dependent on time, place and culture. In the literature on women and empowerment this relativity is clear and is gender based – the empowerment of women in relation to men. Empowerment in itself applies to identifiable bodies, individuals or groups, and is relative within and between the biological sex groupings. But if empowerment has a cultural dimension to it as suggested by Afshar (1993), empowerment levels will be affected by and largely dependent upon the culture as it manifests in terms of gender relationships. In Papua New Guinea, and Melanesia in general, the perceived wisdom is that women are subservient to men and they need to be empowered, a notion reinforced by the UNDP’s Gender Development Index (GDI) for Papua New Guinea of 0.521 (UNDP 2007). This index places a quantifiable measure on the degree of development of a group relative to other groups at a given time but it does not allow for the dimensions of place and culture which, as shown by Mantovani (1993), Afshar (1998) and Kabeer (1999), are important influences on empowerment.

3.8 Empowerment and development

Most governments and development agencies, according to Scheyvens (1995), define development in terms of economic events and situations even though such development may have a hugely negative impact upon social development. She cites the example of dam building in India to provide electricity and irrigation water, where the building of the dam actually destroyed the livelihoods and in some cases the lives, of thousands of people. Within the development discourse the undeveloped ‘poor’ are often described as those with an income of less than one United States dollar per day (World Bank 2000). This definition ignores the richness of culture existing in the so-called Third World or South and the people’s subsistence life ‘earnings’, unless these earnings can be exploited. Poverty has focused attention upon people previously unknown to many in the so-called Developed World and in the process comparisons have been made between conditions, both social and economic, of the Third and the Developed worlds. As a result vast amounts of money have been spent on projects and
programs aimed at eliminating or at least alleviating the poverty of the poor. But many of the poor have remained poor because they have not been able to make the choice to compete on an equal basis with the ‘better off.’

In the Diocese of Aitape the social and economic indicators of development as defined by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) are very low compared to the UNDP’s relative measures and these will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. This part of Papua New Guinea, the Diocese of Aitape, has been almost completely overlooked by development agencies, and the Catholic Church, along with some small church related NGOs, is the only institution that has attempted to address the social and economic aspects of development in that region. Some government input has been made in this regard but the government uses the Church organisation as a proxy for much of its effort in the areas of education and health. With the exception of immediate disaster relief efforts such as that which followed the Aitape Tsunami of July 1998, no specific development projects exist within the geographic area that is the Diocese of Aitape that could be identified as not under the auspices of the Catholic Diocese.

This does not mean that development is not happening within the Diocese and empowerment is a crucial part of development for women and other groups that are disadvantaged (Scheyvens 1995). The self-esteem of women and the disadvantaged generally is vital in determining the response of these people to whatever opportunities arise, be they economic, political or personal, mental and spiritual. That access to resources such as education, land and income can support the empowerment process is undeniable but self-reliance, dignity, self-determination and maturity are necessary prerequisites (Scheyvens 1995). Barre (1980) supports this view and talks about these prerequisites in terms of what is needed for integral human development: “…development that embraces every aspect of a person’s life. …socio-economic, political and religious life…. none should be isolated from the other” (Barre 1980, p.206). A person must be free of all forms of oppression both “physical and psychic” (Barre 1980, p.207). To be free of psychic oppressions is to be confident, have a sense of self worth, and a belief that others accept you this way. When this is the situation for an individual, that individual can then assess opportunities and make choices without the choices being restricted or predetermined by some oppression be it an
external or physical oppression or an internal or psychic oppression. For as Kabeer (1999, p.439) states, “…we are interested in…. people’s capacity to make choices…” It is the lifting of such oppressions and especially the psychic or internal, and the role of the Diocese in doing this, that is of interest in this research.

The gender perspective on empowerment and development is important as it exposes the social relationship as being of vital importance to empowerment and hence development, namely, the relationship between men and women (Sepoe 2000).

Whether we view development as a series of discrete projects resulting in measurable outputs or as a stage of advancement, development will be both subjective, in that the stage of advancement for the individual is dependant upon the way a person feels about themselves and their social and physical environment, as well as objective, e.g. a person’s income level has risen. Development of the individual however will always be linked to the individual’s ability and/or willingness to make choices regardless of how these choices are presented or what choices are actually made. The ability to make choices, the opportunity to make choices and the ability to exert influence over decisions and outcomes comes with empowerment and empowerment enables development (see Rowlands 1998; Kabeer 1999; Afshar 1998; Mantovani1993).

3.9  Culture and empowerment
Mantovani (1988, 1991) places concepts that could be described as ‘power within’ and ‘power over’ squarely in the cultural domain.

“The attitudes of self-respect, self-value, as well as the attitudes of superiority and egocentrism of the will, to use and dominate other human beings, are common to humankind, and universal. The manner in which they are experienced and expressed are cultural and particular. Self-esteem and exploitation are always cultural. The healing that transforms exploitation into real liberation, to be restoration of self-esteem, must be cultural as well” (Mantovani 1988, p.37).

In this context, the level of empowerment will depend very much upon what is achievable within the cultural milieu that exists. Cultural influences upon empowerment could apply in a range of jurisdictions, from the local to the international, from the social to the economic and/or political. To experience a change
in the level of empowerment of an entity will therefore be dependent upon changes in
the culture influences that dictate the relativity of empowerment. Culture is more than
a compilation of customs;

“… (it is) a system of ideas, an ordered whole, inherited from and shared
with a group, through which people are taught how to answer their
physical, social and spiritual needs” (Mantovani 1991, p.3).

If there is no movement or change in the culture, that is, in the ideas that provide the
‘answers’ to people’s physical, social and spiritual needs, then there will be no
changes in the relative levels of empowerment within the groups of people who share
that culture. For changes to occur there must be some influence which may come from
within or from an external source. In recent times much of this influence has come
about as a result of deliberate policies and practices under the banner of development
and such development has generally come via the auspices of outside or foreign
agencies. In the context of this research the agency that has had an impact upon the
culture of the people of the Diocese of Aitape is the Catholic Church.

3.10  Empowerment and women

As well as coming from outside, the influences aimed at bringing about changes in
culture to affect empowerment of the less or un-empowered or disempowered, have
been aimed primarily at the empowerment of women. The UNDP’s Gender in
Development Policy (GIDP) explicitly uses the language of empowerment by a)
promoting the empowerment of women, and b) fostering an environment that enables
the advancement of women (UNDP 1996). The term empowerment is used widely by
a range of organisations, from women’s groups, to NGOs, multilateral and bilateral
organisations, as well as governments. In their efforts to empower women in the
development process, agencies have developed policies in areas such as micro-credit,
political participation and reproductive health (Oxaal and Baden 1997). However, the
implementation of such policies in itself may not necessarily impact positively on
women’s empowerment, particularly if the policies and practices of the implementing
agency do not allow for the full participation of the culture of the beneficiaries, which
includes men. Mantovani suggests that to base development on foreign models,
“…besides being questionable on theoretical grounds, endangers the end-result”
(Mantovani 1991, p.37). This statement is intuitively attractive and almost beyond
challenge in that it says that the models used for development need to be appropriate
and not ‘foreign’, meaning inappropriate. Therefore to influence or to change a culture to the benefit of a group previously or presently disadvantaged by that culture, the changes made cannot be culturally foreign. If the cultural changes are seen as foreign or inappropriate then the changes will not be lasting (see Mantovani 1991). Religion was not culturally foreign to the people of the Diocese of Aitape before Christianity was introduced and as previously shown (see Chapter 2), many aspects of the Christian religion were seen by the people as familiar and comparable to aspects of their traditional religion. However many of the ‘ideas’ within the Christian religion were (and in some instances still are) foreign. With this mix of familiar and foreign the ‘new’ Christian religion has had influences on the culture of the people within the Diocese of Aitape that have been influencing the people over a long period of time. Some of the ideas have been adopted, some partially, some by some individuals and not by others. The result has been a change in the ‘system of ideas’ the people used to ‘answer’ their physical, social and spiritual needs -the culture has undergone change.

If women are to be empowered beyond the level of empowerment they had previously, or beyond the level of empowerment of their mothers and grandmothers, there must be changes within the culture that improve the empowerment of women. For women to be able to make choices that impact upon their lives, the men involved in their lives need to be confident that women can do so without adversely affecting men. Men and women need to share ideas that result in positive gender relationships based on equality (Sepoe 2000).

3.11 A degree of consciousness

In Schuler’s model (Figure 3.2), most development inputs aimed at effecting levels of empowerment are aimed at the level above Collective Consciousness; at the progression from collective consciousness to political power. This appears to assume that there is already an adequate level of individual consciousness. Observations and research in relation to the women of the Diocese of Aitape and the physical environment of isolation in which most of these women live, leads to the conclusion that individual consciousness leading to a collective consciousness is the most important level on the empowerment continuum for these women. It is at these levels that awareness of alternatives and aspirations are possible. To acquire the ability to make choices, as Kabeer (1999) describes empowerment, one must be aware that there
are choices to be made; that the status quo is not the only way things could be (Scheyvens 1995). If for example women are able to make choices, the choices they subsequently make are themselves likely to vary from one person to another depending on culture, education level, life experience and many other influences. Individuals are always a part of a larger community which will impact upon them, and they are subject to the agency of others (Biersack 1991). The agency of others in enabling women to make choices is also seen as a way of bringing about empowerment for women in developing countries. The effectiveness of such agency however is difficult to determine and agency is “… indeterminate and hence unpredictable in a way that is antithetical to requirements of measurement” (Kabeer 1999, p.462). Therefore determining whether a person is empowered or not as a result of some action or situation is almost impossible to measure, and the success or otherwise of ‘agency’ will only be known to the individual on whose behalf the agency was enacted. Giving access to resources such as land or credit, or creating provision for political participation or equal educational opportunity are not themselves empowering, but they can allow for a greater degree of consciousness to be achieved which can result in choices to be made which were not previously available. This is empowering. The greater the degree of consciousness, or as one progresses from the level of individual consciousness to collective consciousness, the greater the ability to make choices and the greater the awareness of the availability of choice and the more able one is to exercise the ability to make the choice.

None of this however accounts for an individual’s ultimate choice. To provide an intervention or agency on behalf of persons deemed to be lacking in empowerment is really only providing the environment in which the individual can exercise the choice-making ability once it is acquired. To be prescriptive with agency and intervention would be to violate the essence of the empowering process by predetermining outcomes rather than women having the capacity for self-determination (Kabeer 1999; Rowlands 1998; Batliwala 1993). The Diocese of Aitape has, over time, worked very hard at creating an environment in which individuals, both men and women, can acquire the ability to make choices and then to exercise that ability. The Diocese has achieved this through the provision of education and health, with policies and staff supporting women, youth and family as well as employment and development support.
in areas such as sustainable forestry and agriculture. These will be discussed in more detail as the views of the participants are outlined in Chapter 5.

3.12 The Church and Empowerment

Duggan (1983) outlines an experience of missionaries in the Diocese of Aitape, more concerned about empowerment of local people than with the baptism of new converts to Catholicism. According to Duggan, the Franciscans saw the ‘development’ of the people as an important aspect of their presence amongst the Sepik people. The Franciscans showed great concern for the people and went to great lengths to help them in adapting to the modern, monetised world. The Franciscan Decalogue of Development (in Duggan 1983) gives a guide to the thinking behind this empowerment approach to Catholic mission in the days prior to and immediately after the formation of the Diocese of Aitape.

The Decalogue Of Development

Thou shalt not be ethnocentric
Thou shalt not be paternalistic
Thou shalt not talk down to people
Thou shalt not cross anyone in public
Thou shalt listen twice as much as thou speakest
Thou shalt find out what are the felt needs of the people
Thou shalt consult the people in all projects
Thou shalt serve the people in their strivings
Thou shalt develop sensitivity to all cultural factors
Thou shalt communicate God’s love at all times

The Decalogue of Development is significant in that it stresses a serving of the people in the fulfillment of their needs rather than an imposition of an outside doctrine, although by this time Christianity had been present for a number of generations. It is significant that the reference to God is only at the very last and then it is not doctrinal reference but one of relationship. A further insight into the prevalent attitude of the clergy in the Diocese in its early years is the Franciscan Mission Aitape: Summary of resolutions regarding development (in Duggan 1983, p.355).
Franciscan Mission Aitape: summary of resolutions regarding development.

That we examine our own attitudes and values, discuss them with others, inviting suggestions and criticisms.
That we each do a time activity study to see at what time we are really available to the people.
That we must give true importance to the Sunday homily, by thorough preparation of material related to the life and strivings of the people.
That visitation be given true emphasis – that it be real personal contact at a time convenient to the people. Having a genuine interest in the customs, relationships, land systems, gardening of the people, we may become attuned to think and feel with them and be aware of changing attitudes.
In our communication through development, we must work with and through those with status, influence, authority or experience so that we depend on them.
That we seek their ideas and through them the people’s. That we give people a chance to grow by praising and encouraging, by submitting our ideas to them, and allowing the initiative to come from them.
That there be a Mission Band of experts who can be called to move to areas where their expertise is needed.
That an anthropologist be available in the Diocese and that seminary study include anthropology to bring a deeper understanding of both the home and mission apostolate.
That a library of useful texts be set up.
That we re-evaluate our present projects to see their relevance to the needs of the people and whether they are over managed.
That a Diocesan Development Committee be set up to evaluate, guide and guarantee projects. It should examine whether projects are relevant, it should allow them to develop at the people’s pace and guarantee projects so that once started, they can be completed and maintained.

This summary of a development approach by the Franciscan priests of the Diocese shows a commitment to the empowerment of people; the facilitator (the priest) endeavouring to understand the people so that his facilitation does not become an imposition upon the people but a demand-driven approach owned by the people. The emphasis made in point 5 acknowledges the existence of a system of authority and governance that should be recognised, respected and utilised. There is no reference
made here to the sex of those with status and influence, so we can only assume that those referred to might vary depending on whom ‘the people’ concerned with the activity were. If the activity involved women then we must assume that women of status and influence would be ‘depended’ upon.

Duggan (1983) also chronicles the experiences of a Franciscan priest in a remote location which demonstrates the difficulties faced by priests in endeavouring to abide by their Decalogue of Development. The cultural and psychological pressures exacerbated by the isolation experienced by the priest point to well-intentioned endeavour struggling with many problems, the desire of the people for modernisation and the role of the priest in that process. Duggan then quotes from an Australian social scientist’s observations on the situation some 10 years later (1975) in the same area in which the priest referred to above had been stationed. The observations show numerous activities, facilities and enterprises such as unused pit latrines, unsold and uneaten rice grown locally for sale to the state, modern buildings such as schools, women’s clubs and aid posts, showing a degree of activity the purpose of which was not always understood or beneficial. The unused latrines were intended to improve the personal and environmental hygiene and subsequently the health of the people; the rice could be sold or eaten but neither was happening. Visiting this same area some 20 years later, rice was still being grown by some farmers and if the state did not buy it, it went to waste; and most people still did not use latrines. This does not mean that nothing has changed but it does show that recognised need, not well-intentioned supply-led change, leads to real sustained development. The author’s own observation in the mid-1990s is that, in the case of the buildings mentioned by the social scientist in 1975, the aid posts and schools and the women’s clubs, or their replacements, were very much in use by all people, which would indicate that during the intervening 20 years people’s ideas in relation to these things had changed significantly. The ongoing presence of the Diocese, providing support for the education and health of the people, has no doubt impacted more significantly upon the younger people who have grown up under the influence of the Diocese.

The Franciscan Friars on their arrival in the Aitape area were quickly aware, from their western perspective, of the low status of women in PNG. “Women have a secondary role in Papua New Guinean society. It is a definite role but certainly a
lower and physically harder one” (National Franciscan Friar, Paias Teke in Bourke 1994, p.7). On arrival in Aitape the Friars immediately wrote to Franciscan sisters in Australia asking for their help in working in particular with women and children. The nuns who first arrived in the Aitape area in 1949 were also Franciscan and they too, like the Franciscan Friars, had a more humanitarian rather than an evangelical approach to their Mission. In the newsletter of the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (now known as Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception), ‘The Seed Grows’, there are numerous stories and references to activities, especially with and by women, which are concerned with improving the quality of life, be it from a health and nutrition or a social, relationship perspective.

Along with a deep concern for the well-being and development of all the people of the Diocese, the Friars, who under the Bishops of the Diocese (of whom there have been four and all four themselves Franciscans), have identified raising the status of women as one of their expressed objectives. As Fr Greg Bourke ofm writes,

“It (the raising of women’s status) is one of our primary works. Some ways we are trying to do this are:

• To develop our own personal maturity as adult male Religious; comfortable in our position as men in PNG society. To grow as men who appreciate the women who enter our lives as one of God’s greatest gifts to us.

• To give respect and reverence to all women we meet in everyday life. We must not exploit or abuse the innate trust they give us. We must not belittle them in actions or words and encourage them to use their talents and leadership qualities wherever it is possible.

• To be conscious that both men and women watch us to see how we treat our own Religious Sisters – to use the example of Saint Francis and the early friars in their relationship with St. Clare and her Sisters as our role model.

• To encourage the family life apostolates and those who direct them as well as all those directly engaged in the care of women and children. To encourage all forms of women’s groups. To promote in men a strong
devotion to Mary, the Mother of God. A devotion to Mary should overflow to all women.

- To tackle the increasing incidence of rape and violence to women in a forthright manner by our preaching and teaching. To instruct young men in what it means to be a Christian man and that the violation of any woman in our community is not only a catastrophe for her but an indictment of all the men of her community – including the male Religious.
- To make use of the information available to us about women’s issues in PNG. There is no shortage” (Bourke 1994, p.7).

Fr. Bourke’s list of ways in which the friars are endeavouring to raise the status of women may appear to be religiously oriented and lacking in practical, concrete efforts to effect change such as convictions for rape might do. But as he also says, “there are no atheists in PNG” (Bourke 1994, p.6) as the people have such a deep spiritual dimension to their world. These efforts by people (the friars) seen as significant players in a large part of the spiritual world in ensuring that the behaviour of all Religious adheres to the above six directives, is likely to have a positive impact upon the behaviour of others. In spite of this, changing attitudes is a difficult task and Fr. Bourke, in reference to the training of young Papua New Guinean priests, says, “…male attitudes to women do not change much in the novitiate” (Bourke 1994, p.6).

The Diocese of Aitape still supports a developmental and empowering approach to its mission amongst the people of the Diocese and is still committed to the issue of raising the status of women. The Diocese has a range of activities grouped collectively under the heading of Diocesan Development Services. These services are provided and supported by the Diocese under the rationale:

“The Diocese of Aitape has the policy of holistic development of peoples as its standard of service…. The main thrust is toward the spiritual health of the people but we realise that a healthy body and mind amid a peaceful and just society are essential to achieve a strong religious environment. So

---

11 “The adult male Religious”, “the male religious” and “the religious”, used variously in this thesis, refer to members of a religious order.
it is that we emphasise health, education, agricultural, social and development services through the departments of the Diocese. PNG is going through tremendous changes at present and the pace of change is confusing to many people. They feel they are missing out on a chance to improve their quality of life. The development policy of the Diocese hopes to offer them that chance” (Bishop Austen Crapp, Diocese of Aitape web page 2005).

With this policy behind it the Diocese has fulltime officers in the pastoral care areas of women’s issues and affairs, youth, Family Life Program and counseling services. The Diocese also has enterprises which provide employment and training to a range of people. These areas are communication (Aitape Star newspaper), saw mill and brickworks, farm, maintenance and electrical department and its health and care centers and nurse training facility. It is in the pastoral care areas where the Diocese explicitly advocates on women’s behalf and these are discussed in detail in chapter 5.

Women within the Diocese are also the most organized demographic within the laity. There are numerous women’s groups such as parish groups and the Legion of Mary Groups. These groups have been organized by women for women. The Legion of Mary is the largest apostolic organization of lay people in the Catholic Church, with well over 3 million active members in almost every country of the world. The main purpose of the Legion of Mary is to give glory to God through the sanctification of its members. As such, the Legion of Mary within the diocese of Aitape is effectively a prayer group for women but is also a reason for women to get together as a group with a common interest. A legion of Mary group is a focus group in this research (see focus groups and women’s groups, Chapter 6).

There are no similar organized groups for men. Men have not felt the need to organize into men only groups outside of what they have traditionally done along kinship lines and political alliances. For women, the auspices of the Diocese of Aitape and by association, the Catholic Church, has encouraged and enabled the formation of these groups (Dickson-Waiko, 2003; Scheyvens, 1995).

---

12 Legion of Mary website, http://www.legionofmary.org/lom.html
3.13 Conclusion
This chapter has discussed the various paradigms under which women have been included in the development process, as well as the concept of empowerment. The chapter also shows how empowerment is related to development and dependent upon culture. It shows that being empowered is not just a matter of implementing a project to bring about a desired level of empowerment, but that the whole environment in which a woman exists will impact upon her level of empowerment. ‘Good’ empowerment does not seek to have power over others: it seeks to share power with others, although at the political level this may not be as clear. ‘Real’ empowerment is being aware that there are choices which can be made and being able to make those choices.

This thesis is concerned with the empowerment of women primarily at, but not restricted to, the individual and collective consciousness levels through the agency of the Catholic Diocese and by extension the Catholic Church. To determine the level of consciousness or degree of empowerment that the women of the Catholic Diocese of Aitape have attained, and whether or not they attribute this in total or in part to the Diocese (the institution) and the Catholic Church, is the purpose of this research. The analytical framework endeavours to show the relationship between women and the Diocese/Church by way of the potentially empowering interactions between the Diocese/Church and women.

The next Chapter outlines the hypothesis: The Catholic Diocese of Aitape (and by extension the Catholic Church) appears to provide an environment within the Diocese of Aitape for the empowerment of women. The methodology for the research, why that methodology was chosen and the methods used to gather data and to analyse the data collected are also outlined in Chapter 4.
4.1 Coming to the Research Subject

For a twenty-six month period, my wife, our son and daughter and myself, lived in a remote bush location within the Diocese of Aitape. There were no other white lay people in the district. There was a Catholic Mission Station about a one and a half hour walk from where we lived and the priest was an Australian. In the convent there were five nuns of English, South African, Indian and Sri Lankan origin. There was no electricity, telephone, stores, school for the children, or doctors within a day’s walk. We were Australian Volunteers Abroad (AVA), having been recruited to run an agricultural training centre for the Diocese of Aitape. This training centre was set out as primarily a cattle farm with some vegetable gardening activities aimed at improving gardening techniques and feeding the resident trainees. The Farm catered for the people of this remote area and its aim was to provide the hunter-gatherer people with some skills and knowledge of new food gardening techniques which may help improve the productivity of their gardens and to improve the nutritional level of the population, in particular of young children and women. This role required me to work closely at the Farm with young married couples and their children who had been chosen from within their communities, by their community members, to attend the centre for an extended period. The couples and their children all belonged to the same language group, and sometimes even the same clan, but lived in different small villages.

The families, five at any one time, would live at the Farm for a period of approximately ten months, periodically returning to their village for one or two weeks to implement the new techniques they had learned over the previous five weeks. When the families returned to their villages, I would visit each family at their village and
assist and advise them and the broader community in implementing the new technologies. Having such regular contact with the families attending the Farm and then with their broader families and communities I was able to observe these people in their day-to-day lives without being an intrusive investigator. It was not uncommon to have members of the extended families, both male and female, visiting their relatives at the Farm, a situation which presented me with a community close at hand to live and work with and to observe.

I did not commence recording data for data collection sake but rather as a diary of my experiences. These notes were of a general nature prior to my awareness levels of the community becoming more conscious and critical. Over time, however, I became aware of various behaviours and relationships that prompted me to become more curious as to the reasons for these phenomena. For example the male dominated relationships between men and women which I expected to see were not always the case. Some men seemed to be quite particular about assisting and giving attention to their wives and taking some responsibility for the care of young children. It was my understanding that men and women had specific roles in relation to work and family and that these roles were fairly rigid, particularly within village life. My diary subsequently became as much a record of my observations as it was of my experiences. Upon reflection on these observations and experiences it occurred to me that there was perhaps some outside influence impacting upon what I had understood to be traditional behaviour patterns of women and men, to cause some people to behave contrary to what I might have expected. I had been told that in Melanesian culture women are never allowed to be physically above men. If men are gathered under the floor of a house raised on stilts, then a woman cannot be in the house above. Yet at the Catholic Diocesan Office, a two storey building in Aitape town, women worked in the upstairs offices whilst men happily worked, congregated and conducted business below with the knowledge that women were located on the level above them. My observations led me to question the variations between what I had expected and what was present day Melanesian society in relation to relationships between men and women.

My extended period of observation enabled me to observe the community within a cultural transition process. By this I mean that it enabled me to observe people in a
range of situations and circumstances; in their remote village home with very irregular contact with outside influences; in the town of Aitape where there are ‘trade stores’ and electricity, some paid employment, primary and secondary schools and a hospital; in close proximity to a district administration center where government workers live and earn wages, where there is a school and medical facilities; in close proximity to a mission station where there is a community (primary) school and a sub-health centre, a priest and convent with nuns in residence. These environments provide the opportunity to observe subtle differences in the daily life patterns of people due to the availability of distractions and alternatives to the traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the village. I was also able to observe the changes in role and behaviour, particularly of women, as they moved from the environment of Aitape town to the remote village environment. For the purposes of my research I have presumed that the Catholic Diocese is not just the geographic area in which these environments exist, but that it is also the common institutional influence affecting all participants.

In Chapter 5 the Diocese will be described in detail, but can be briefly described as both a geographic area within the Sandaun Province of Papua New Guinea and also an institution/jurisdiction of the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea. The Diocese has a Bishop as its head and then priests and nuns make up the clergy, all of whom are responsible to the Bishop. The Diocese is divided into deaneries which are groupings of parishes. Normally each parish has a priest but this is not always the case. Sometimes a member of the clergy other than a priest or even a catechist may be primarily responsible for the day-to-day running of a parish.

The observations outlined above regarding gender relationships, the status of some women and their level of empowerment, and the knowledge that there had been no development projects aimed at empowering women or specifically aimed at impacting upon gender relationships led to forming the hypothesis that the Catholic Church appears to provide an environment within the Diocese of Aitape for women’s empowerment. The notes and observations made during those years and prior to conducting this research have informed the design of my research, driven by this initial hypothesis.
4.2 Qualitative or Quantitative?

To answer to the research question, *does the Catholic Church provide an environment for the empowerment of women within the Catholic Diocese of Aitape, Sandaun Province, Papua New Guinea?* it was necessary to ask women living within the Diocese and affected by the Catholic Church for their responses. Did they consider their life a better one than their mother’s? Did they think that the Church had an effect on their quality of life, their status within their community and upon their level of empowerment? These are the type of questions that formed the basis and the starting point for the informal interviews conducted with the participants. The interviews did not all necessarily follow the same path, as they were allowed to follow the direction of interest of the interviewee as well as the interviewer. Answers to questions such as these combined with my own observations would help to determine an answer to the research question posed above. To obtain such information would require direct contact with participants and would involve questioning and discussion of potentially sensitive subjects such as male-female relationships and gendered roles in the community. A location and situation that offered both the participant and myself a degree of privacy would also be necessary to conduct interviews.

In village life in this part of PNG, it is not acceptable for men and women who are not married to be alone together. There is also the need for men to protect themselves from the ‘power’ of women (Mantovani, 1993). Behaviour between males and females outside of what is acceptable can be taken as a requirement to marry or result in sometimes violent consequences from jealous suitors or male siblings of the women believing they have been shamed (personal correspondence with a village woman in PNG). In the Melanesian context, relationships mean expectations and obligations in both directions. To be seen to be establishing a relationship with a person, particularly a person of the opposite sex can mean, to others observing, the development of relationships and obligations that reach beyond the two individuals directly involved, and into the families, clans and communities to which those persons belong (Mantovani 1991). As an adult man engaged in close relationships with women, albeit for the purpose of conversation, I could potentially create tensions between myself and members of the communities to which the female participants in my research belong. Mantovani (1993) explains that a woman has female ‘power’ by virtue of the things that make her a woman - things such as her monthly period and giving birth -
and this power is ambivalent in that it is recognised by men as threatening their own masculinity. However, at the same time it is accepted as a consequence of sexual relations. This power is surrounded by taboos to prevent its negative aspects from contaminating the males and the young. Melanesian society has therefore developed mechanisms to protect men and the young from contamination. The most obvious of these is physical avoidance. Such avoidance can even extend to not allowing the shadow of a woman to fall on a man. Avoidance is particularly important at the time of women’s menstruation. In dealing with women I needed to be aware of these issues so that I did not inadvertently offend by my behaviour.

Being a ‘white, western male’ could also be problematic in close relationships and liaisons with women. For most people in much of the area involved in this study, the association with white people was mostly with religious missionaires. In the case of white males this meant priests and religious brothers. Being a non-religious person (i.e. not being an ordained priest or brother) did not necessarily mean that my attitude, power and lifestyle were any different to the other white males with whom these people had associated. However I had a significant differentiating aspect to my role with these people. I was a man with a wife and children like almost every other mature, local man. My family and I lived physically close to the local people and my children shared the same experiences as their friends and peers. The priests and the nuns lived in the convent and priest’s house, which are seen as ‘separate’ by the local people. I was not an authority figure in the same way as the priest and the nuns and therefore not subject to the same degree of deference from the local people. My personal situation in this regard, I believe brought me closer to the people and their lives than the ‘white’ religious, or earlier colonial administrators or even the single males who had preceded me in the role of the agricultural training facility manager.

However, for the participant interview part of the fieldwork I would require a methodology able to overcome the cultural barriers, and one that could also obtain and if necessary tease out the information and explore new directions and issues as they arose. My extended period of observation would form a significant part of my research fieldwork.
The requirements of the research methodology to investigate the issues outlined above would suggest a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach. A quantitative methodology applies a positivist or empiricist approach to social phenomena using social surveys as the preferred instrument and a preoccupation with operational definitions, objectivity, replicability and causality (see Brockington and Sullivan 2003; Platt 1997; England 1994; Opie 1992; Bryman 1984). By contrast, qualitative methodology, rather than being inferior as sometimes inferred, “…displays a commitment to seeing the social world from the point of view of the actor” (Bryman 1984, p.77). Qualitative research contrasts with the natural science approach which sees people as inert, and indeed displays a phenomenological approach that seeks to focus upon the lived experience of people. It could be said that to determine whether or not a degree of empowerment has been achieved by a group of people, either collectively or individually, a certain amount of empiricism is required to assess the extent to which accepted criteria for empowerment are met. However, using personal empowerment as the primary level of empowerment with which this research is concerned, the criteria for measurement are very much personal and subjective and in this instance are unable to be measured in quantifiable ways. A measure or a count of the number of women who feel empowered would seem, perhaps, to be a way of determining some quantifiable measure but this would require an almost impossible task of mastering the incredible logistical challenge of the terrain. I had no resources to achieve this.

To enquire into the lives of people through their opinions of themselves relative to others, their relationships with other people and their view of ‘self’ is to enquire into the lived experience of the person from the point of view of that person and therefore a qualitative approach to my research became an obvious choice.

4.3.1 White male – black female: valid research?

Ethical issues and research fieldwork into development issues regarding the other are inseparable. The other, may be someone different to the researcher in ethnicity, race, creed or gender or any combination of these. What risks might the person or persons being researched be exposed to when the researcher belongs to a different culture, a different gender and seeks to inquire into the life of someone so different? According to England (1994), fieldwork can expose the researched person to intimidation and
exploitation due to power relationships that exist between researcher and subject. There is an assumption that the researcher has more control over the relationship between the researcher and the researched. In relation to women, there is an assumption that when women in developing communities are researched, the ethical sensitivities are intensified and, this ethical sensitivity is further heightened when the research is cross-gendered (Scheyvens and Leslie 2000).

My research into issues regarding Melanesian women has been to interview women to determine their own perceptions and experiences, whether they feel that the Diocese of Aitape in Sandaun Province, Papua New Guinea and/or the Catholic Church has provided an environment where women can be empowered. This research involved asking the women to reflect on their lives and to reflect on what they knew of the lives of their mothers and grandmothers, and to decide if their own lives were different. Are their lives better, and if so can this be attributed in any way to the Diocese of Aitape and/or to the Catholic Church? The research was conducted independently of the Diocese of Aitape and the Catholic Church and was initiated and conducted by myself. My experience, as a white, Anglo-Celtic, Australian male inquiring into the lives and experiences of Melanesian women, on face value could be described as a problematic situation. I believe, however, what has occurred has been a mutually beneficial experience based on reciprocal trust and respect resulting from familiarity and friendships developed during my extended period of close association with, and commitment to the people and to their community prior to the research, during the fieldwork and since.

Before conducting my fieldwork I lived and worked for over two years with the people who subsequently became the subjects of my research. With my wife and my nine-year-old daughter and eleven year old son, I lived in a remote location of Papua New Guinea where my children were the first white children that the majority of the population had ever seen and our family was the first white family of father, mother and children to live amongst these people. We were parents and children rather than the religious missionaries, priests and nuns and brothers, and lay missionaries who were the previous ‘whiteskins’ that these people had known. In this respect we, as a family, were more like the locals than our white predecessors. During this time my children interacted freely with the local children and my wife and I developed close
relationships and friendships many of which remain to the present day. All of us have been able to return in the intervening years to renew our friendships and relationships.

My fluency in Melanesian Pidgin, Tok Pisin, the lingua franca of Papua New Guinea has also added to the validity of my research. The fact that I can speak directly to non-English speaking participants without the need for an interpreter helps to build and to maintain a relationship. Because I am familiar with the local situation I also understand much of the colloquial language and nuances, which I could and did often use thereby making the interview a more comfortable and conversational event.

4.3.1 Positionality, Subjectivity and Reciprocity

In the relationship between a researcher and the person or persons being researched positionality, subjectivity and reciprocity are issues that are two-way in their action. That is, the relationship is, and should be, a dynamic one, dependant upon the two parties interacting with one another during the research. Consequently the three issues will be discussed together.

A white-skinned male of Western cultural origin researching issues pertaining to women in Melanesia could be problematic. It could be difficult gaining the confidence of women and the acceptance of both the women and the men to allow me to have time to spend with women asking questions and gathering information. Interaction with women could raise suspicions and jealousies amongst the men. I would have to obtain not just the acceptance and consent of the women but also where necessary, that of her husband, father, brother or *kandre* (kun-dray), whichever was applicable for the individual female participant. It is the *kandre* who benefits from the bride price received when a girl marries hence he has a particular interest in whom the girl has relationships with as her worth in terms of bride price can be based upon interest shown in her as well as what knowledge and abilities she is known to have. The important reciprocal, obligatory and responsorial relationships between men and unmarried women are not a simple father to daughter or brother-sister relationship (Mantovani 1990). Such relationships can extend beyond the immediate family and the predominant *kandre* relationship in the Diocese of Aitape is between an unmarried woman and her mother’s eldest brother. A male researcher researching women would need to be mindful of these issues, not just for his personal well-being but also for the
consequences that contact with him could potentially have for the women with whom he was interacting. The social structures and relationships of a Melanesian community are well known to its members but can easily be offended by the unknowing outsider. My situation as a white-skinned male was mitigated by my awareness of the complexities of existing social relationships. Even though I did not necessarily understand the intricacies of these relationships I was at least aware of them and of the need to ‘tread’ warily.

In ethnography Morse and Richards (2002) claim that because culture has so much assumption, belief and behaviour embedded in it, researchers must be from outside the culture if any comparisons they make are to be valid. The researcher must have the etic (an outsider’s) perspective and explore the phenomena within the cultural context by obtaining information from members of the culture. The information is obtained via the emic (an insider’s) perspective. This methodology is also valid when comparing sections within a predominant culture. When I asked the participants in my research to compare their lives with the lives of their mothers and of their grandmothers, I was asking them to compare changes in culture and to provide the emic perspective while I as the researcher from outside of the culture and the gender, could bring the etic perspective.

The power relationship between the researcher and the researched was a very real concern for me in the conduct of my fieldwork interviews. This potential power relationship could be expressed through several sites including gender, education and ethnicity. In Melanesian society power is vested very strongly in the male, and women rarely have an opportunity to voice an opinion or to be seen to be in a position of holding knowledge that could be useful (Mantovani 1990; Beben 1990; Mandie 1983). A power gradient between myself as the researcher, and the participants could also be a problem in the manner in which Melanesian people in this area defer to white people as being more knowledgeable and indeed superior beings (Scheyvens, Scheyvens and Novack 2003). If informants agreed to be informants simply because they felt they could not object to being such, this could jeopardise the integrity of the data. If a woman felt threatened or intimidated by being interviewed by a white male and/or if she felt unease due to the reaction which others may have to her close proximity to a white male, then the quality of the data gained may be questionable. Overcoming the
potential problem of my gender and race could be achieved by having someone other than myself, perhaps a Melanesian woman, interview the informants. This, however, would mean me surrendering ownership of the fieldwork process, an option that did not appeal to me. Alternatively I could invite participants whom I felt confident would not feel threatened by me in the role of interviewer and whose communities, families and spouses (where applicable) would also see my presence and investigations, after explanation of the activity, as a non-threatening activity. To merely adopt a supplicant role in relation to the participants as suggested by Cotterill (1992) would be insufficient in this situation to overcome the perceived difference in power. Besides, as Cotterill points out, the real power in a research relationship is beyond the fieldwork.

The real power in research is in the writing of the research result. The writing must fairly and accurately reflect the data as well as the research relationship. This aspect of the research is not dependant upon gender, race or ethnicity but upon the integrity of the writer. When writing the research results, the essence of the interview and the circumstances in which the interview and data gathering took place must be preserved intact. Drafts can be returned to participants to check if what is written is how they recall the data which could also be seen to be a reciprocal act, and also ensure that what England (1994) calls textual appropriation does not occur. Another way of ensuring reciprocity in research is to use quotations and provide attribution of specific data. England also says that whatever steps are taken to ensure the integrity of the end product, it is ultimately the construct and responsibility of the researcher. For my part, I asked the participants if they had any concerns about me writing and perhaps publishing my findings from the research. The only response I received was that I should do so. For as one woman said to me, “Em tingting na save bilong yu nau John”, (it’s your thoughts/ideas and knowledge now John).

It was critical that the participants understood that I as the researcher only had my observations and my questions. They had the knowledge, the experience and the answers. A number of the women who participated in the interviews expressed their pleasure at the opportunity to speak about their lives and their reflections on the Diocese and the Church and indicated that they also gained from the experience. That a man would show an interest in the opinions of women was also something
appreciated by many of the women and a number of them thanked me specifically for both the opportunity to speak and for showing the interest.

“Thank you for inviting me to speak with you John…. I am very happy to help you with your work for women.” (Case study D)

My gender in the interview situation was not so much a problem for, as Coplan (1993) explains, gender is not something in itself, but what is important in the research is the dialogical relationship. The previously established relationships between myself and the other participants in the research enabled the interviews to be very conversational, providing a two-way dialogue that in most instances allowed both myself and the other person to hear themselves speak. A number of the women asked me for my opinion or asked me if what they had told me was similar or otherwise to how things are where I am from. An example of such an exchange is in relation to violence by men towards women. I was asked if men where I come from are violent to their wives. I was able to inform the participant that gender related violence is common in my culture and it is not confined to Melanesian culture. Such exchanges provided the opportunity for both reflection and for reciprocal benefit through the sharing of our own experiences.

Having lived within the Diocese of Aitape with my family for almost two and a half years and then later without my family for a further twelve months, I know many people. Many of these people are very close friends to myself and to my wife and children. Many are people with whom I have shared both sorrow and joy, who are the parents of children with whom my children spent days and weeks at a time in their villages being cared for by their friend’s parents. These are people who have asked me to name their children and who have named numerous children after myself and my wife and my children. These are people who have been overjoyed to see my family members, as we have been to see them, on subsequent visits to their villages. It was therefore from this group of people that I chose my participants for positionality in research is not just how you, the researcher feels, but also about how the researched see the researcher (Cupples 2002).

The choosing of participants from among those to whom I am known and many of whom are well known to me, raises the issue of friendships between the researched
and the researcher. I considered the issue from the ethical perspective of whether I was taking advantage of a friendship, distant or otherwise, to gain easy access to information. Being known to each other at the beginning of the interview negated the need for what Cotterill (1992) calls *the art of impression management*. This is when people in unfamiliar situations and environments feel the need to manage their own conduct. Being known to one another helped to dispel this practice although the process of the interview still needed to be explained to participants. Oakley’s (1981) point regarding reciprocity in research interviews may indeed be assisted by the absence of a artificial exchange that may occur when participants find themselves in unfamiliar roles with unfamiliar people (Cotterill 1992; Oakley 1981). By knowing the participants and their environment, I was able to conduct the interviews in a relaxed manner for the comfort of the participant and in an environment of their choosing.

Cotterill (1992) raises the issue of how the researcher is viewed when interviewing friends. Is the researcher a friend doing research or a researcher who happens to be a friend? She also questions if it is indeed possible to differentiate (see also England 1994; Opie 1992). For me the friendship enabled me to easily explain what the purpose of the interview was and how it fitted into the broader research of which this interview was a part. I could use words and phrases from the colloquial language if need be to explain that I wanted the participant to tell me about their life with the influence of the Diocese and of the Catholic Church upon it. We both knew that the other knew the Church, so we had a lot in common to begin with. Although the desire to be egalitarian in an interview situation can be enhanced by a good relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, the research relationship and friendship can become blurred (Cotterill 1992). In some instances the interviewee may divulge more to a researcher friend than they might otherwise have done had the relationship been more formal. When the researcher is able to walk away at the end of the process this may be problematic for the person who has ‘told all’. In my case I don’t believe this to be a problem because my relationship with all the participants precedes the interview, and in many cases continues on afterwards. Therefore there is no just walking away as referred to by Cotterill (1992).
Harvey (1985), Harding (1998) and England (1994) have demonstrated that neutrality and complete objectivity are unlikely to be achieved in social research and go so far as to say that, “…they should not be expected” (England 1994, p.81). The decisions I made in choosing informants, locations for interviews and the start of each interview could be seen as lacking in objectivity and to be a less than neutral position displayed by myself as the researcher. However, when I first began my observations I was quite detached from the subject matter of the subsequent research but closely involved with the persons who became the informants. I do not believe this to be a problem for the validity of the results as I have clearly stated the reasons for all decisions and choices. To have done otherwise would have rendered the research not feasible and logistically difficult.

My familiarity with the participants and their physical and social environment could also act as a barrier to gaining information regarding some issues of life and relationships. Not being a stranger and knowing not just the participant but also their family and friends could mean that the participant is less inclined to divulge certain private information, whereas they may be happy to tell ‘all’ to a stranger (Cotterill 1992). At no point did it seem that prior friendship, relationship and/or knowledge was a hindrance to the participant or to myself.

4.3.2 Truth of Responses

Another issue for this research situation is that the researcher cannot be completely sure that the information given is completely true. When confronted by the interviewer a participant’s answers to some questions may be what the participant thinks the researcher may want to hear. By choosing the participants I did, I felt I already had their confidence and I was confident that the information they would give me would be a true reflection of their experience and not just a version they may think I might like to hear, true or not. Cotterill refers to this as, “The best face phenomena; giving responses to questions, or painting a verbal picture that places themselves, the respondent, in the best possible light” (Cotterill 1992, p.595). Although I felt confident that this would not be a significant problem I judged that follow up interviews after some time had elapsed, could help to overcome the potential for inaccuracy. If I suspected this had occurred I would ask the same type of question in a
slightly different way at a later date and if the response I received was similar I accepted it as accurate.

4.3.3 Integrity depends on the people concerned

In any sociological research that wishes to truly reflect reality it is impossible for the researcher to be completely neutral. The participants and the researcher are not objects and as such will form perceptions of each other, will form relationships during the research fieldwork (if not before) and will interact with one another as the research fieldwork progresses. It is how these relationships are managed that will impact upon the integrity of the research outcome.

This research demonstrates that being a white Anglo-Celtic male interviewing black Melanesian females is not necessarily an issue. In this role I was a person with much in common with the communities from which the direct research participants were chosen. I was a family man, a co-worker and friend who later became a researcher. The participants saw me as a researcher endeavouring to assist women and as a male who showed an interest in what women had to say. Research by people into the lives of other people cannot be devoid of perceptions, emotions and resultant opinions; to be otherwise would be impossible. The integrity of research depends upon the people involved and where there is direct contact between the researcher and the researched, the relationship between the two is critical. This researcher-researched relationship is also dynamic and liable to change. It is the responsibility of the researcher to judge the validity of the research situation, and in this case the relationship was not just valid but provided a much richer response.

4.4 Methods

The methodologies used in my research to obtain data from women regarding their lives and relationships included firstly, personal observations gained over a prolonged period, secondly, semi-structured interviews with selected individuals (these interviews were with educated women living in Aitape town or they were with nuns, and they enabled the interview to remain focused on the topic while allowing a degree of flexibility in relation to the content of the interviews) and thirdly, focus groups to gain the views of village women because it was convenient and I believe more appropriate for these women for reasons to be discussed below.
4.4.1 Observations

Brockington and Sullivan (2003) and Clifford (1983) give great credence to the value of observation as a research tool. The embodied experience of “taking up a location on the edge of the frame” (Clifford 1983, p.119) or immersing oneself “in the world of the ‘other’”, living with the actors, “being-in-the-world” (Brockington and Sullivan 2003, p.73) gives credence to the observations as credible data. Such data resulting from prolonged periods of observation is likely to be more contextualised than might otherwise be the case and therefore ‘real’ and accurate. “Methodology may just mean a series of meetings with people…and (if) meetings are characterised by good listening, and conversation, we will have much to learn….” (Brockington and Sullivan 2003, p.76). If meeting people is a methodology then getting to know them is the research tool of the methodology. Prolonged observation such as I was allowed by living and working with the people, enabled me to know the people and get close to their ‘world’. Observation, as well as sowing the seeds of my inquiry, has been one of the research methods I have relied upon for the collection of data.

My familiarity with the area, the people and their lifestyle resulting from my extended time living with, working with and socialising with people of the Aitape Diocese I believe has reduced what would otherwise have been significant barriers to my research. The issue of my race and being male, as outlined above, I believe was mediated because the people also knew my wife and children. We lived as a family with them and my wife and children are as well known as I am, perhaps more so in the case of my children. The transition to friendship or friendly stranger as outlined by Cotterill (1992, p.595) was a process that had occurred long before I began my research. This enabled me a freedom of movement, association and access that I doubt I could have otherwise obtained in the more remote village locations within the Diocese. Cotterill (1992) also points out that subsequent interviews during a research process can result in a transition from the ‘public’ response from the participant in initial interviews to a more ‘private’ response in subsequent interviews as the participant and researcher become more familiar with each other and a level of trust and perhaps even friendship builds between the two. This means that later interviews may reveal more private and/or more sensitive information than could have been expected in an initial interview with a previously unknown researcher. In some instances I was surprised how much ‘private’ information was revealed to me in initial
interviews. I put this down to the fact that I was already seen as someone who could be trusted.

My prolonged period of observation also has enabled me to deal with the issue of appropriation of what I had observed and of what I was told in interview as I am familiar with the language and nuances, places and much of the context of responses (see England 1994; Opie 1992; Cotterill 1992); it is almost impossible to be completely neutral, as “… any person, without gender, personality, or historical location, who would objectively produce the same findings as any other person, is completely mythical” (England 1994, p.85). This reality results in a degree of subjectivity which will influence our research and subsequently the resultant text of the research may be an ‘appropriation’ of the ‘other’s’ words. I do not claim to be immune to this reality but I believe that, as my research topic and design grew out of my presence within ‘the world’ of the ‘other’, the risk of serious appropriation is mediated.

4.4.2 Semi-structured interviews (Oral Testimony)

The other tool of qualitative research upon which I relied was the semi-structured interview. By using a semi-structured approach I was not locked in to a predetermined pattern of questioning but could allow the interview to follow new and unexpected paths if and as they arose with the possibility of unearthing rich veins of data which might otherwise go undetected (Bryman 1984; Scheyvens, Scheyvens and Novack, 2003). For me to conduct this research required the cooperation of many other people acting as participants. These people would speak to me about issues that to many of them would be quite sensitive, giving what Brockington and Sullivan (2003) call their oral testimony. I decided this process should not be just a one-way gathering of knowledge. A more conversational tone in the interview would also allow the language to change from English to Tok Pisin if need be without any problem as this is how my conversation with some of the participants would normally be conducted in a non-research situation. This flexible use of language could also result in a more nuanced record of interview. The lack of formal structure also allowed me to reflect on and outline the parallels between the culture and society of the participant and my own Western culture and Australian society. This was particularly important when discussing negative aspects of the participants life and/or culture: being able to show
that other races and cultures have similar situations I think lessened the burden on the participant, as they became aware that other people also have aspects of culture and behaviour that perhaps are not what they should be, or as participants in those cultures would like them to be.

From my own experience living in this remote part of Papua New Guinea, there is a real belief among the local people that they are inferior to outsiders, in particular white people. When I suffered injury such as a cut foot or hand and it healed relatively quickly compared with similar injury to my local friends and colleagues, it was in their view because I am ‘white’. When I tried to explain that it is because I had kept the wound dry, and that I ate a balanced diet, this was dismissed with words such as, “waitpela emi nogat sik olsem mipela. Waitpela emi winim mipela long planti samting” (white people don’t get sick like us. White people are much better than us at everything). People would also be surprised and somewhat shocked when I would assure them that things such as violence between husband and wife were common in my country and that violence towards women was not confined to Papua New Guinea. In the church buildings of the Diocese, icons such as a crucifix, or a picture or statue of Christ or the Virgin Mary would inevitably be of a Melanesian man or woman. In spite of this, the people assured me that they knew God was really white and that the priests and the nuns, who themselves were from many races and nations, just put those pictures and crucifixes up ‘to make us feel good’. In the light of this sense of relative inferiority I felt it important to point out whenever possible and appropriate, the similarities of the good and not so good within our two societies. The participant could also gain some form of benefit or knowledge from the process and by listening to themselves talk some of the participants said that they began to ‘hear’ things they had not thought about before.

By using semi-structured interviews I felt that the process would be less formal and more two-way as this process has a degree of commitment to seeing the situation from the point of view of the informant (see Bryman 1984; Platt 1997). The interviewee would have the opportunity to reflect on their responses and discover from hearing their own words and by a degree of discussion, what level of empowerment they had and how it had come about. They could make comparisons between their own situation and that of others. This process could also provide me with a richer, more
insightful type of data about the informant’s level of consciousness regarding their status in the community and culture in which they live. Within the Melanesian culture, with its oral tradition of knowledge exchange, a qualitative method of enquiry such as this is much more culturally sensitive and provides a degree of reciprocity (Reinharz 1983, Cotterill 1992) that a quantitative methodology could not.

My observations gave rise to the questions that formed the basis of the semi-structured interviews with the chosen participants and so I was able to refer to specific relationships such as kandre and girl, and to practices such as ‘bride price’ when asking questions. I could do this with a degree of prior knowledge and understanding of how these relationships and practices played out in day-to-day life, and what I was asking was how the participant felt about them and how they saw them changing if at all. The fact that the participants knew that I had this prior knowledge made it easier for them to talk about these and other topics. My close association with the communities from which my informants have been chosen enabled me to observe social structures and behaviours in a wide range of situations of everyday life and to do so in a very unobtrusive way. My observations were not just a passive, third party observation but often an active, inquisitive process. I was able to comment and to question why certain types of behaviour and/or relationship occurred at the time or soon after I observed it. For example, why do all the women sit on the left hand side of the church and all the men sit on the right? During this time I was also privileged to be able to observe the interactions and differences between generations (sometimes up to four) because of the communal nature of village life and the relatively young age at marriage of many young women in the villages. I have spoken with the great grandparents of young people attending school in the town of Aitape and heard from the great grandparent how the times and the attitudes and values of these young people have changed from when they were the young person’s age, and how ‘white man’s’ education had changed the way the village is structured and run. “Young people no longer respect their elders and they learn from books and expect to be paid for everything they do” (personal correspondence from an elderly village man). I have also observed people who are educated and live in Aitape town, return to their village and appear to me by their behaviour as though they had never been away from their village. This is especially true for women in their mid twenties and above. Women who hold responsible positions in an office return to their villages and are, to the
casual uninformed observer, indistinguishable from the other village women. These experiences have been very beneficial in helping to conduct and interpret the semi-structured interviews, which I conducted at a later time. During these interviews I was able to gain a better understanding of observations I had made but had until conducting the interview, not been able to rationally interpret.

The issue of power and control during the interviews and the supplication of either party (England 1994; Smith 1998; Hastrup 1992; Cotterill 1992) I believe is ameliorated by my prior knowledge of the participants and their prior knowledge of myself and my family, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The format of the semi-structured interview also allows for a freedom of speech that a more formal approach may not, by its informality, and by allowing the participant’s ‘voice’ to be clearly heard, not just in response but also in leading the conversation. This process of dialogic research as England (1994) refers to it, when the situation is structured by the researcher and the researched and the researcher is part of the setting (Stanley and Wise 1993; England 1994; Said 1989), can help to lessen the influence of the power gradient between the researcher and the researched.

For each of the interviews conducted with individual participants, I was conscious of the need to give as much control to the participant as possible. I always came to the place of their choosing at the time of their choosing having determined this at a meeting occurring under normal circumstances. For example after Mass or Lotu (the conduct of liturgy and communion without a priest present) on a Sunday when meeting and greeting is the norm and all sorts of conversational groupings occur.

I would also be dressed as I would normally be dressed in any other contact I would have with that person at that time of day or night. My appearance I believed should be how the person was familiar with seeing me so that I was as much as possible the individual they knew and not the ‘researcher’. As England (1994), Stanley and Wise (1993) and Opie (1992) indicate, to supplicate the researcher and give as much power to the researched helps to ensure that the researched person is just that, a person and not an object of enquiry.
When participating in the interviews I was also conscious of England’s (1994) dialogic approach to gaining information in that the process is the important thing and not the product. In many of the interviews there was much laughter brought about by the relaxed nature of the conversation and the genuinely funny dialogue generated by either the interviewer or the interviewee. The fact that some instances recounted involved persons known to both myself and the participant often resulted in banter and laughter. This was the situation in most of the interviews which constituted my fieldwork and I believe they were genuinely participatory and as non-hierarchical as was possible. The fact that the participants had a large input into the setting and the content of the interview also meant that they were conscious of what was happening and that they were not being manipulated (see Cotterill 1992; Reinhartz 1983; Hastrup 1992; England 1994).

All my interviews with individuals were tape recorded with the permission of the participant. On occasions when the tape ran out I took written notes or otherwise tried to recall the conversation as soon as I could afterwards to make a record of any important points. At the end of each interview, I asked each participant if they would like to hear any or all of the taped conversation either then or later. I assured them that if they decided at a later time that they would like to reheat the tape and then delete any of it if they wished, they were welcome to do so. This was an important aspect of ownership that I could offer to the participants (see Scheyvens et al. 2003).

4.4.3 Focus Groups

In the remote village areas of the diocese where the bulk of the population live most village women are illiterate and there are a number whose only language is their own traditional language (known in Tok Pisin as Tokples)\(^\text{13}\). Although I am fluent in Tok Pisin (Pidgin) I am unable to converse in Tokples and even though I am well known to all the women I spoke with, I felt the use of an individual interpreter would distance me from the words of the participant and leave me open to the appropriation of other peoples words as numerous authors indicate (see Scheyvens 2003; England 1994; Cotterill 1992). I therefore chose existing women’s groups to be participants and asked them as a group the same type of questions that I asked of individual

\(^{13}\)Tok Ples is the language of a particular place; the local language. In the Diocese of Aitape there are at least 30 separate language groups.
participants in the semi-structured interviews. These groups were effectively focus
groups although they consisted of married women only. One group was a Legion of
Mary group, the other a parish women’s group. Each of these groups has a
membership of ten to twelve women but numbers at meetings varies from meeting to
meeting. My familiarity with the members of the group enabled the Pidgin speakers
within the group to informally translate for the non-Pidgin speakers without undue
embarrassment for the women concerned.

The significant role that women’s groups, and in particular, Church related women’s
groups play in the lives of women in Melanesia, as outlined in Chapter 2 (see also
Scheyvens, 1995) was one reason I chose existing groups to be focus groups. The
group dynamics are already established and some or maybe all, of the members may
be aware of benefits they have derived from being a member of the group. The other
reason for choosing existing groups was the convenience. The two groups that I chose
were a parish women’s group and a Legion of Mary (see Appendix 3) with each group
having about ten to twelve members. Numbers present varied from meeting to
meeting.

The semi-structured interview was the basis for my discourse with the focus groups.
Scheyvens et al. (2003) point out the advantages of this approach in focus groups, as
groups are ‘self correcting’ and any dissention within the group can itself be
illuminating. This approach to the conduct of focus group interview, with no rigid
interview question sheets and allowing a free flowing dialogue, is more comfortable
for participants of the group who may be less confident than others in the group who
perhaps have, or are perceived to have, greater skills of oratory or literacy.

4.5 Who were the participants (other than myself)
For the reasons I have outlined above, I chose informants from each of the domicile
environments and was careful to choose persons and groups who had known me
personally and my family for a significant time. This was particularly important in the
case of informants whom I interviewed individually. In the case of group interviews it
was less important that the individual members of the group knew my family and I
personally as they would always have the security of the group whenever I was
present. However I thought it was important that they knew of myself, and that they
were familiar with my presence within the broader community so that I was not a complete stranger. I also included nuns within my participant group as they had very explicitly demonstrated an impact upon their lives by the Catholic Church (McNamara 1996). Another group of people from whom I wanted to choose participants is men. I wanted to get some indication as to whether any changes in the empowerment levels of women were observable to persons other than the women themselves and the researcher. Including men in the research is important too because as outlined in my discussion of empowerment in Chapter 3, there is a view that the empowering process infers a gaining of power by some and a relative loss of power by others. In Melanesian culture power has been so unashamedly vested in men (see Beben 1990; Mantovani 1990; Mandie 1983) so I felt that a view on any relative changes in the balance of power between the sexes from a male perspective would be a valuable contribution to the research. In choosing male informants I thought it important that they come from a more restricted group, educated and familiar with the modern aspects of life in Papua New Guinea. I wanted the men to provide a considered observation of any overall change in the status of women as they saw it in a general sense and not just in relation to their own personal family and/or friends, whereas I was asking the female participants to describe their own perception of themselves only, even though this may mean drawing comparisons with others. One last group of people from which I chose a participant was from the expatriate nuns who had spent up to fifty years living amongst the people of the Diocese of Aitape. From these informants I wanted a view of the changes in the status of women over time and also observed changes in relationships between men and women.

In selecting the participants I have chosen a number of case studies and focus groups from the full range of physical and social environments in which women live in the Diocese of Aitape, of which I am aware; from remote villages, from a town, from a convent (communal living in a western sense) and from women who live primarily in town but regularly return to their village. I have also chosen participants, men and an expatriate nun, for their reflective views on the changing situation, if any, of women in the Diocese. It is important to state here that each participant, individual or group member, was not necessarily asked the same question/s. By choosing the informants as I did I was endeavoring to obtain different perspectives on the same issues; the status of women; the relationships between men and women in the public sphere and
between husbands and wives (the private sphere) to the extent that there is a public
and private sphere in Melanesian communities; what impact if any, did the Church
have upon their relationships and the relationships of men and women in general?

I interviewed groups of women (focus groups) from remote village environments and
chose these groups on the basis that they were already existing women’s groups and
met regularly. This was to ensure that they were comfortable and open to discussion
as these women, although they knew me and my family and I knew them, were more
likely to be negatively affected by issues of power and gender as referred to above.
Women who cannot speak Tok Pisin or English could also be included in this way as
there were many informal interpreters readily at hand. To record data from these
interviews I took notes of important issues as they arose as I felt a tape recorder would
give a record that may be difficult to decipher at a later date due to background noises
and difficult acoustic conditions. These groups consisted of between ten and twelve
women. From these groups of village women, many of whom are illiterate and have
not been further from their village than their own food gardens, I wanted to know
what they thought the Diocese had done for them, socially, emotionally and,
physically. I wanted to know if they felt that their lives were any different to the lives
of their mothers. As village women with little or no money, how did the Diocese assist
them?

For each of these focus groups I conducted only one interview each, for organizational
and logistical reasons; these being the difficulty of returning to the location at a
predetermined time and not being certain that all the women, or that the same women
would be available or present at a following meeting. Although I had only one
meeting with each of these groups, I am confident that the data I received is probably
as much as I could have expected even had I been able to have a follow up meeting.

I interviewed a number of nuns, two of whom trained as nuns in the Diocese of
Aitape. All nuns belong to different Orders and perform different roles within the
Diocese. I chose three nuns only, although I could have chosen many more, as I did
not want to disproportionately represent this very specific group of women in the case
studies. I was particularly interested in what had motivated these women to become
nuns. What effect did this have upon their status in the village and the broader
community? Did the fact that some women became nuns have any benefit or otherwise upon the situation of other women in general? How did men treat them as nuns, compared with the way women in general were treated by men?

The expatriate nun I interviewed is originally from Australia and is a member of the first group of nuns to arrive in the Diocese of Aitape in 1949. She is still living and working in the Diocese and has worked in numerous locations and performed many different roles. This person is a woman who had worked closely with the people of the Diocese of Aitape and in particular with the women and married couples. I wanted her to reflect on the changes, if any, that had taken place in the relationships between men and women, particularly married couples with whom she has worked closely over the years, and the relative position and status of women in the different types of communities of the village and the town.

All women individually interviewed were born within the Diocese of Aitape and still reside there. Some are married with children, one is a single mother and another is a single adult woman who works in a responsible position in a business in Aitape. This woman is from a relatively small group of women in that she has never married and borne no children and yet she is well into her adult years. These women provided me with a good mix of backgrounds from town dwelling women. Some regularly return to their village where, while there, they actively participate with the other women of the village in the day-to-day life of the village. Others occasionally return to their own or their spouse’s village. The remainder were born in Aitape town and even though they refer to their ancestral lands as their ‘asiples’ they have rarely ever been there. From these women I wanted to learn of the impact if any that the Church had upon the lives of married women in relation to their husbands, and the relationships between them and their husbands, their in-laws and the community as a whole. What was the role of a woman in town compared with her role in the village and why was it different, if in fact it was? Are there different standards and expectations for and of women in the village and town? How is life for a single adult woman in the Diocese of Aitape? How has the Church affected the lives of these women either positively or negatively? Has the Church impacted upon the relationships between men and women?
The male participants were married and live in Aitape town but have not always done so. They have been educated to grade ten level of high school and at one point were community (primary) schoolteachers. I asked these men how, if at all, the relationships between men and women had changed; what did they think had been the cause of these changes; had the Church played a role in bringing about observed changes in relationships; was their relationship with their wife different to the relationship between their parents?

Another participant or resource I have had access to is my wife. She has observed many of the same phenomena that I have and in the same location and situation. We would often discuss these observations during our time living in Papua New Guinea. Her view of and interpretation of various phenomena was not always the same as mine and this has no doubt had an influence on my thinking. Also on many occasions we asked our daughter what was meant by certain events, behaviors and words, particularly in relation to women. As she ‘lived’ even more closely with the local people than the rest of our family and as a young girl, she was often privy to information and events that neither I, my wife nor our son ever knew of or saw, especially in relation to women’s hygiene and sex and women’s private conversations in relation to these topics.

4.6 Ethics and ownership

When I first approached individuals and groups to participate in my research, I explained to them that during my time of living and working amongst them, I had observed them and others in their lives; I had asked many questions in relation to what I had observed and had received many answers; these experiences had led me to do this research. I then asked them if they would agree to be interviewed as part of my research and in agreeing to do so they were agreeing to be a case study that would be written as a case study in the final research document. I then explained in detail the reasons for interviewing them: to determine whether or not the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Aitape assisted in or provided opportunities for the empowerment of women. The explanation of this varied depending upon the participant’s degree of understanding and questioning, but however the explanation went I was careful to ensure that each person clearly understood what I wanted to do and why I was asking them to assist me. I also assured them that they would not be identified in any way in
a written report of my research and that whatever they said to me in the interview would not be disclosed in any way in which the comments could be attributed to whomever made them. Where it was appropriate, as with a woman whose husband was present, or would be present if he did not understand what was happening, I included the husband in the explanatory briefing. In such cases though, I did not place great emphasis on the marital relationship aspects of my enquiry. This I did so as not to create unnecessary anxiety for the couple. I also explained to the husband that I would be speaking with his wife in private and that what was said in the interview would be between his wife and myself. If I had thought that this situation would cause any problem for the women I would not have proceeded with asking her to participate. In subsequent meetings with participants none have indicated to me that they have faced any form of interrogation or excess inquiry as to their private conversations with me.

Each person I approached to be a participant agreed to do so. As I have outline above, I either knew or was known to each of these people and had considered carefully whom I would approach. I also discussed with the agreed participants how best to share with them the results of our interviews and who should own this information. It was agreed that we would discuss this at the end of each interview. At that time each person was happy that I should keep the information for my ‘book’ as some referred to the end product of my research. This situation I was happy with. I did also assure all of the participants that the results of my research would also be made available to the Diocese so that they could understand better how the Church impacted upon the lives of women and how this information might be used to benefit or further benefit the lives of the people of the Diocese.

Having agreed to be a participant I then asked them to sign a letter (see appendix 1). Most participants felt this was not a necessary requirement as they preferred to see me as a friend and if they could help me they were happy to do so. I have assured each of my participants that I will return with the end product for them to see, and to read if they wish, and to give each of them a copy of any section directly relating to each individual. This is a promise I am confident of keeping as I have traveled to this area since my fieldwork and have updated my participants on my progress. I keep in touch with people in the Diocese on a regular basis and have close ties there.
4.7 **Analysis of the data**

Records of all interviews were made. These include one interview with each of the focus groups, one interview with each of the men and two or three interviews with each of the women and nuns. I reviewed each of these records of interview to ensure I understood what was said and written, and wrote down what I considered to be key words and themes. When reviewing these records I initially made a note of the location of the interview, an overview of the body language exhibited by the participants and my general feeling regarding the atmosphere of the interview. By referring back to my initial observations I could determine whether what my informants had told me could explain and or confirm my observations or not. By noting the recurring themes and key words I was able to relate these to the stages of empowerment as outlined in Chapter 3. The stages to which I allocated the various words and themes were judgments I made. The reasons the informants gave for feeling the way they did, or for behaving in a particular manner or for holding a particular view or expressing a particular opinion were their own.

What I was looking for were the opinions of these individuals and focus groups as representatives of the broader community of women living in the Diocese of Aitape. I wanted to use the views of these women to determine whether or not they felt that by comparison to their mothers, or other women, they had been empowered and whether or not they felt that women in general had also been empowered or whether the status quo was unchanged for women. If things had changed, what did they think had brought this about? I had specifically asked questions regarding how they felt the Catholic Church and the Diocese impacted on the status of and the lives of women, if at all. By analysing the records of interview and noting words, issues and themes as well as quotes, I have, as mentioned above, tried to develop a picture of how the women themselves perceive the impact of the Church on their lives.

The interviews with the men have provided me with the view of an onlooker, albeit an affected onlooker. This is not to pass any form of judgment on the women or to try to use information from the men to interpret the information from the women, but merely to try to determine whether or not men see or experience any changes taking place in
gender relationships within the Diocese of Aitape. The information obtained from these interviews with men in fact provided me with little information that I had not observed for myself.

Some interviews, particularly second and third interviews highlighted some issues that are considered taboo in traditional society. Many of the interviews covered similar themes to those highlighted in interviews with other informants. The resulting picture I built up was one of a range of degrees of empowerment amongst the female informants. This was not unexpected, and indeed confirms the evidence explored in Chapter 3, that empowerment is a continuum, and at any point in time people will be at particular point; this point will vary from time to time and from person to person depending on many influences. What I was most interested in were the reasons given for the degree of empowerment that the women felt. I reviewed the interview data many times to ensure that I was familiar with the content and the themes and meanings expressed in them.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated why a qualitative methodology is appropriate for this research. The methods used in fieldwork and why these methods were chosen have also been outlined. Importantly, this chapter has discussed the possibility of conflicts or problems that may have arisen due to issues of gender, race and any other possible issues, and how the researcher resolved or reconciled these issues is clearly stated. The participants in the research, the case studies and the focus groups have also been introduced.

In the next chapter the Diocese of Aitape, its history, its geography and its people are described. The demographics of the people and their lifestyle will be discussed to provide the reader with an informed picture of the life, place and times of the research participants.
Chapter 5  Life within the Catholic Diocese of Aitape, Sandaun Province  
Papua New Guinea

5.1  Introduction
In the previous chapters the reasons for this research were discussed, research methods outlined and the research located within the literature about women, empowerment and development. This chapter will describe the area and the people that are the Diocese of Aitape, beginning with some Church history in the area, including a description of the landscape and some demographic details so that the reader has a picture of the day-to-day lifestyle of the people and in particular the women who are the focus of this thesis.

5.2  The Analytical Framework
The framework in which this research study is conducted is premised on women’s views of themselves and the lives they live in comparison to that of their mothers and grandmothers, their relationships with men (gender relationships) and the way they feel about themselves. These personal assessments by the participants are then made in the context of the Catholic Church and how it has impacted upon their lives through the social environment within the sphere of influence of the Church (the Diocese of Aitape) and the opportunities provided by the Church and direct actions the Church might take.

Figure 5.1 shows the various ways in which women interact with the Catholic Church within the Diocese of Aitape. Some interactions are two directional while some are only one way. The literature reviewed has shown the links between these components depicted in the diagram and the empowering process as it applies to women both individually and collectively. The diagram demonstrates a broad range of cause and effect which could be expected in any community within the developed world. Here in the isolated area of Papua New Guinea, that is the Diocese of Aitape, the Catholic Church is one of the few constants, and the only institution that has such an influence.

Of the many cause and effect relationships in a community, organization or family, Figure 5.1 shows the significant relationships that form the basis of the research and the framework for the analysis of the information obtained from the participants in the research. The arrows indicate direction of influence and predominant input as it relates
to the lives of women within the Diocese of Aitape. During the interviews and
discussions with the participants and the focus groups it is these relationships which
formed the basis of the questioning and discussion. That all headings are grouped
around the central body of the Diocese of Aitape is indicative of the fact that in the
Diocese of Aitape, the Catholic Church is either the sole or principal provider of these
services and a significant employer.

An outcome for women of being involved in some or all of these activities and
relationships depicted in Figure 5.1 may be empowerment. As discussed in Chapter 2,
the degree and/or level of the empowerment gained by women as a result of the
activity depicted in Figure 5.1 will vary from person to person depending upon the
individual’s starting point in relation to their own empowerment.

In the Figure 5.1 diagrammatic representation, the nuns are shown as a separate entity
to the Diocese and the Church. This was done purposefully for two reasons. Firstly the
nuns are all women and although a recognized part of the Catholic Church, they are
not an integral part of the Church hierarchy; secondly the role of the nuns in the
Diocese of Aitape is predominantly one of community development and pastoral care
as distinct from the liturgical and/or sacramental.

Figure 5.1 Areas of participation and contact for women and the Church within the
Diocese

![Diagram of areas of participation and contact for women and the Church within the Diocese of Aitape.]

Source: The author’s own work
5.3 A brief history of the Catholic Church in the area of the Diocese of Aitape

This discussion draws heavily on a limited literature available in reference to the Diocese of Aitape and the area and its people. The work of Duggan (1983), Hansen et al (2001), the Diocese of Aitape website and Diocesan statistical data are the main sources used here.

Catholic missionaries first arrived in Papua New Guinea in the eighteen hundreds and on October 28th 1896 the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), a German religious order, established a mission on Tumleo Island, a small island off the coast from what later would become Aitape town. The SVD expanded their mission and established a number of stations along the coast of the adjoining mainland. In 1899 the SVDs were joined by an order of nuns, the Holy Spirit sisters who established schools and health clinics and by 1914 there were 68 missionaries and 6 new mission stations along the coast. The Mission headquarters was then shifted from Tumleo Island to Alexishafen, further east along the coast near Madang. From this new headquarters began the rapid expansion of Catholic mission stations westward from Alexishafen along the northern coastline. In 1906 the Saint Anna Mission was established at Aitape and SVD records show that 280 hectares of land were planted with coconuts and rubber trees and 100 head of cattle and 20 horses were introduced. A significant missionary presence was established at Aitape.

With the advent of World War I expansion stalled and consolidation and self-sufficiency became priorities. Coconut plantations were established to generate income from the production of copra, and cattle farms and rice production were introduced to provide a familiar and suitable diet for the newly arrived missionaries. Sea transport was also established, as were workshops to provide the maintenance as well as to fabricate materials for the building of new and permanent mission buildings. Today the Alexishafen Mission is no longer the thriving centre of industry it once was (its former significance still evident in the buildings and equipment remaining).

14 All data and dates from http://www.global.net.pg/diocese_of_aitape/aitape/history.html
suffering extensive damage during the Second World War and the more recent downturn in expatriate missionary numbers.

After the end of WWI the Church divided the now former German colony of New Guinea and the British territory of Papua into two mission territories; Eastern and Central New Guinea. Aitape is located in what was the mission territory of Central New Guinea. Expansion of the Catholic presence both along the coast and inland continued in what was now known as the Vicariate of Central New Guinea and overseen by the newly ordained Bishop Loerks, SVD. The new Vicariate was centred on Wewak (now the provincial capital of the East Sepik province of Papua New Guinea) and stretched to the border with the colony of Dutch New Guinea (now the province of Papua in the Republic of Indonesia) in the west. With the expansion of mission activity and influence came more European missionaries and the establishment of catechist schools. Catechists\textsuperscript{15}, local, lay missionaries, were seen as critical to the evangelisation of the local population and the nuns played a vital role in the education of the catechists who at this time were almost all young men. A catechist school was established on Kairiru Island off the coast from Wewak.

In 1942 the Japanese invaded New Guinea and many of the missionaries were either killed or imprisoned, while many catechists continued the work of evangelisation. One catechist, Peter to Rot was executed by the Japanese and has since been raised to the status of Blessed by the Catholic Church. By this time the Church had made a lasting impact upon the people of the Central New Guinea Vicariate, attested to by the martyrdom of Peter to Rot. In 1946, after the end of the War in the Pacific, 18 priests and 14 brothers came back to the Sepik area of the Central New Guinea Vicariate and they were joined by six Franciscans from Australia who took over the SVD mission stations in the west of the Vicariate around Aitape and Vanimo (now the provincial capital of Sandaun province, Papua New Guinea). In 1949, nuns belonging to the order Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (now known as Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception, FMIC) arrived in the Vicariate and established themselves at Sissano to the west of Aitape and soon after at

\textsuperscript{15} Catechists are trained lay preachers in the Catholic Church. Many are responsible for the spiritual and pastoral care of whole or part parishes. They officiate at \textit{Lotu} services where priests are not available.
Fatima on the southern side of the Torricelli Mountains where the Franciscan friars had already begun to expand. The numbers of Friars were bolstered by the arrival in 1952 of a number of Italian Franciscan Friars recently expelled from China. Various congregations of brothers, sisters and priests joined the Franciscans and in May 1952 the Prefecture Apostolic of Aitape was created with the division of the Central New Guinea Vicariate into two Prefecture Apostolic. The Aitape prefecture was overseen by the Franciscan order of Friars and Monsignor Ignatius Doggett, a Franciscan, was appointed to oversee this mission.

Under the care of the Australian Franciscans and assisted by their Italian brothers, the Catholic Church in the new Prefecture Apostolic of Aitape, expanded into the upper Sepik region south of the Torricelli Mountains establishing new mission stations and building roads and airstrips to facilitate the ongoing needs of the mission and the missionaries. The Prefecture Apostolic was designated as a Vicariate Apostolic in November 1956 and remained as such until 15th November 1966 when the Diocese of Aitape was established with Bishop Ignatius Doggett installed as the first Bishop of Aitape. The present day Diocese has a total of 124 mission workers made up of priests, brothers, nuns and lay people. The Diocese has three deaneries (groupings of parishes) with 24 parish centres serving a population of 69,400 Catholics in an area of 12,000 square kilometres stretching from Serra in the west to Suian in the east and from Ali Island in the north to Warasai in the south.

Map 5.1 Map of the Diocese of Aitape.

Taken from: www.em.com.pg/png/provinces/mapsepik.jpg
The Diocese of Aitape is also a major provider of services to the people living within the Diocese and makes no distinction between Catholic and non-Catholic in the dissemination of these services. The Sepik region of the Sandaun Province (formerly the West Sepik Province) of which the Diocese of Aitape occupies about half the area, is recognised as one of the least well-serviced areas of Papua New Guinea in relation to government provided services. The Diocese of Aitape is a significant provider of services such as education and health (see Table 5.1). Most people in the Diocese live between 4-8 hours travel of a service centre (Hansen et al. 2001, p.225).

Table 5.1  Institutions run by the Diocese of Aitape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Institution</th>
<th>Numbers of this institution</th>
<th>No. of persons benefited</th>
<th>No. female</th>
<th>No. male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>8,770</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>4,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical centres</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>240,000</td>
<td>140,000</td>
<td>100,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre for disabled persons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage guidance/family centres</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: 2001 Central Statistics office of the Church, Vatican Secretariat of State, General Statistical Questionnaire for the Diocese of Aitape.

5.4 The people and land of the Diocese

The people living within the Diocese of Aitape can be divided into two broad groups; the coastal people (*lain bilong nambis*) and the people of the bush (*lain bilong bus*) south of the Torricelli Mountains. The coastal people from Aitape west to Serra are known as Siau and from Aitape east to Suian are known as Bakla. The Torricelli Mountains form a natural and formidable barrier between the coastal plain and the interlocking, tropical rainforest-covered ridges of the inland stretching to the Sepik River flood plains in the south. These Torrecelli Mountains run west-east, parallel to the coast and rise abruptly to over 2000m on the north side and are often shrouded in cloud. South of the Torricelli Mountains the people are more diverse with Wapei
occupying the western parts of the Diocese (Yili to Kareitem) and the Au occupying
the area in the south west (between Yili and Yemnu). East of the Au lands to the
border with the East Sepik province are the Palei people and south of this group are
the Mai Mai. Amongst these various groups of people there are some forty separate
and distinct spoken languages; around thirty in the bush and ten along the coast
(Duggan 1983). The Diocese is also divided into two government administrative
districts; Aitape-Lumi District and Nuku District. The Diocese covers the same area as
these administrative districts (see Map 5.1).

The Aitape-Lumi district covers parts of the Sepik River valley, part of the Torricelli
foothills and mountains and the coastal plains and hills from Sissano in the west to the
provincial border with the East Sepik province in the east and includes the small
islands of Ali, Tumleo, Seleo and Angle. Altitude in the Aitape-Lumi District ranges
from sea level to over 2000mm in the Torricelli mountains and the rainfall ranges
from 2000-2700mm and increasing from east to west. The Nuku District covers part
of the Torricelli foothills and mountains and part of the northern side of the Sepik
river valley. Altitude ranges from 50m near the Sepik valley to over 1300m in the
Torricelli Mountains. Rainfall ranges from 2100-3000mm increasing from north to
south. Population density also varies greatly ranging from 23 persons per square
kilometre in the Torricelli foothills to only three persons per square kilometre in the
far south of the district. In the urban and peri-urban areas of Aitape town the
population density is 60 persons/sq km (Hansen et al 2001).

Rural people in Sandaun Province are the poorest people in Papua New Guinea with
very low incomes of 0-20 kina/person/year being the norm within the Diocese; there
are exceptions to this in Aitape town where the government, the diocese and private
business are significant employers and in the administrative centres of Nuku and Lumi
where there are salaried government employees and the vast majority are involved in
subsistence agriculture with sago as the main staple (Hansen et al. 2001, p.225).

At the 2000\textsuperscript{16} census the total population of the Aitape-Lumi and Nuku districts was
99,403 with 23\% of this population aged between 10 and 19 years and 16\% aged

\textsuperscript{16} This is the most recent data available

96
between 20 and 29 years, the median age being 17. Only 3.6% of the total population is aged 60 years and over (Papua New Guinea, National Statistical Office 2000 census). The majority (95.5%) of the population live in rural villages that are mostly remote from services such as health and education and are poorly served roads which can often be impassable in the wet season. The 1998 UNDP Human Development Report\textsuperscript{17} for Papua New Guinea quoted a Human Development Index for Sandaun Province, of which the Diocese of Aitape is a part, of 0.262. The Report also quoted for Sanduan Province an adult literacy rate of 30%, infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) of 110 and 40% of children under five years of age as underweight and a life expectancy at birth of 45.7 years (UNDP 1998). This is at the lower end of the development scale within the Pacific region and is similar to some poor African countries (UNDP 2006).

The people of the coast traditionally lived in large villages and this is still the case today. These large villages provided a critical mass of people that allowed for the development of infrastructure such as large spirit houses, village industries such as canoe making, pottery and fishing for trade purposes as well as food consumption. Intertribal warfare was common along the coast and in the bush, although by around the 1920s such fighting had all but ceased along the coast due largely to the efforts of the missionaries. Fishing is still a common practice for men while women are mostly involved in food gardening and caring for children and the elderly. There are generally greater opportunities for people in the coastal areas because of access to Aitape town where there are some employment prospects, better health services and two secondary schools as well as a vocational training centre. More income from outside sources such as the Diocese and other companies is brought into the area, especially Aitape town, and is spent locally. Most areas of the bush have no access to outside money.

The people of the inland areas of the Diocese live in villages usually made up of a number of smaller hamlets located on the ridge-tops and linked by walking paths. In these bush villages almost everything required for living, such as water, food from gardens, firewood and building materials, is located below the ridge-line on which the village is located. The heavy work of carrying food and water up to the village from

\textsuperscript{17} Data availability in the Pacific region is in many cases poor and outdated (Feeny and Clarke 2006).
the valley is done by women. Food gardens are often located long distances from the village and women spend long hours walking to and from these gardens carrying heavy loads of food and firewood usually in the company of small children and young girls.

Table 5.2  Community Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aitape-Lumi district</th>
<th>Nuku district</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Households</td>
<td>8,447</td>
<td>8,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Av. Size of household</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home ownership</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>97.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional dwellings</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>95.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in any form of agriculture</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>97.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in growing food Crops for own use</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>76.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in any income Generating activity</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in selling food 10 yrs and over been to school</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>76.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 yrs and over been to school and completed grade 6</td>
<td>68.3 75.9 60.5</td>
<td>51.2 59.4 43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 yrs and over been to school and completed grade 10</td>
<td>66.3 68.5 63.5</td>
<td>63.2 63.3 63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 yrs and over literate in at least one language</td>
<td>11.7 13.4 9.5</td>
<td>8.4 9.7 6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 yrs and over literate in at least one language</td>
<td>52.5 60.6 44.0</td>
<td>42.0 50.6 33.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: Papua New Guinea, National Statistics Office 2000 National Census

Fewer people from the bush attend secondary school than is the case in the coastal areas (see Table 5.2) which could be the result of the availability of places or the availability of money to pay for school fees. Attendance at primary school is similar in the bush to that in the coastal area perhaps because there are no school fees required at
primary school. However, attendance records for primary schools may be quite unreliable due to poor record keeping in remote, bush material schools where teacher absence is common. Income earning opportunities in the bush are few. Some very low incomes are derived from minor sales of cocoa and Robusta coffee (Hansen et al. 2001).

The average household size is larger in Aitape-Lumi district and could be the result of better access to medical services that are available in this District, especially in Aitape town. The people living along the coast have always had access to fish as a ready source of protein while the diets of the bush people are generally protein deficient and far less balanced than the diets of the coastal people. The people of the bush are short in stature and slow rates of physical maturity are common with secondary sexual characteristics often not appearing until 18-19 years of age. Diets lacking in protein, a high incidence of malaria, skin diseases and high parasite infestation are common in the bush where stunting is common (Duggan 1983; Hansen et al. 2001). The common practice of chewing betel nut \( (buai) \) with lime has made the introduction of newer food varieties to the diet difficult as any acidity in the food acts adversely on the over sensitive teeth of the betel nut chewer as the practice of chewing with lime removes the protective enamel from the teeth. Mouth cancer is a common result of the practice of chewing betel nut with lime.

Child malnutrition is a very serious concern in the Nuku District (Hansen et al. 2001). In the foothills of the Torricelli Mountains which form the northern part of the Nuku District, most people are at least 4-8 hours from the nearest service centre while those in the southern part of the Nuku District are very remote and require more than one day’s travel to their nearest services. In the bush areas of the Aitape-Lumi district the travel times to services are the same as for the Nuku District, but for the coastal people in the Aitape-Lumi district, travel time is generally less than 4 hours and the services are of a higher standard. These factors, especially as they relate to children and pregnant mothers, could be significant in the difference in average family size between the two districts. Given that not all births and deaths are recorded, especially in the bush, it is difficult to determine just what the actual reasons for the difference in family size might be other than those speculated on here.
Home ownership and traditional dwelling levels are higher in the Nuku District than in the Aitape-Lumi District. People in the bush build their own homes from bush materials and generally follow traditional design and methods of construction. In many bush villages the houses of the people are as they were first described by Europeans (see Duggan 1983) while some have added windows and/or a raised floor to the traditional design. In Aitape town there is a greater number of non-traditional houses belonging to the government and to the Diocese and these are occupied by paid employees of these institutions. There are also increasing numbers of non-traditional, privately owned, owner occupied houses in Aitape town.

The proportion of people involved in agriculture and selling food is also higher for the Nuku District than for the Aitape-Lumi District. This difference can be explained as a difference between the opportunities available to coastal people as compared to the opportunities available to the bush people. In both districts the figures for these two activities is three-quarters of people involved in agriculture and involved in selling food in the Nuku district and nearly sixty percent in the Aitape-Lumi District. Women are the primary providers of food in the Diocese of Aitape and they do this through their food gardens. Any excess production, which is very rare and very small in quantity when it occurs, is sold in local markets. In Aitape town coastal people sell larger quantities of garden produce in the market place to buyers who have access to income earned from paid labour. Whereas in the bush almost all women and girls are involved in growing food, coastal women might be employed in Aitape town or even involved in other activities such as Religious Orders or other Church related activities.

Cash cropping of cocoa and Robusta coffee is carried out in both districts, but access to buyers for the bush people is extremely difficult and irregular due to the poor road infrastructure in the bush. Access to buyers for cash crop producers is much more assured for the coastal growers. Copra is also produced in small quantities on the coast and is sold in Aitape town. Timber royalties and some oil palm production have also been a source of income for some coastal people (Hansen et al 2001). There is also a regular shipping service to Aitape town bringing supplies for businesses in the town and surrounding areas. These factors add a monetised economy, albeit small, to the predominantly subsistence based lives of people outside of Aitape town and this
Traditionally the people are animists, very aware of the spirits of their ancestors and the spirits that inhabit, form and regulate their traditional lands and environments (Mantovani 1991; Duggan 1983). Although all people of the area were traditionally animists, the variation in language and custom ensured that there was also a range of ceremonial practice and ancestral worship that contributed to the tremendous diversity among the language groups. This was even more pronounced in the bush areas south of the Torricelli Mountains, the area also known as the Sepik Fall. Despite the lack of uniformity of religious practice prior to the introduction of Christianity, there is some evidence that the Siau and the Bakla had supreme deities that were recognised in each tribe of these ethnic groups. Such a god is the Bakla’s Wunekau, the spirit of the sun from whom all languages come and who oversees all growth. However, it was the lineage or ancestral spirits to whom the people paid most attention, as it was these spirits who related to everyday matters like food gardens, warfare and fertility.

The variation in language referred to above is more pronounced in the bush than on the coast. From the Wapei region in the western area of the Torricellis through the Palei region in the east of the Torricellis to the border with the East Sepik province, an area in which around 46,000 people live in about 240 villages (according to the 2000 census), there are thirty distinct language groups. The people do not identify themselves as members of a larger anthropological or ethnic group such as Wapei, Palei or Au, but as a member of a people who belong to a particular village. These villages are located on the top of ridges and usually consist of a number of smaller, named hamlets which are made up of smaller family units. It is common for people, especially women, to live out their entire life within the village-hamlet environment. In the larger coastal villages, people, especially the men, have traditionally been more mobile in activities such as trade and in warfare, but women too have tended to move further from their village than was the case in the bush (Duggan 1983).

With the rapid expansion of the Catholic Mission in the years between World Wars I and II and the increased presence of Europeans and their new technologies, a decrease in trade occurred which in turn led to a downturn in the level of village industry. The
decrease in inter-tribal warfare was accompanied by an increase in sorcery and *sanguma* (ritualised murders) which were much more difficult for the Christian missionaries to act against due to the belief of magic involved with *sanguma* rather than the physical act of murder (Duggan 1983). During the 1930s the Christian Missionaries in their efforts to dissuade the local people from these ways and their often overt practice of traditional religious ceremonies and rituals, razed many spirit houses and displayed many of the sacred objects from the spirit houses to women who were traditionally forbidden to view these objects. These actions proved futile and people continued their observance of their traditional religions covertly, while the priests considered those people they baptised to be Catholics. There are very few outward signs of the traditional religions today within the Diocese however, many of the priests and nuns actively encourage the integration of cultural and traditional ritual, song and dance and the wearing of traditional ceremonial dress into the modern liturgy of the Catholic Church within the Diocese of Aitape. From personal experience there is still a widespread belief in the use of magic and the practice of *sanguma*. Very often following the death of an adult (occasionally following the death of a younger person) from any of the villages where I lived, there would be rumour and discussion regarding the magic that had been used to cause the death and the possible reasons for it. The various spirits within the environment, the forest, the rivers and springs are collectively known as Masalai and are often referred to, especially in relation to specific locations. Illness and serious sickness are signs that the spirits need placating and in the more remote areas of the Diocese it is not uncommon to find that no effort has been made to obtain medical treatment for sick and injured persons as it is the work of the spirits and they must be assuaged. The ancestral spirits are generally helpful and when things go wrong it is attributed to a displeased ancestral spirit. As humans and spirits share the same physical space spiritual relationships are constant and not seen as sacred or even as supernatural. Christianity is for many people an ‘add on’ to the spirituality that they already experience.

In the Diocese of Aitape all societies are patrilineal so that ownership of land, trees of value and any other assets are handed down through the father’s line. In this agnostic

---

18 (personal correspondence with Fr. Greg Bourke, ofm, Saint Anna Friary, Aitape and Fr. Pat McGiver former parish priest, Fatima Parish, DOA)
structure a woman moves to her husband’s village-hamlet upon marriage and even when she dies her spirit remains with her husband’s agnates. The major relationships from marriages are matrilineal and are generally between children from the marriage and the mother’s brothers. Exchanges and beliefs within these relationships, the *kandre* relationship, are powerful and complex and both ritual and economic relationships are oriented around this relationship. These relationships are especially strong in the bush whereas on the coast there has been more exposure to ‘other ways’ and these relationships are not always as strong but they nevertheless are present and meaningful.

Most marriages are arranged and descent groups are closely observed to ensure a healthy gene-pool is maintained as much as possible. Sister exchange, whereby men could negotiate marriage on the basis of having a female relative to exchange for a wife from another lineage, has been an important factor in arranging marriages. A bride price is also included whereby traditionally the husband’s family would pay primarily in the form of shell money and livestock, as well as household utensils for the woman. These payments and exchanges helped to cement relationships between lineage groups but today the monetisation of bride price has tended to override the value of the traditional exchange process and young girls are often now seen as a commodity to be cashed in for money to start a business or buy a car (Bourke 1994). Polygamy was traditionally an acceptable practice and indeed was seen as an indication of status for the man. Polygamy is still practiced in some areas but is far less common than it was and the Christian attitude to polygamy has had a big impact on reducing the incidence of polygamous marriages.

Authority within the village structure is maintained by the observance of obligations and meeting expectations. People learn at a young age the rules by which society is governed and the authority that an individual attains is a result of the ability to expand and then maintain a network of exchange and ritual obligations. The status of ‘big man’ is attained by being able to meet exchange obligations and by ensuring that the ledger of exchange is constantly in the ‘black’. The more indebtedness to an individual the greater the status of that individual. Wealth for wealth’s sake is of no great value and it is only when it is shared that the value is realised. For example, a pig was traditionally only of great value when it was ultimately killed and the meat
dispersed. When the receivers of the meat eventually reciprocated with pig meat the total amount received over time would be more than the original amount given away. Today a combination of the traditional and the modern applies to this exchange process. Monetary exchange for goods has in many cases displaced the traditional exchange process and a person who can disperse money or items bought with money is often seen as the ‘big man’. It is much more difficult for a women to attain such status as women do not have ownership of property and goods. A woman has access to land and resources belonging to her father or husband or both to use for gardening and other activities relating to her role as a food provider and carer but she does not exercise control over them.

Life for most of the people living within the Diocese of Aitape is a subsistence lifestyle based around the village-hamlet, the sago palm (especially for the bush people), the garden (especially for the women and girls) and fishing for the men of the coast. There are occasional variations to this brought about by some form of celebration or ritual or illness and activities associated with the Church. In Chapter 6 the variation that Church activities can provide, particularly as they relate to women, will be discussed. These include activities such as the Church women’s groups, mid-week and weekend religious services and other Church sanctioned activities. If seen by men as legitimate, women can participate freely although their other tasks will not necessarily be done for them in their absence unless they have an older daughter to do them.

A village woman’s day starts early, before dawn, and finishes after dark. Her day is one of caring for her family by way of food preparation, food production, washing clothes and children, tending to the young and the sick, fetching water and firewood
and usually walking long distances to achieve many of these tasks. A woman is generally accompanied by her children who if they are male are pre-school age, and if they are female are not at school either because they are too young or do not go for other reasons, or they are married. It is common to see a woman bearing a heavy load of produce and firewood in a bag (bilum or limbum) on her back suspended from a strap across the woman’s forehead, walking alone or in the company of very young children at dusk making her way from her garden to her house. “Young girls are taught to carry from a very early age and as they grow so too do their loads” (Bourke 1994, p.4). She will more than likely be carrying a smouldering piece of firewood so that she can easily light her cooking fire when she reaches her house.

As a mother a woman is responsible for ensuring that her children attend the medical clinic/aid post (haus sik) on the appropriate day so that the children can be vaccinated. She is also responsible for taking sick children to the aid post for medication. Many children do not receive their vaccinations regularly because their mothers neglect to take them at the appointed time due to lack of knowledge or opportunity. Because of their often solitary daily routine women are more likely to be uninformed of upcoming events such as maternal health days at the aid post. The Church through the regularity of Sunday liturgy has given people, women in particular, more regular access to information. Visits to medical facilities can take up to hours of walking one way and then a long wait can be had before treatment and the long walk home. Most village women in the Diocese of Aitape have never visited a town. Until recently not one woman in a village located in the foothills of the Torricelli Mountains, approximately 30 kilometres in a straight line from Aitape town, had ever been to Aitape town, had ever seen the ocean, had ever ridden in a car, or had ever experienced electricity, television or shops. Rarely had they travelled further from their house than their garden or the Church.

Infant and maternal deaths are common within the Diocese, as indeed they are across Papua New Guinea. Women fatalistically accept that they will bear many children of which few will survive beyond infancy. Because of ‘taboos’ women are forbidden certain foods such as meat and bananas at times when good food is essential, such as during pregnancy and after childbirth. These taboos are to protect men from becoming ‘sick’ from women’s proximity to food during times of female biological activity such
as menstruation or childbirth. Even intercourse is ‘dangerous’ for men as it takes away their strength. Even educated women and men are reluctant to break these taboos (Bourke 1994).

With an end to inter-tribal warfare life for men within the Diocese is far less structured than it is for women. On any given day a man might involve himself in any number of planned or unplanned activities. He might be involved in politics; he might hunt or go fishing (if he is a coastal dweller); he might work in his coffee or his cocoa garden; or he might decide to hop on a vehicle and travel to some distant destination such as Wewak. For a man in the village, life is far less regimented and more social than it is for a woman. Almost all activities that a man might involve himself in have a potential tangible outcome; money from the sale of coffee or cocoa or fish; improved relationships and/or prestige from politicking; the experience and excitement of visiting a town. The opportunities for impromptu social interaction are greater for men than for women because their lives are less regimented and their responsibilities are limited and are mostly to themselves whereas there are many persons dependent upon a woman for food and care.

Generally men in Papua New Guinea seek power and authority. For most this is in the form of local prestige and importance especially in the eyes of other men. He needs to be seen as head of the family and this may mean subjecting his wife to physical abuse and violence to ensure that she submits to his authority. Most women accept being ‘bashed’ by their husband as normal and despite efforts by the Church and government to highlight such violence as a criminal act, very few cases are brought to court. Most women accept the power of men over women in the domestic domain. All major family decisions are made by men, and although women may have input to the decision in the privacy of the home, the man does not acknowledge this input (Bourke 1994).

5.5 About women in Papua New Guinea

Most women in Papua New Guinea live in remote rural villages where their lives are to a large degree prescribed and vary little from one individual woman to another. This can result in a lack of self-awareness which is critical to empowerment. “Empowerment…must also include the processes that lead women to perceive
themselves as able and entitled to make decisions” (Rowlands 1997, p.14). Rowlands’ statement indicates that to be empowered one must be aware of one’s self, one’s rights, and one’s present relative situation. Women generally have a prescribed role in their communities and how they interpret these roles and subsequently use them can be greatly affected by outside influences and examples.

To understand gender relations and to determine whether there is gender disparity or equality, one must first have a clear view of the reality of the daily lives of women.

“Women’s work is about making a living rather than earning a living; throughout the world, but particularly in the South, it is this multiplicity of daily acts, this making a living, which keeps countless households alive” (Moser 1993, p.43).

Moser says that the role of women is threefold: reproductive, productive and community managing.

The reproductive role is one that not only includes procreation, but also the care and maintenance of the workforce, namely husband and older children, and the future workforce, namely infants and young children (Moser 1993). In Papua New Guinea this is very much the role of women, along with caring for the sick and the elderly. The burden imposed upon women as a result of their caring role often precludes them from accessing other political or economic opportunities. Even Sunday, which is a day for attending Lotu (church services) and resting, is a work day for women due to their household responsibilities of cooking and caring (Sepoe 2000).

The productive role involves working for payment in cash or kind; work done for subsistence or for market exchange that has a value placed upon it (Moser 1993). In Papua New Guinea, and the same is true for the Diocese of Aitape, women are generally involved in subsistence agricultural production and sometimes in roadside, informal economy market activity. Women’s mostly unrestricted access to land for food production has enabled them to maintain the lives of those for whom they are responsible (Sepoe 2000).

The community-managing role for women is about the maintenance of resources such as water, health care and cultural learning, whereas for men it is about the politics of
the community, which has a direct return either by payment in money or status or both (Moser 1993). The life of a woman in Papua New Guinea can be largely a solitary one once she marries. Except for the company of her young children and sometimes her older, single daughters, much of her life is spent in the garden or washing children and clothes, or in the dark in the house cooking before or after a long day of often hard physical work. There is little time for communal involvement and what time there is, is often found at the expense of other essential tasks. Women’s groups under the auspice of the Church provide rare opportunities for solidarity among women. Marriage itself is often an impediment to women’s involvement in communal activity because of the added responsibilities of care of children, husband and extended family. These obstacles are not present or are not as great for single women (Sepoe 2000).

Thus, to the outsider the women of Papua New Guinea and Melanesia in general appear to be a subjugated group of people controlled by a series of rules and taboos brutally imposed by a patriarchal system of authority. There is an antagonism between the sexes in Melanesia and yet according to Beben (1990, p.49), “…an anomaly among patrilineal groups remains the exemplar of the ‘high status’ of women in Melanesia.” Papua New Guineans have great respect and awe for a woman’s reproductive functions and Mantovani (1988) claims that the Melanesian woman has power.

“Whatever expatriate women and men might think and feel about the sociological and ideological position of women in Melanesia, the Melanesian woman is experienced, recognised and celebrated as ‘powerful’. This is the foundation of the woman’s identity. As long as she is part of that traditional life, she is psychologically strong and secure.” (Mantovani 1991, p.4; see also Strathern 1987; Sepoe 2000).

The division of labour, or separation of tasks, in Papua New Guinea appears to be upon the basis of sex giving rise to specific sex-based, socially-constructed gender roles imposed by men. Yet the division of labour may also be seen as a basis for a degree of independence, particularly in a society where community “… is of the greatest importance to Melanesians” (Mantovani 1991, p.4). Women and men performed different tasks in a traditional Papua New Guinean community. The tasks, while not necessarily cooperative, were indeed complementary and women’s tasks
were not seen as inferior (Strathern 1987; McDowell 1984; Sepoe 2000). This division of labour was, according to Mandie (1983), for the benefit of the community. In Melanesia, the community can dictate the likes and dislikes of the individual and this community is not just a grouping of people but a complex series of relationships. This includes relationships with the environment of the bush and the garden as well as the village, dead relatives and ancestors and of course other individuals. These relationships require constant attention and involve an ongoing series of exchanges that help to cement the relationships. Women played a significant role in binding communities and in the political relations between communities and clans by the role they played in marriage and relationship building. Such activities were not necessarily obvious to early western anthropologists who recorded the ‘public’ but often did not see the ‘private’ influence of women (PNG Report 1995; Ralston 1992). To have specific, clearly defined tasks to perform within such a social environment may indeed provide a degree of independence otherwise unachievable. Narokobi (1980, p.41) says, “There is no need for Women’s Lib here….Melanesian women are already equal”. All this is not meant to suggest that Melanesian women would not want to make changes to their situation but it ought temper to some degree, the desire for outsiders to want to quickly change the status quo.

Much of the anthropological literature regarding Melanesian societies is Western, male dominated and viewed by way of western concepts and ideas (Strathern 1987; Sepoe 2000), which characterise gender relations in terms of male domination and female subordination. As pointed out earlier in this chapter men are often violent towards women to ensure that women submit to their authority particularly within the home. However, there are domains within communities where women do exert significant authority as outlined above. The concept of inequality itself is a Western construct very much associated with the ‘public’ domain while ignoring the ‘private’ which is where influence by women in Papua New Guinea is most often exerted. Depictions of both subordination of women and complementarity of the roles and tasks of men and women appear in the literature (Sepoe 2000). In the changing nature of society within the Diocese of Aitape, much of the traditional complementarity of gendered roles has been replaced by a lopsided situation where women work physically hard for most of the time while men have time to spare. The ‘private’ may still provide an opportunity for women to exert influence and a degree of power, but
the ‘public’ is the easily observable domain. For this reason this thesis relies upon the views and reflections of the women themselves.

The complementarity of roles of women and men in traditional society was also the antithesis of the roles of men and women in the society of the colonial masters. Mies (1986) notes that where British colonialists saw equality between men and women of newly colonised lands, they saw a ‘backward’ people where men needed to learn to dominate and women accept subjugation. Without gendered inequality, how could a people progress? Thus, a major task for the new colonial administrations throughout the British Empire (of which half of Papua New Guinea was prior to 1914 and all of it was until the end of World War One) was to ensure inequality between the sexes (Mies 1986). During this time,

“…while they disrupted all social relations created by the local people, they began to build up in their fatherlands the patriarchal nuclear family, that is, the monogamous nuclear family as we know it today. This family…consists of the forced combination of the principles of kinship and co-habitation, and the definition of the man as ‘head’ of this household and ‘breadwinner’ for the non-earning wife and their children” (Mies 1986, pp.103,104).

While much of Mies’ work relates to Africa and Asia, the timeframe and the colonising masters are the same for what later became Papua New Guinea.

In pre-colonial and pre-contact\textsuperscript{19} times there were numerous societies of different clans. These are now inextricably linked to the new ‘civil society’ which is Western influenced, and based on the unitary State of Papua New Guinea with a monetised economic system. In many matrilineal societies where land issues were determined by women, the government generally overlooks women, and their brothers and sons are consulted regarding large mining and agricultural projects (PNG Country Report 1996). In contemporary Papua New Guinea while gender roles remain distinct, gender relations have generally become more unequal since the beginning of the colonial era. This is highlighted by Sepoe (2000) in areas of increased violence towards women, a

\textsuperscript{19} Pre-contact time refers to the time before a group of people in Papua New Guinea had any contact with and often even knowledge of white people. Due to the rugged terrain and isolation many groups of people in the inland of PNG, pre-contact time existed well after colonisation had been begun.
decline in health services that women are dependent upon, and the increasing proportional representation of women in the subsistence sector, while more men are engaged in the formal economic sector. “As a result of male privilege in all aspects of contemporary life, gender relations can appropriately be characterised as relations of domination and subordination” (Sepoe 2000, p.102).

During colonial times many men left their villages and worked on plantations. Here they learned skills, new language and knowledge about how to fit into the newly emerging socio-economic and political order. During this time women remained in the village, isolated from many of the changes except that their lives became more burdened as their workloads increased due to the absence of the men. Most women are to this day still engaged primarily in these socially prescribed tasks (Turner 1990). More recently, Structural Adjustment Programmes imposed by the international financial institutions have further marginalised women by severely restricting their access to basic health and education through the introduction of fees and charges. When the costs of services increase, participation rates of women in these services decrease (Hunt 1992).

When the missionaries combined with the colonial administration to ‘modernise’ the locals by endeavouring to make them behave as they, the missionaries, behaved, a misunderstanding of the local situation of complementary roles led to a reinforcement of the existing gender roles with Western values of motherhood and household duties. Thus, the division of labour changed from one of complementarity to a separation of task and purpose. The domestication of women’s roles in the Western image also extended to Western ways of socialising in groups such as sewing groups and women’s clubs. These changes to gender relations have since become entrenched and can be problematic for women in Papua New Guinea because they can make it difficult for women to play complementary roles to men as their foremothers did, or to take advantage themselves of new opportunities. The environment in which gender relations are now viewed is a very different one to that which existed in pre-colonial and pre-contact times. Most women within the Diocese of Aitape still live a very subsistence agrarian existence which means that their day-to-day life activities are not too dissimilar to those of their pre-colonial ancestors; this is the case for the majority of Papua New Guinean women (Sepoe 2000). The reality though is a combination of
modernity and tradition. The monetisation of value systems has meant a non-recognition of activities that do not return money (Chapman 1992). This situation has made it difficult for women to find a place in a changing society that fits with either traditional or modern expectations. Whereas for men, recognition by anthropologists, colonialists, missionaries and other often uninformed outsiders, and now government, most of them as spokespersons, leaders and decision makers has meant that they have often been included and catered for by policies and strategies, women have not been so fortunate; or men and women have been catered for separately (Sepoe 2000).

When Narokobi (1980) says that women are already equal he is reflecting the legal situation as set out in the constitution of Papua New Guinea. But in practice, women in Papua New Guinea are not equal (Sepoe 2000). Section 55 of the Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea states:

"Subsection (1): Subject to this constitution, all citizens have the same rights, privileges, obligations and duties irrespective of race, tribe, place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed, religion or sex.

Subsection (2): Subsection (1) does not prevent the making of laws for the specific benefit, welfare, protection or advancement of females, children, and young person, members of underprivileged or less advanced groups or residents of less advanced areas.


The Papua New Guinea constitution clearly outlines the equality of women in law. It also opens the law to question by the reference to pre-independence law which could include local, traditional law which may not have been so liberal in its attitudes towards women.

In a country like Papua New Guinea where the majority of the population live in remote rural villages, the law of the State in relation to gender equality is likely to have little effect. What matters is what is local, and equality and empowerment for women will be locally constructed. As Batliwala (1993, p.159) states, “You know
(empowerment) has occurred when it crosses the threshold of the home”. For some women in Papua New Guinea this may be a long way off yet. In an analysis of gender issues for the World Bank in 1998 the authors claimed,

“Men now mediate all female interests in Papua New Guinea and women are beginning to define themselves by virtue of their sex as non-participants in politics as they are currently structured.” (Brouwer et al 1998, p.4; see also Sepoe 2000).

Avalos (1995) notes that even 36% of educated women in Papua New Guinea accept that wives are beaten by their husbands, compared with 41% of educated men.

This research, while asking women to draw comparisons between the lives they lead and the lives that their mothers and grandmothers led, is very much based in contemporary Papua New Guinea. The reality for the women participating in this study is the present day situation they find themselves in, be it in Aitape town or the predominantly rural area of the Diocese of Aitape. The position taken in this research regarding gender relations is that although many women in the Diocese of Aitape may still perform tasks that were once complementary to those of men in pre-contact times, today their tasks are mostly solitary and undervalued, and are not complemented by male work and women are generally subordinate.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has described the geographic and demographic nature of the Diocese of Aitape as mostly a remote place where the people are to a large degree disadvantaged and poor. It has also briefly outlined some of the cultural characteristics of the people and their relationships to one another and how the arrival of the Christian missionaries has influenced these relationships if at all. The chapter also highlights the variation in the roles of men and women in pre-colonial times to that imposed upon them by colonialists and then the more recent trend to redress this situation by endeavouring to assist women. Empowerment of people has been highlighted as an underlying goal of the Diocese and how the particular issue of the status, or the relative social position of women, has been an explicit issue for the Diocese since its beginning, has also been noted.
The next chapter will present the views of the women involved in the research, as to how they see their lives and their situation, and to what factors/causes they attribute the positive changes.
Chapter 6  Women’s Voices: the Views of the Participants

6.1 Introduction

Having discussed the history of the Church in Aitape and the traditional life experience of women in this part of Papua New Guinea, this chapter will focus on the views of women in the Diocese of Aitape themselves regarding the effect that the Church has had upon their lives and the lives of women in general from the point of view of their level of empowerment. This is done in a two step way: firstly by outlining representative case studies and summarising the general thrust of the interviews, and secondly by discussing the various factors influencing and contributing to a level of consciousness, particularly the transition from individual to collective consciousness and progress towards political power (as shown in Figure 3.1, Chapter 3). These factors include education, interest and self-help groups, family, community and relationships, self-respect, self-esteem and dignity, Christianity and religious practice, gaining skills, organising and implementing strategies. I use the comments of the case studies within this discussion, much of which is in the first person because the material that is the basis of the following is the result of the interaction between myself and the persons who participated in this research with me. When citing my own observation/s I state in the text that these are my observation/s.

To accurately represent the information obtained during my research, a number of representative case studies are presented before the focus group discussions are reported. In each, the voices are those of the individuals, rather than trying to combine the outcomes of the various interviews into a narrative that would then be mine in an exercise of appropriation. By choosing this style of presenting the data the individual contributions of the participants and focus groups are acknowledged and recognised in
what Haraway (1991) refers to as ‘situated knowledge.’ Situated knowledge is knowledge gained by a person in a particular situation, environment and context and is therefore relevant and ‘real’ for that situation, environment and context. The knowledge that I obtained from each of my interviews comes from a source that gained that knowledge in a particular context. By keeping the data separate this contextualisation will not be lost. By presenting the data in this way it will also give an identity to the participants as real people and bearers of knowledge. If I merely collated the data and tried to summarise it, those persons who gave me their knowledge would be in danger of becoming merely objects of research rather than the participants that they are. By outlining the contributions of the participants and setting out their context individually I will re-present the research as it occurred rather than just ‘write-up’ the results (see Berg and Mansvelt 2000). Assuming that I have chosen my case studies well, the contexts in which the case studies gained their knowledge can be reasonably expected to be closely replicated for those women of whom the particular case study is broadly representative, but who did not participate in the research.

The data gained from my observations is my own knowledge and cannot be imposed upon the other participants in the research. It is knowledge gained by a white, male person living and working closely with the people from whom the participants were chosen. It is in this context that my ‘situated knowledge’ was gained. I will present my observations separately in the discussion as another source of data alongside that gained from the other participants.

6.2 The case studies
To maintain the anonymity of the participants who constitute the case studies I have allocated a letter from the alphabet to each person to differentiate each from the others. Hence the first case study is referred to as ‘A’ in this narrative, the next as ‘B’ and so on. I will not present the case studies of the expatriate nun or the men in this form as the purpose of their input is more commentary rather than experiential. Their comment, like my own observations, will feature in the discussion.

The quotations highlighted in italics and the views expressed under the heading of each of the case studies are taken from the transcript of the interview/s conducted with
each of the participants. I have not tried to interpret or extrapolate meaning from the material but have presented it as presented to me. The reason for highlighting some quotations and not attributing quotation marks to the rest of the material is to emphasise different aspects and/or issues raised during the interview/s. The non-italicised text is the words and views of the case study subject presented in a non-quotational manner, as they are the conversational context within which the highlighted quotation occurred. Where quotation marks do appear in the non-italicised text, it is because I believe the particular word or words needed to be highlighted as they were strongly enunciated by the participant. Where I have included a reference, I have done so to highlight an unusually close correlation between the words (rather than just the sentiment) of the informant and those included in the reference.

At the end of each case study outline, I have included a summary of what I have drawn from the participant’s responses.

6.2.1 Case study A

Born and raised in a village within the Diocese of Aitape, A is married with four children. A speaks some English but is mostly a Pidgin (Tok Pisin) and tokples (her own local language) speaker. Her husband is a former schoolteacher. Together A and her husband work together to deliver Family Life courses to married couples and their families throughout the Diocese. They are employed by the Diocese of Aitape to carry out this work. A had no prior teaching experience before commencing this work but draws on her own life experience and her husband’s teaching expertise along with course content material to deliver these courses.

“Before, when men put women down I was hurt. Now I speak out, ol meri I gat namba (women are worth something, are important).”

Since taking on the role of the Family Life Course presenter in partnership with her husband, A is much more confident to speak out on behalf of women, often in the face of hostility. She believes that her understanding of the relationship between men and

---

20 Family Life courses are facilitated by the Diocese of Aitape for the purpose of enhancing the gender relationships between men and women. Aspects of these courses focus on family planning, violence, spousal relationships and responsibilities, extended family relationships and responsibilities. The Family Life program was initially run by nuns while married couples were trained to take over this role. The program is now run solely by married lay couples.
women in marriage has changed and that she and her husband, by delivering these Family Life courses as a married couple are leading by example. Persons attending the courses must be accompanied their spouse and they must sit with their spouse. To sit with one’s spouse is not easy for many men, but A maintains that this is important to emphasise the equality of the two people in the marriage. She says that after one or two sessions most couples happily sit with one another and discuss the issues of the session without direction to do so.

“My own self esteem has risen and I am much more confident. Before I just stayed home; meri blong haus. Now I involve myself in many things.”

A says that as a result of her being involved in the Family life courses, which began when she and her husband participated in a course which was facilitated by a nun, she has grown in confidence. This growth has been supported by her husband who also believes that the Family Life course had a big impact upon his attitude toward women, according to A. A says that her marriage is a partnership between equals rather than one person, the man, dominating the relationship as is often the case in marriage in Papua New Guinea (Sepoe 2000).

“Family planning and the spacing of children has made life easier for women. Many of the natural (traditional) birth control methods were harmful to women.” (Family planning methods form a part of the family life program.)

Men and women together learn about human reproduction and how this impacts upon their lives, especially the life of the woman. A says that it easier for a woman to say no to her husband if he understands how her reproduction system works. When women have an understanding of, and a degree of control over the reproductive function of their own body they have significantly progressed from the life that their mothers lived.

“The Church has made life better for women. When my husband and I go to lotu (Church service) with our children, we all learn that God made us all the same, all equal. Men are not more important than women. We must all live as equal people.”

A claims that the teaching of the Church, that men and women are made as equals, is a very important factor in helping to improve the lives of women. The fact that God tells us that HE made us equal makes it easier for women to stand up for themselves.
Summary

A attributes much of her self-confidence and awareness to the Family Life course program, in terms of both her initial participation as a course participant, and now her facilitation/presenter role which she shares with her husband. This has firstly helped to improve her own and her husband’s marital relationship and subsequently her willingness and confidence to speak out on issues she feels she needs to, especially on issues regarding gender relations. Whereas women’s and men’s roles in society were complementary (Mantovani 1991; Sepoe 2000; Strathern 1972, 1980), today men and women need to work together and to share tasks and responsibilities for their mutual benefit.

Secondly, her personal consciousness has risen as a result of her involvement with the Family Life program which was introduced by the nuns for this very purpose - to improve the relationship between husbands and wives. As A says, she used to stay at home but now is involved. She has progressed along the empowerment continuum (Batliwala 1993; Kabeer 1999; Rowlands 1997) to the point where she is regularly active in the public sphere. A has seen that there are choices for her to make and she has consciously made them.

The reproductive function of a woman’s life is highlighted by A, and although the benefits of family planning and child spacing which she outlines may not be enjoyed by the bulk of women, the fact that she recognises the importance of this issue and that it is included in the material of the Family Life course is a significant contribution to the improvement of gender relations of husbands and wives in remote areas. In particular it raises the awareness in women that there are choices to be made even in relation to a women’s reproductive role. The ability to make such a choice is very dependent upon the state of the relationship between husband and wife.

A also attributes the Church’s teaching of equality to the improvement of women’s position within the community. She claims the authority of the teaching of God makes men more accepting of women as equals and therefore less likely to abuse them and take them for granted.
6.2.2 Case study B

B was raised in a coastal village where she attended a community school run by nuns of the order of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception (FMIC). She attended high school in the East Sepik province in Wewak in a boarding school situation also run by the nuns of the FMIC order. B has been active in women’s affairs as a member of the East Sepik Provincial Women’s Council and when interviewed, worked as a counsellor for the Wok Sanbai (Work Standby), a counselling and support program established by the Diocese of Aitape following the tsunami of 1998 which devastated the coastal communities to the west of Aitape. B is married to a very well-educated man who practices as a lawyer.

“Without the Church there was no education for girls. The Church broke the barrier for women.”

B credits the Church for breaking the barriers to education for women. In the early days men would not let girls go to boarding schools with boys. The church set up girls schools run by the nuns so that girls could go to school. People trusted the system. Men trusted their daughters to the sisters in the boarding schools. Vocational centres were also set up to teach skills to young women who could not go to high school or who wanted to learn or wanted to experience something other than village life.

With education women became teachers, nurses etc and many fathers realised that their daughters could earn income. So rather than sitting around and waiting for brothers to be married so that they would then be married to their brother’s wife’s family, they had income which increased their independence. They were not just “bride price.”

“The nuns play a very important role as role models and spokespersons. The sisters have done a lot to improve my life.”

B relates a true story about a young woman at high school who wanted to be a nurse until one day a nun who was also a doctor visited the local clinic. Up until that time the young woman had thought that only men could be doctors. The young woman determined to become a doctor; a goal she achieved. B uses this as an example of the many role models provided to women by the nuns. B also singles out the women in Aitape town who hold responsible positions within the Diocesan structure as well as
in private enterprise. The women in the Diocesan positions like hers, which cater
directly for women, provide an important source of information as well as support for
women.

The nuns also speak publicly against violence and abuse and every Thursday they
wear black badges condemning violence. This practice has spread amongst the
broader population of Aitape town and even men are seen wearing these badges on
Thursdays.

“You know you have equality when you can say no in the bedroom. I can say no to my
husband.”

She and the woman (case study D) who is the Woman’s Affairs Officer for the
Diocese spoke of organising a large workshop for men and women on reproductive
rights. “We have many men here in Aitape who are sensitive to gender issues. They
have been through the Family Life program and are very aware of the issues
surrounding reproduction and women.” B relates the trauma of many women brought
about initially by the loss of children (in some cases all their children) in the tsunami
and then compounded by the pressure from men to replace those lost children. Many
women have attempted to induce abortions, have attempted suicide and some have
succeeded. “They cannot face the thought of going through all that child birth and
hardship again.” In these circumstances Family Life (the program) has limited effect.

“Christianity has unified existing beliefs; a new name for the same God…The Church
is making Jesus a Papua New Guinean – gutpela konsep (this is a good thing). The
Church is being localised.”

B also says that the Church itself doesn’t really help women, but that it is the teaching
and the people like the nuns and many of the priests that make a difference. However
as B also points out many teachings and Bible texts can be used by men to suppress
women. Some men say things like (to their wives), “The bible says your body is mine
and mine is yours”, the inference being that the husband has power over the body of
his wife. “Men should not use the Bible like that. The Bible talks about empowerment
is for everyone. Women conduct services (Lotu) if there is no priest.” In these words
B is stating that women actually take the place of men in some Church liturgies
therefore showing that they are as capable as men.
The Church’s position regarding contraception, as expressed by B, “... shows no empathy for the plight of these women. The priests and the Bishops who preach these rules do not understand what a woman goes through. They don’t know what it does to a woman to have too many children.”

“Modernity has made men useless and this has made it difficult for women. Men have no roles or knowledge.”

B states that she has seen much violence in town where men have nothing to do.

“In my whole life I only saw my mother and father fight once. Only once. A woman’s role was to care and to feed while the man’s was to protect, build and be political. If a woman had a canoe and could go fishing she was empowered; she was important.”

Many taboos have been broken. There are still some places that women cannot go, but mostly they are free to move around unlike they were before. This is because of many things but the Church has had a lot to do with these changes because they have a lot to do with attitude and fear of change. The Church has encouraged men and women to become closer together in their day to day lives by working together and accepting one another. Most of these changes have occurred in the towns. In the bush change is a lot slower.

“I am empowered. I have my job and my income. I drive a car - I’m in control. I’m licensed to drive. I am free to move around. I can make choices.”

“Empowerment is a long, long process. Even to have a little is better (than nothing). If we start to measure and value women’s work – gardening, caring. These are never measured or valued. Things are changing for women. Women are working and taking responsibility for families and school fees. Women are catechists21, they are in sport and parliament and secretaries of government departments. Men are staying at home and minding the children.”

---

21 Catechists are trained lay preachers in the Catholic Church. Many are responsible for the spiritual and pastoral care of whole or part parishes. They officiate at *Lotu* services where priests are not available.
Summary

B credits the Catholic Church with opening the doors to education for girls and women in all levels and forms. The nuns, she claims, made this possible by providing an environment into which men could entrust their daughters. The nuns have also been role models for women and have acted as spokespersons for women’s causes such as violence and lack of respect for women in the modern era. Many men have supported the nuns in this work and subsequently have supported women in general. The role of other women in positions of responsibility is also singled out by B as a significant factor in alerting men to the fact that women are capable of performing important and valuable roles outside of the home.

Equality and reproductive rights are very important issues for B. She says that although the Family Life program helps in this area, it is not enough. She cites the case of the children lost in the 1998 tsunami and the pressure brought to bear upon women by their husbands to replace children lost in the tsunami. B says that, “You know you are equal when you can say no in the bedroom.” On this issue she says that the Church does not help women. The Church’s stance on contraception and limited family planning as well as its patriarchal structure, works against women and their reproductive rights. Even the Bible is at times used by men to justify their demands over the bodies of women.

The unifying nature of Christianity and the localisation of the Church is highlighted by B as a good thing as is the incorporation of women into the running of services and liturgies in the role of catechists. This can only raise the status of ordinary women within their communities. The changing attitudes of men and women and the breaking of taboos which often restricted the freedom of movement of women are breaking down and this has a lot to do with the teachings of the Church and the fact that works and activities associated with the Church are seen as acceptable and non threatening. This has made life a lot easier for many women.

B’s description of empowerment for women in the past and for those in the present are remarkably similar; to be in control of their lives and to be able to make choices.
6.2.3 Case Study C

C was born and raised in a coastal village to the west of Aitape. She attended the Catholic Mission school there during her primary school years and then attended high school in Aitape. C is married to a man who is a qualified teacher and also a nurse. C herself is a registered nurse and holds a very senior position in the Diocesan health service. Her husband is not from Aitape having met C at Goroka Nursing College. It is C who has the good job in Aitape and her husband is to some degree dependant upon her. She and her husband have three children.

“The attitude of parents is very important to how your life might turn out.”

“My daddy’s mother was a catechist from Wabag. My family knew that women could do things as well as men. My daddy encouraged me when I was a young girl. He had the example of his mummy. The Church gave many women an opportunity. The Church sponsored many young women to become nurses. The Church sponsored me. Most nurses are women and men here (at the health centre) have a lot of respect for the women. I think all the health centres are run by women in the Diocese of Aitape. Woman are more capable than men. They are more loyal, harder working and honest.”

The nuns run many vocational schools and courses for girls and women. The women learn skills like sewing and they then use these to work for themselves. These schools and courses also give women a chance to move around and meet and to discuss. It helps people organise themselves into groups to get things done.

“Working with people as a nurse and as a leader in the Church helped me with confidence. It made me aware of women’s problems such as domestic violence and I became a leader.”

“I joined the women’s council. With my work as a nurse I got around and combined my work (as a nurse) with work with the LLG (Local Level Government) members in working for better relations between men and women. My husband and I together take the message to people that men and women are equal in marriage and equal in life. We run marriage and women’s health courses with the Family Life program. At these courses both men and women attend.”
“The Church is a unifying influence, especially in the village.”

Everyone in the Church does not necessarily have the same attitude. “At Saint Joachim’s Church on Sunday eight men including the priest are involved in the serving of mass. Not one woman. At Saint Francis’ it is exactly the opposite. We go to Saint Francis’. (D) is there also; women are doing it. Women at Saint Francis’ are from the villages across the river; the wives of labourers. They are all here and they participate. Reading in Lotu gives women an opportunity to show what they can do. Educated women assist the uneducated. We are all the same. We make an effort to include the men, to get them involved. Women are sitting with the men on the right hand side.”

“Village women adhere to culture more (than town women); work, bear and rear children, take orders. We (working town women) are role models for them.”

The large crowd at the International Women’s Day march was made up of both village and town women. “Village women told me that the dramas and speeches (centred around polygamy, rape and violence) were very good. The men took notice. This was all the work of women and organised by D with help from women like myself. It was a wonderful day for women of Aitape.”

Summary

C sees her role as an educated, working woman as an opportunity to assist women who are less well educated than herself and are lacking in opportunity. She uses her role as a nurse to educate and to influence both men and women at the local village level and also at the policy level of local level government. She also says that her efforts to change things for women need to be done with the support of other women and men. She cites her husband as a co-worker.

C’s distinction between village and town women in relation to culture indicates that she is aware of the importance of a woman’s social environment to how a woman conducts her life. That is, life for a woman in the village is closer to a traditional Melanesian cultural life than life for a woman living in Aitape town.

C also recognises the Church as a provider of opportunity and a unifying influence. However she recognises that within the Church there are variations according to the
individuals involved at the time. Her comparison of the involvement of women between Saint Joachim’s and Saint Francis’ Churches highlights this.

6.2.4 Case Study D

D is a single mother with a teenage daughter. She was born and educated in Aitape town but like most Papua New Guineans, she relates to the area of her heritage as her ‘aspers’\(^{22}\), in this case a village in the mountains to the south west of Aitape town. D is the Diocese of Aitape Diocesan Catholic Women’s Coordinator as well as the Diocesan Peace and Justice Officer. The first position involves working closely with the women of the Diocese to address issues affecting women, or issues raised by women and to educate and empower women by making them aware of their rights, as well as assisting women to cope with their role in an ever changing socio-economic environment. The title Peace and Justice Officer means that she is the Diocesan representative to Caritas (Commission for Peace and Justice), which is a development and relief organization of the Catholic Church. D represents the Diocese of Aitape at the Papua New Guinea national level of Caritas.\(^{23}\)

“We work with all the community not just women. We need to help people cope with the changes.”

D cites the issue of Bride Price to highlight how societies have changed. “Traditionally it was the exchanges between two families; recognising an agreement and union. Any problems in the marriage involved more than just two people. Now with Bride Price being merely a money payment, no one but the married couple have a vested interest in the marriage. It also can prevent marriages if the price is too high. The new attitude also leads many men to see their wife as a possession that they have bought and now own.”

D works with local women’s groups and other groups to organise workshops and seminars to help communities cope with changes and to raise awareness of social issues affecting all community members. D is very concerned about the changes in the

\(^{22}\)Papua New Guineans will describe themselves as being from a particular place even though in some instances they may never have actually been there. Their place of origin or ‘aspers’ is where their ancestors are from; it is where their land is.

\(^{23}\)Caritas is a Catholic Non-government Organisation (NGO) concerned with development, relief and peace and reconciliation among indigenous communities. It an international NGO and Caritas PNG is headquartered in Port Moresby and each of the Catholic Diocese in PNG has a representative to Caritas.
behaviour of young people especially young men. With the changing roles of men in modern society from one of protector to one of often-idle observer, and lack of employment, resentment amongst many young men is on the rise. D sees this in the priority given to hard working daughters in relation to food by appreciative parents, whereas once the men would have always had first priority. To D this is an indication of a deeper problem of disaffectedness amongst young men that is leading to a less safe environment for all in the community.

“There are many changes taking place in our communities, some are good and others not so good.”

Here at the Diocese Office there are people like you, whiteskins, who don’t have the same cultural laws as us and so people accept that here some laws don’t apply. Like the law that says that a woman should not be physically above a man. Here with a two storey building both men and women are up and down I think this is good as it helps people see that men and women can be equal.

D is certain things are better now for women than they used to be. We (women) have a good chance of going to school and of organising groups. Before women spent a lot of their time on their own in the garden or the house in the village. If we measured how many girls are enrolled in schools and vocational schools, and how many women go to a health centre to have babies you would see that things are better now. Numbers of women in parliament or as managers etc (UNDP indicators) are not really relevant to most women in the bush. Here at the Diocese we have a woman manager who manages men and women’s daily work programs. These measures are more relevant to someone like her or myself.

“Men try to leave women out. They make decisions without asking women what they think.”

In 1994 when a Malaysian logging company came and made agreements with men to do logging, village women asked me to organise an information meeting. “Women realised that they needed to find out about the consequences of logging. Women are closer to the environment. We are in it every day in the gardens and rivers.” From a

---

24 Indicators such as Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)
big meeting of village women representatives we formed a committee and sent letters to politicians, even the Prime Minister. We got people with knowledge to come and speak. We campaigned and the logging (clear felling) is now stopped. Even the men can see the damage that was done in the time it operated. The men could only see the money.

“Let me tell you a little story. In June I went to Rome for a conference. We were discussing the role and participation of women in Caritas; the structure and network. How could we improve the gender equality in policy and decision making in Caritas?”

There were women from all over the world. I represented the women of the Oceania Region. We found there is a lack of women in policy and decision making positions. At the grassroots level women are the ones involved. The top positions are filled by priests and religious; not the laity, men or women. A woman is director of Caritas New Zealand; that is something.

“My own experience has empowered me. I can stand up and speak.”

“I have told men to shut up. Women generally cannot say this.” I am a role model. Men have said to me, “if you can do this my wife could do it.” Women approach me, like this morning in the market; they have land and want me to help them with a project.

“Women used to be recognised for their knowledge and skills. We (women) need to grasp opportunities; we need to do it ourselves.”

“Most changes in women is through the Religious. The changes in men’s attitudes towards women for the better are due to religion.”

We still have a lot of prejudice though within the clergy. They live on their own and they don’t learn or understand how ordinary people live. The Church needs the awareness of women. What role can the women play in developing the Church?

Summary

D’s position as the Catholic Women’s Coordinator of the Diocese of Aitape is a recognition by the Diocese of Aitape that there needs to be particular attention given

25 Religious being the priests, nuns and brothers of the various religious orders within the Church and that are represented within the Diocese of Aitape.
to the issues of women as a group within the changing socio-economic environment of modern Papua New Guinea.

The examples cited by D of her work are very much across the empowerment continuum; from individual consciousness when working at the village level to political activity in the case of the logging activity. The educational role D plays in the awareness raising of issues with whole community groups is both individual and collective consciousness-raising (see Sepoe 2000; Rowlands 1995; Kabeer 1999; Afshar 1998; Batliwala 1993).

D also highlights the changing nature of society and the need to address the resulting issues, and that the Church is very much at the heart of life in the Diocese of Aitape and although responsible for many positive things, it still needs to look at its own structures and attitudes in relation to ordinary people and women in particular. Gender mainstreaming within the institution of the Catholic Church would not appear to be happening according to D’s views regarding decision and policymaking within the Church and associated organizations such as Caritas.

6.2.5 Case Study E

E was born in Aitape town where her father worked for the Diocese of Aitape and as such lived in a house owned by the Diocese. E still lives in this house although her parents have returned to the village since her father retired many years ago. She attended school at both primary and secondary level in Aitape and has for many years worked in a number of important senior administrative positions for the Diocesan administration. E is married and has three children having lost her eldest child in the tsunami of 1998. E’s husband spends most of his time in Port Moresby on business matters and so E is for a greater part of her time, effectively a single mother in Aitape although she regularly spends extended periods of time in her parent’s village. E at one point joined her husband in Port Moresby but decided to return to Aitape for her own and her children’s better life.

E believes that education is the key to equality between men and women. She cites her own situation and says that had she not received the education that she did, she could not live the life she now does and look after her children and her parents the way she
can. E had a lot of family support from an early age from her parents, especially her father who encouraged her to go to school. She believes that his exposure to Christian teaching made him more aware of the needs of women than would otherwise have been the case.

“It’s men who have problems in relationships.”
E says that many men find it difficult to accept that a woman might be equal to them. If a woman has a job and is earning an income and her husband has no job and no income, this can create trouble for the family.

“(in the Assembly of God Church) The spirit is more inclusive of women.”
I have left the Catholic Church because although it teaches equality between men and women, it does not practice it. Look how the priests are always in charge of decisions. Women, especially the nuns have a lot of knowledge that is ignored by the Church. The priests have their job because they are priests and nobody else can do it because they are not priests. Only men can be priests.

I feel a lot more welcome at the Assembly of God (AOG) Church. The emphasis is more on the relationship between me and God rather than me the Church and God. Yes the Catholic Church has done a lot for the people of Aitape and without it the people in the bush especially would have no schools or haus siks (house sick; aid posts/clinics).

I am able to make a choice between the lotus (denominations) and I have chosen the AOG because “the Holy Spirit gives me strength to stand up and preach in the church or in the street. When I return to the village I also make choices. I usually choose to be a village women like my mother, it’s different to my life in the village and I enjoy the change.”

Summary
E acknowledges that the Catholic Church has provided the opportunity for people and women in particular to become self reliant as in her own situation. She has demonstrated clearly that she recognises that there are choices to be made in life and she herself has made choices (Afshar 1998; Kabeer 1999; Rowlands 1995, 1997). E
clearly demonstrates a degree of empowerment and independence that many women in the Diocese of Aitape do not outwardly demonstrate.

6.2.6 Case Study F

F’s asples (place of origin) is a village to the South West of Aitape in the mountainous bush. Her father was the first catechist with the Catholic Church in that area of the Diocese in the years of WWII and afterwards. He met and married F’s mother in Aitape town which is where F grew up. F did not attend high school and has continued her schooling as an adult via correspondence. As a young woman F decided she wanted to become a nun. She is a member of the Handmaidens of the Lord order of nuns which was founded in Papua New Guinea in 1918. The order has a total membership of only 55 and F is the only member of this order in Aitape Diocese. F has a sister who is also a nun; a FMIC (Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception) nun who is in the convent in Aitape. For four years F, along with a priest, ran the Saint Martin Diocesan Pastoral Centre. This centre provides group and family accommodation for people from across the Diocese who come to Aitape to attend courses ranging from courses for catechists, prayer leaders26, various interest/demographic groups such as youth, and for families and young married couples.

“When I saw women in the village treated as second class, doing all the hard work and men just sitting I thought, this is ridiculous.”

My parents were very happy for me to become a nun. My daddy wanted no bride price for me. My daddy never treated my mother like she was not equal to him. My daddy being a catechist and my mother being very religious probably helped me to decide to become a nun. “As a religious nun I am treated differently to village women” (McNamara 1996).

“I see it as my responsibility to help women come out of themselves.”

People take notice of me because I am a nun. Too many men see women as bride price; they are objects with a value. During my four years at the Pastoral Centre men and women learned a lot about being equal. I think my work there was a success.

---

26 Prayer leaders are persons with some basic scriptural training who then conduct prayer meetings for communities where there is no priest or catechist available.
“Men seek power but women consider others when making decisions.”

In Papua New Guinea there are too few women in politics. We need women in politics to work alongside the men. Men also use custom to exert power. Many village men will not eat food from a woman who is having her monthly period. This should change. My daddy did not practice this. He once punished my brothers for treating me and my sisters in this way. He told them that we are all equal and he would not allow them to treat us in that way.

F says that D (case study D) is also a role model for both women and men. She says that men respect D for who she is and what she does for both men and women.

“If I was not a nun I believe I would still think the way I do now. But my life and work is easier as a nun.”

I get treated differently to village women. There are many priests who are trying to bring women into the Church alongside the men. The older priests are not so much but many of the younger priests are. I would not wish to be a priest even if it was possible. I am a woman and a woman’s role is to be amongst people. We nuns have a role to play in bringing men and women together in their lives as partners not as separate people with one more important than the other.

Summary

F clearly sees the life of a nun as being of greater personal satisfaction than would otherwise be the case in that it enables her to have an influence in her work with people. Joining the religious order enables her to be free of the constraints and burdens endured by ordinary non-religious women, especially village women (McNamara 1996). This imposes on her a responsibility to help women help themselves for the betterment of women and their relationships with men.

F also indicates that the religious beliefs of her parents and in particular her father’s role as a catechist had a big influence upon her and upon their attitudes toward her as an individual person rather than the daughter of Papua New Guinean parents which could mean being worth money in terms of bride price, which she says her father never expected for her.
F accuses many village men of using culture as an excuse for subjugating women and calls for more women to become involved in politics to work alongside men in decision-making. She also sees the Church as becoming more inclusive of women, especially amongst the younger priests.

6.2.7 Case Study G

G was born and raised in a coastal village west of Aitape town. She attended school at the Catholic Mission school and was taught by the nuns. As a young woman she did not attend high school but lived with her sister and brother-in-law and cared for their children as both her sister and brother-in-law had paid employment. After nine years of this life G joined the novitiate of the Presentation Sisters which was the order of nuns who had taught her and still had a convent in her village. She is now a fully confirmed member of that order of nuns and is in charge of the new aspirants to that order in their first year at the convent.

“I was taught by the nuns. I saw their work and the way they lived. The way nuns could move around and work with people; that’s what I wanted to do.”

My culture restricts women; it is difficult and strict. To become a nun, to not get married was not easy; it was challenging. I know some women who have tried but have gone home and got married. Women are supposed to get married and raise children. Nuns become leaders and role models (McNamara 1996). I say to men, “Why are you hanging on to your culture? Help the women. Share the work with the women.” It was to do with scrapping sago27; this is women’s work. This really challenged them (men). They (men) said it’s their job (women). I said, “No! No! It’s about time you changed. It’s men’s and women’s job. Don’t cling to your culture.”

Men at first would not accept communion from me as I might have been menstruating at that time. Now they don’t even think about it and just accept the Eucharist from me. Because I am a nun they will accept that. Women are also in the police and even the army is recruiting women.

27 Sago (saksak in Pigin) is a starchy food derived from the pith of the sago palm. It is a food staple with cultural significance and its processing is very gendered even though the gendered roles do vary from place to place. Scrapping sago is the term used for the preparation of sago.
The ‘say no to violence’ days were started by nuns and Church women. Men are now getting involved. The Church influence on the lives of the people is very great. The Family Life program has made an enormous impact upon the relationships between men and women.

“The Church provides an opportunity for women to use their skills.”

Women can see themselves as a woman and not just a beast of burden and procreation. Women could not speak Pidgin. The Church brought Pidgin and women learned it. The same applies to English. Nuns learn English and they escape the Bride Price. Women get together and are involved in Lotu.

“The Church is always there.”

After the tsunami the Church kept coming. The government didn’t come for long.

Summary

G very clearly states that life as a nun is much more favourable to what her life might otherwise be although it was not an easy decision to forsake the traditional life as Melanesian woman for the life of a nun. Being a nun has enabled her to challenge both men and women in their roles to make changes for the good of their relationships. When G states that the Church allows women to use their skills, she is referring to all women and not only the nuns, by providing them with the means of communication (language) and opportunities centred around Church activities such as women’s groups and participating in liturgy.

G also refers to the importance of gender relationships within the community and cites some examples of how she has personally issued challenges to men to work to improve these.

6.2.8 Case study H

H was raised in a coastal village outside of the Diocese of Aitape but attended high school in Aitape where she was taught by nuns of the order of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception (FMIC). As an infant an aunt requested that she be allowed to raise H and subsequently when she joined the convent her aunt
demanded a bride price\footnote{Bride Price is the traditional payment made by a groom’s family to the family of the bride. The way in which this practice is played out and the form of payment varied (and still does) from region to region and the process played an important role in cementing relationships between disparate and sometimes warring groups. These days Bride Price is often demanded as a cash (Kina) payment rather than the traditional forms of payment which may have included pigs, shell money and other household items.}, a demand met by H’s parents. By entering the convent H also deprived her community of an exchange of brides. According to H in her language group, when a bride leaves her village to live in her husband’s village, another woman from the groom’s village, often a sister of the groom, comes to the bride’s village and marries a man, often the bride’s brother. If the girl child being exchanged for the bride is too young for marriage at the time, an arrangement is made for the exchange to be completed when she is old enough. To join the convent required strong support from community members as many traditions were being dispensed with. H’s parents were very supportive of her desire to become a nun.

“It is a lot easier for women whose parents have been educated and who also believe that men and women are equal.”

H says that after attending primary school she could have expected to have her life restricted to that of a traditional village woman had it not been for her father. Her father supported her wish to attend high school despite opposition from other family members who held that young women should stay at home. H attributes her father’s attitude to, and support for her education to his belief in equality of men and women in the eyes of God. H claims that her father’s view is not necessarily widely held but is nevertheless more prevalent than it used to be. This shift in view she says is very much the result of education which is mostly provided by the Church, and to Church teaching that men and women are equal. However, she also acknowledges that the male clergy within the Church do not necessarily always adhere to the view that men and women are equal within the Church. “Yu meri nating” (you are a nobody woman) she says is a common attitude expressed by priests towards nuns. Such an expression of differential status within the Church of men and women might be more indicative of patriarchy within the Church rather than the influence of the Church upon the laity that adhere to the Church’s teaching.

“When a family gives their daughter to the sisters it is because they respect the sisters and the work they do. A women has more respect because she is a nun than she would
have as an ordinary woman. In traditional culture women push themselves back......they have certain responsibilities and they must fulfil these”.

H says that by becoming a nun a woman holds a position of respect without the predetermined cultural constraints upon her. The Church, although in many ways mirroring some traditional practices and institutions (as discussed earlier), does not have the prescribed behavioural expectations for nuns that still may exist for many women. Nuns are more able to be outspoken in public and tackle issues that affect women without the threat of retribution from an angry husband. H cites examples of nuns from her own order providing counselling to women who are victims of violence, and the challenge that they put to the perpetrators of that violence by confronting them with what they have done. Every Thursday each nun from the FMIC convent in Aitape wears a black badge condemning domestic violence. This practice has spread to other women and even some men. This act of political activism has been made possible by the nuns.

“Church committees give women a chance to exert some political influence......Women should be invited onto committees. Only one woman is on the Bishop’s ordination committee......When ordinary women see other women on committees and making decisions it gives them confidence that they can do it.”

H sees women’s groups as a playing a vital role in the empowerment of women. Women have a contribution to make to the community. Even if women are reluctant to speak out when on a committee, at least they are privy to the thoughts and deliberations of the committee and are able to convey the information they have gathered to other women thus keeping women informed about what is being considered and decided, often on their behalf. Many women’s groups initially set up by the nuns are now run by the women themselves. They have a president, executive and sometimes request support from the nuns. These committees provide the opportunity for women to develop a collective empowerment with the potential to exert political influence. The solidarity behind the message coming from the women’s group is more powerful than a single voice. The exchange of views and the discovery of their rights has been a very empowering aspect of these women’s groups. The patronage of the groups by the nuns is very important as “men have a lot of respect for the nuns and what they say to women.”
“The Church has influenced the lives of many women. Women have come out of themselves because of the nuns; in their own groups, in their marriages, in their own lives.”

H says that the pastoral work of the nuns, listening to people’s problems and providing moral support to families, has made real improvements to the quality of family life, especially for women and children.

“Women get skilled as nuns. Many become nurses, teachers and their income supports the (convent) community. They probably would never have got these skills if they had not become a nun. ...Some nuns leave the order and return to the village. They take their skills and their strength and confidence with them. This is a very important part of our mission as nuns.”

H explained that before a woman becomes a nun she passes through a lengthy novitiate so that she is sure that the life of a nun is what she wants. When a nun leaves the order for a non-religious life it is generally with the blessing of her ‘sisters’. According to H nuns see their role as improving the quality of life of all in the community be it directly or indirectly. In many respects the role of the convent in the Diocese of Aitape today is not different to that of convents and congregations of women in the early Church. They can be a refuge from the drudgery of life for a woman in marriage and normal village life. Opportunities of fulfilment through education and the solidarity and strength derived from their numbers can be very appealing to young women (McNamara 1996).

“Initially the biggest contribution that the Church made to the lives of the people through the nuns was education and health care. Then came the pastoral care work. This work along with the Family Life courses that the nuns started helped men to show a new respect for women as people and not just as mothers of their children. This also helped women to value their own lives beyond that of a wife and mother.”

H attributes her choice to become a nun to the Church and in particular the nuns. Her education, her exposure to other women who lived a life other than that of a village wife and mother, and her family support made her aware that there were other lifestyles to be lived. She became aware of alternatives and choices and she had the knowledge, strength and support to make a choice.
Summary

H has highlighted her belief that it was as a result of the Church and its teaching of equality between men and women that her father was prompted to support her decision to become a nun even in the face of opposition from his community. She also states that due to the education given to her by the Church and the nuns in particular, she was aware of other options in life other than that experienced by her mother. It was the education and the Church that gave her the confidence to make her choice. The awareness of choices and the ability to make choices is the beginning of the empowerment process (Afshar 1998).

H also outlines the significant role nuns play in the lives of people, particularly in the lives of women. How nuns have in many ways paved the way for women in general by demonstrating women’s abilities and by providing a safe, secure and supportive environment in which women can transform their life from that predetermined by culture to one over which they have significant control. That some women leave the order and become mothers and members of the broader community is seen as a positive contribution to the mainstream of women in the Diocese of Aitape. That women find strength in women’s groups and general communion is significant in attaining a degree of communal and political empowerment. (McNamara 1996; Scheyvens 1995).

An important point made by H is that men within the Church, in particular some priests, still see women as being of less importance than men. Although she does not say it explicitly, H seems to infer that women and nuns in particular are given a higher status by the laity of the Church than they are by the men who occupy the bulk of official positions within the Church structure and hierarchy.

6.3 Focus Groups

The groups of women I used for focus groups were pre-existing Church related women’s groups. The groups met regularly, usually monthly, and attendance at meetings was apparently relatively stable in numbers, but not always consistent as to who attends. Most of the women are illiterate, few having had any schooling, but all spoke Pidgin. All of the women are married village women ranging in age from
around late 20s to late 50s. Younger women are generally in school, at the vocational school, gardening or caring for other family members. At each of these meetings a nun also attended but I have not included her in either the numbers or as part of the interview group.

In outlining and summarising the responses from these meetings I have not differentiated between the groups as the responses were in the main very similar in their meaning although the wording may have varied, nor have I tried to give a verbatim narrative. The discussion at these meetings was in Pidgin which can be a very verbose and repetitive language and many words are often spoken in saying the same thing a number of times in slightly varying ways, with the meaning not changing (see Appendix 2). The notes taken at these meetings were in English, translated at the time they were written.

What has the Church done for women?

Socially:

Because of the Church we have groups like this. We have members in groups from all over the parish as long as the women can get to the meeting. This means that we can go to other villages and talk to other women.

When we go to Lotu people from all the villages come.

We know more people and we see them often. If we did not have Lotu and our groups we might not meet all these people or we would only see them at sing sings or funerals and they are not as often as our meetings.

We sing hymns that we all know so we all join in.

We don’t know the songs of the other villages, we only know our own Tok Ples songs so we cannot all sing together.

The hymns are in Pidgin so we all know them.

The Bible is also in Pidgin so we can read this in Lotu and at our meetings.

29 Most village people are unaware of their age or year of birth. There are no records of births and deaths unless the child is born at a medical centre. A child born at a centre is given a record book with birth details in it and this is then kept by the parents as a medical record for the child to be used throughout the child’s life. Often they are not available at the centre or a payment is required and parents do not have the money. Books are also regularly lost.

30 Tok Ples is the language of a particular place; the local language. In the Diocese of Aitape there are at least 30 separate language groups.
Physically:
The Church has not really done much for women physically. Women do all the work in the garden and carry the water and scrape the sak sak. The men do nothing or they talk. At Wasisi\(^{31}\) it is men who get paid to cut the grass at the mission. But women cut the grass in the garden and the village and we don’t get paid.

The *haus sik* (aid post/health centre) at Rubi (Wasisi) is closer than Nuku (government district centre) so it is not as far to walk. The nurses at Rubi are good and all live at the *haus sik* so there is always someone there to help when people are sick. The Church *haus siks* always have medicine but the government *haus siks* never have any. The APOs (government Aid Post Officer) do not do their job. Sometimes they don’t get paid and so they don’t work. We go to Rubi, there is always a nurse there.

Emotionally:
When you pray it makes you feel better. The nuns are always helpful. Even when the priest is not here the nuns always help. When someone is sick or just too old the nuns come to see them. When women are treated badly by their men the nuns help those women. They tell the men that they should not treat the women like that. Some women have stayed with the nuns until her husband said he would not punish her if she came back to the house.

How different are your lives from the lives of your mothers? Our mothers did all the work like we do. We do the garden and the sak sak just like they did. The *haus sik* is there now and it is better. Before many more women died in the village because there was no nurse.

\(^{31}\) Wasisi is a mission station and a parish in the Diocese of Aitape.
We can go places other than the garden. My mother only went to the garden. Sometimes she had no one to talk to except me and my sisters.

Before most women did not know anything about family planning. Now many women have learned about family planning. If the men listen to the women it would be good but most men don’t care.

Some of us have gone to school and can read.

Are relationships between men and women different now than before? If yes are they better or worse?

Some men help women but most men expect women to do all the hard work.

Men and women mix together more than before. At Lotu and at the schools men and women work together.

Before, the men only wanted women for sex and for food. Now men and women do things together like at the market the men sometimes help the women.

Some men look after the babies and the young children.

Have any of you been to a Family Life program?

Around 30% of the women had participated in a Family Life program. Some had done a part of the program - the family planning (around 50%).

What difference has it (Family Life) made to your relationship with your husband? Other family members?

It helps the married couples (husband and wife) understand each other better.

Men learn to accept that women have a right to be treated well.

Men and women are equal. God made both men and women to be equal; to be partners.

Men have more respect for women.

My husband sits with me in the church now, in the centre. Before he used to sit over with all the men.

When I am too tired to go to the garden or too tired to do all the work in the garden my husband does not get angry with me.

My husband’s first wife died because she had too many children. Since we learned the ‘ovulation method’ he understands that sometimes we cannot have sex. He does not get angry when I say I don’t want to have another baby yet.
Sometimes my husband comes to the garden with me and helps to carry things and the children when they get tired.

What effect do nuns have on the community in which you live?
The nuns help women to organise these groups. They show us how to do things like writing to the member of parliament about the school teachers not getting their pay so they don’t come to school and so the children cannot go to school.
The nuns support us to speak up for ourselves against the men. When the men get jealous because we have our women’s group they get angry. We tell them that you can organise your own group if you want to.
The nuns help the youth. They run courses for the youth with the boys and the girls.
The girls vocational school was set up by the nuns and the nuns still run it.
The sisters visit all the villages. They walk a long way to see the old people and the sick. This shows that they care about the people.

What do you get from being a member of the group?
When we have our meetings I always come because we always have a good time.
Since I started coming to the meetings I have learned to write my name.
I know that I have rights and that women are equal to men.
After I had been coming to the Legion of Mary I gained confidence and wanted to have more to do with the Church so I became a prayer leader. Now I conduct and lead prayer meetings in my village and I sometimes give out communion at Lotu.
We get support from other women. When you have a problem it is good to know that you are not the only one with that problem even if you cannot fix it.
I represented the Legion of Mary at a conference of the Legion in Aitape. I had to report on all the things that we do here in Wasisi Parish. I had to represent all the Legion women from the Parish.

What does the group do?
The women’s group does many things. It gives women a chance to discuss things without the interference of men.
We have organised fund raising activities to raise funds to buy things for the church like holy pictures. We have raised money for the haus sik and for the school. We make things and sell them at the market.

The nuns got us a bale of second hand clothes which we sold to raise money for the school.

Women from the group visit sick people in the village and help them with food for their families. If the mother is sick she needs help if she cannot go to the garden.

We support women who have been beaten by their husband. Sometimes we have supported women in court (Village court).

Sometimes with the help of the youth group we have organised working groups to cut grass and clean the mission station.

The women’s group also makes suggestions to the LLG (Local Level Government) for projects in the community.

Once we organised a protest march to Nuku. We joined up with women from other parishes, Seim, Wati and Nuku to march to the District Office in Nuku where we presented a petition to the Member and the District Manager. The petition was for the government to pay the wages of the nurses in the haus sik and to supply medicine to the haus sik. The nurses had not been paid for six months and there was no medicine.

There were many women and the Member and the District manager were a bit afraid. The sisters helped us organise it. They used the radio in the Haus Father (priest’s house) to organise with the other parishes.

**What has the group achieved?**

The women’s group helps to give women confidence.

We have bought things for the school and the haus sik.

We (Legion of Mary) organise Lotus for special womens days.

We have helped many village women when they are sick or when their children are sick or their husband dies.

**What else could the Church do for women?**

*The Church could employ more women (in the bush). The men get money for doing work but women don’t get anything.*

*The Church should give more projects for people to earn money; like chickens.*
Summary

From the above responses, which are themselves a condensed account, the village women of the focus groups express throughout a positive outcome for themselves as individuals and collectively as women from their membership of a women’s group (see Scheyvens 1995; Sepoe 2000). The responses also reveal that it is the auspices of the Church and the nuns that make the formation and subsequent membership of these groups possible.

In the responses there are expressions of individual and collective consciousness raising and real empowerment; from writing one’s name to input into LLG policy and projects. The political activism demonstrated by the protest march shows how the strength in numbers that women’s groups can bring to remote and often otherwise isolated women is a real benefit of those groups and a key element in the empowering process for women. The improved freedom of association, and ability and freedom to travel is also demonstrated in the responses through the increased participation with women from outside of one’s immediate family, clan or village.

The ability to be a part of the organization of things that are important to women, as in the organization of appropriate *Lotu* (liturgy) for women, is also a demonstration of women making further choices. If it affects the person, the person ought to be able to have input. Such choices and inputs may not of themselves seem of any great significance to an outsider but in the context of one’s life and interests - in this case village women living a subsistence existence - it may be very significant; who can truly judge but the person concerned!

In Chapter 5 (5.1) I represented the various relationships within the diocese affecting women (Figure 5.1) with various headings. It is within the framework outlined in Figure 5.1 that I will now discuss the responses of the research participants.

### 6.4 Areas of Participation and Contact for Women and the Church

There are numerous ways in which women can involve themselves with the Church. Women can be passive recipients of the Church’s doctrine and practices by observing the rules of the Church and attending services, and be impacted directly or indirectly by living in an environment in which the Church plays a significant role in the lives of
the lay people. Women can alternatively choose to be active participants in the Church’s activities and structures. They can do this by being a member of women’s groups formed under the auspices and/or the banner of the Church or associated entity such as the Legion of Mary or Catholic Women’s group or Guild. Women can also become active members of the laity involved in the outward ministry of the Church by being Prayer Leaders who have had some basic training in the conduct of a prayer meeting and generally have a conferred authority from the local Church hierarchy to conduct prayer services on behalf of the local Church. Another way in which women can be actively involved in the Church’s functions is to become a Catechist. This involves a degree of formal training in theology and scripture and the conduct of formal church services. A further way for a woman to be actively involved in the Church’s operation in a formal manner is to become a nun, or to become a member of a religious order which has the recognition of the Vatican as either Pontifical Rite\textsuperscript{32} or Diocesan Rite\textsuperscript{33}.

The two main groups of women of concern to this thesis are the religious nuns and the female laity although the male laity and religious are a constant reference as it is very much the relationship between men and women, be they of the laity or religious, that impacts upon the relative empowerment and/or disempowerment of women, in this case as they relate to the Church.

From the interviews with nuns and lay women who have become more formally involved with the Church than merely passive recipients, the general impression is one of very positive self fulfilment. These women expressed a great deal of satisfaction with their lives and they are observed by other women, as well as men, as being strong women worthy of respect.

\section*{6.5 Making Choices}

The ability to make choices has three interrelated dimensions according to Kabeer (1999).

\textsuperscript{32} A religious order established under the auspices of the Pope.
\textsuperscript{33} A religious order established under the auspices of a bishop.
1: Resources (pre-condition). An income, gained from employment that resulted from education is a resource endowment giving a predisposition to making choices (see section 6.8). The support of key players such as parents (see section 6.9) is also a pre-condition for choice making in the context of a young woman in a village in the Diocese of Aitape. The information gained through education, formal or informal, or by being present when the information is disseminated, such as at *Lotu*, provides knowledge of choices to be made.

2: Agency (process). To define goals or to set out preferences for one’s life or part of one’s life, for women, that involves a lifestyle or role outside of the status quo, is a major benefit which many women of the Diocese of Aitape have received as a result of the Church. The choice made by a woman can be facilitated within the institutions of the Church, such as religious orders. In the case of the nuns the novitiate and pre-novitiate process can enable the choice making to take place in an informed, supportive environment. Women’s groups play a similar role in supporting decision-making and acting on these decisions, be it collective or individual.

3: Achievements (outcomes). When women make a choice that results in an improvement in their quality of life e.g. improved health or education leading to perhaps income or status, it could be said that they have achieved. However, choices vary, as does the desire to make them. When G says, “To become a nun, to not get married was not easy; it was challenging”, it indicates she made what was for her a difficult choice. She could have chosen to get married and live a traditional life. This would have been a choice, but a choice without achievement as it would have been choosing to live a life she (G) had already determined was not a good life for her. Choices without achievement undermine a woman’s sense of self and/or self-confidence and could in fact be disempowering (Kabeer 1999).

The Church in the Diocese of Aitape has provided for women all three of Kabeer’s dimensions of choice; resources, agency and achievement. The life of most women in the Diocese of Aitape is spent in the physical environment of the village, the garden and the bush. In this environment women work hard and long for the sake of their families. The choices they make in day-to-day life are more often than not related to their day-to-day activities in their work routine and could be said to be choices.
affecting their practical needs. However, the choices affecting their membership of a
group, or regarding education, or the choice to take political action, or to become a
nun or other such life-changing action, are choices that affect a woman’s strategic
needs. These are choices that can affect positively or negatively the future life of
women as well as the woman making the choice, whereas the practical choice affects
the present. Kabeer (1999, p.447) says that decisions and choices that are made in
relation to addressing strategic needs are the decisions that demonstrate real
empowerment. Measurement of this empowerment is difficult and does not lend itself
to the subtle and private forms of empowerment experienced by women. Women may
enjoy privately the satisfaction that the decision they have taken is perhaps the first
time they have asserted themselves, or the changes in gender relationships that
perhaps reduce the anxiety felt by women in relation to the consequences of their
decision making (see Sepoe 2000; Kabeer 1999).

6.6 Spaces of specific identity for women within the Church

The Church in the Diocese of Aitape recognised in the early days of the diocese that
women’s needs and issues needed to be addressed and accommodated. The expatriate
Australian (hereafter referred to as X) nun interviewed specifically for this research,
who arrived with the first group of nuns to reside in the Diocese in 1949, and is still
working with the women there, told me, “(t)he Bishop invited us to come because he
could see the desperate plight of women here. We always put women first.” Indeed the
Diocese of Aitape was at one time referred to by some in the Papua New Guinea
Church hierarchy as the ‘petticoat diocese’ (personal communication with Fr. Greg
Bourke ofm, 1999), because it was seen by others within Papua New Guinea to be
doing a lot for women and it appeared as though women had some influence over
decision making and policy affecting the Diocese.

There are organizations, positions and roles within the church that are identified with
women and allow women to play a role, albeit a role that may be seen by some of the
male Church members as being tokenistic, or not as important as the roles that men
play. This point is highlighted by H’s comment that even some national priests (Papua
New Guinea nationals) have said to her, “yu meri nating”, a derogatory term
dismissing women (in this case nuns) as not being important.
Nevertheless, there are women and men who take the roles of women seriously and the discussion that follows looks at the implications of these organizations, positions and roles for the women of the Diocese of Aitape.

6.6.1 The Nuns
According to McNamara (1996), women in the early days of the Church played a very important pastoral and liturgical role equal to that of men. However, it became obvious that the responsibilities associated with motherhood and the general caring role of women made it more and more difficult for women to perform this role uninterrupted or to be meaningfully involved in political activity at the local or broader level in a society such as exists in Papua New Guinea (Sepoe 2000). Women then publicly forsook the role as mothers and carers and lived celibate lives to ensure they could continue their work and avoid the criticism from men that they should be at home and leave the religious life of the priest to men.

Being aware of choices and making a choice
In case studies F and G, becoming a nun was seen as the way to achieve this need to be free of the ties of normal womanhood to do the work that one wished to do. McNamara (1996) goes further and says that women even entered into syneisatic relationships and often cut their hair very short to appear more man-like. The nuns interviewed certainly did not indicate that they wished to be man-like or do the work of men but they did explicitly take the opportunity provided by the Church by way of the convent to avoid the constraints of motherhood. “I was taught by the nuns. I saw their work and the way they lived. The way nuns could move around and work with people; that’s what I wanted to do.” (G)

G states that, “to become a nun, to not get married was not easy.” For G to have the confidence to make this choice clearly did not come from being a nun as it pre-dated that outcome. As she says, however, the example set by the nuns and her observation of them helped her recognise that she could choose, then make the choice. At the same time it seems that for G there was no choice to be both a wife and mother and also do the communal things she wanted to do. F outlines a similar experience, where she

34 Syneisatic relationship: a married-like relationship with no sexual component.
found the general relationships between men and women and the division of labour in the village as, “(w)hen I saw women in the village treated as second class, doing all the hard work and men just sitting I thought, this is ridiculous.” (F)

All three nuns whose views are detailed in the case studies had the benefit of parents who were supportive of their decision to become nuns. Indeed, all three place great importance upon the fact that their fathers required no bride price for them. In these nun,s opinion this freed them from the sense of obligation to their families and also of any sense of guilt of not having fulfilled that obligation. In fact their fathers gave them the power to make an un-pressured choice; their fathers empowered them. That their fathers did this was made possible by, according to the nuns concerned, the religious beliefs and strong faith of their parents. In the words of H, “(i)t is a lot easier for women whose parents have been educated and who also believe that men and women are equal.”

According to X there is no doubt that many women want to join the convent to escape the life of the lay women. As X points out, “they see the young women here happy and healthy and they think, that’s what I want. But they must spend 12 months in a pre-postulate year and then 2 years in the novitiate before they are professed. They see that we work hard too. They sort themselves out. Many decide the life is not for them.”

The realisation that there are choices to be made and the process of making the choices is the beginning of the empowerment process (Afshar 1998).

**Education and example**

Those women who do become professed may work hard but they do gain many skills and from my observations the young nuns and the not so young nuns are the healthiest and happiest (if laughter is an indication) Melanesian women I have encountered.

“All women get skilled as nuns. Many become nurses, teachers and their income supports the (convent) community. They probably would never have got these skills if they had...

---

35 The two religious orders of nuns with novitiates in Aitape, Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception (FMIC) and the Presentation Sisters require families of women entering the convent to sign a document forgoing all claims to bride price or compensation for lost bride price before the woman is finally professed as a nun.
Some nuns leave the order and return to the village. They take their skills and their strength and confidence with them. This is a very important part of our mission as nuns.” (H)

There is a recognition of and a respect for the nuns by the broader population. This positive view of nuns in many instances may translate into a more positive view of women in general. The influence of the nuns, directly through their work with both women and men, and indirectly by their example, has had a positive effect on gender relations and women’s confidence in general. Although this is a difficult thing to measure, it is a generally heard observation. H expresses the same point in this way:

“Initially the biggest contribution that the Church made to the lives of the people through the nuns was education and health care. Then came the pastoral care work. This work along with the Family Life courses that the nuns started helped men to show a new respect for women as people and not just as mothers of their children. This also helped women to value their own lives beyond that of a wife and mother.”

X explained that in the very early days of the nuns’ presence in the Diocese of Aitape young women lived in a boarding school near the convent where they learned Pigin, hygiene and nutrition before they went on to formal school. Many of the young men, teachers and government workers came to ‘our’ girls looking for wives because they could see that these girls were different. “We have been criticised for ‘domesticating’ the local women. But we were just teaching them to be healthy. The cooking we did with them was all about hygiene. I have never known a nun to dress a woman; who wanted or told women to cover up…. In the bush where there had been no missionaries before us the people saw us nuns as teachers and nurses and not as religious missionaries. We certainly taught prayers and the sacraments, but the example was far greater than the preaching. … you can’t just preach something; you have to be it.”

The effect of this ‘example’ by the nuns is still present today, especially in the remote bush areas away from the coast. The nuns are seen as role models for women by women themselves. Women who may not wish to be nuns themselves often still aspire to be like them. They are also seen to be ‘different’ as highlighted by this anecdote told by the now Bishop of the Diocese of Aitape (then Fr. Austen Crapp, ofm, 1994).
During a session explaining the ovulation method of birth control as part of a Family Life program, a woman asked the nun who was giving the instruction, “just tell us what you nuns do to stop having children.” Although this indicates a lack of understanding by the woman concerned of the life of a nun, it also indicates that the nuns are seen to have knowledge and skills beyond those of ordinary lay women.

“When a family gives their daughter to the sisters it is because they respect the sisters and the work they do. A woman has more respect as a nun than she would have as an ordinary woman. In traditional culture women push themselves back……they have certain responsibilities and they must fulfil these” (H).

The education of people, whether formal or informal, is about their learning and their participation. The skills to do things such as to cook or sew, the skills to participate such as language and confidence, and the knowledge that a person is seen to hold, can bring respect and standing for a person, male or female. The schools, the courses, the commitment to the people and the example given by the nuns have enabled the people to learn and have given them choices to make between status quo or new ways and new attitudes and new bases for relationships.

**Role models and dispelling stereotypes**

The interaction of the nuns with the people in the communities in health, education and general pastoral care has had an impact upon both the women and the men of the Diocese. The role model aspect and the example and the revelation of what women are capable of achieving, have been commented upon. The story (recounted earlier) of the young girl at a high school in the bush who wanted to be a nurse, until one day an African American Presentation nun who is a doctor came to the local haus sik demonstrates this phenomenon. Until that day the young women had believed that only men were doctors and women were nurses. She changed her personal goal from nurse to doctor, which she achieved. She became the chief medical officer at a provincial hospital (personal communication with Franciscan Br. Gary Hill, Health Extension Officer, Nuku Haus Sik, 1995). This example is obviously not the norm but giving power to women to assist themselves and to raise their own and their men’s awareness of how to improve their lives is an explicit goal of the nuns. By giving them the language skills to participate beyond their traditional roles, and new skills for
which they can be recognised by their peers, husbands, brothers, fathers and communities in general as achievers the nuns open opportunities for women.

“I see it as my responsibility to help women come out of themselves.” (F)

This process is what Scheyvens (1995) describes as ‘power to’, and consciousness raising at both the individual and collective levels. The fact that these women who become nuns are committed to the ‘cause’ is a vital factor in the sustainability of the empowering process (Sen and Grown 1987, p.88).

The fact that empowerment is a gender issue (see Rowlands 1995; World Bank 2000; Sepoe 2000) has long been recognised by the nuns of the Diocese of Aitape. Although they have “always put women first” (X) because workloads and health (maternal) issues facing women are so significant, men have not been excluded from the work of the nuns. The Family Life program is an example of the concern of the nuns for the improvement of gender relations between men and women in general and in particular between husbands and wives. These programs grew out of the many ‘marriage enrichment’ courses organised by the nuns and initially conducted by them. Married couples who attend must do so as a couple and sit together and participate in all aspects of the program from discussions regarding sexual relations and family planning to issues of violence and the division of labour within a marriage. If men were excluded from this work and it was seen as something for women only it could possibly and most probably worsen the often already not-so-good relationship between a man and woman due to feeling by the man of exclusion and suspicion of what was going on.

The nuns, because of their ‘special’ position are able to confront men too and to challenge them when they abuse women. Without the inclusion of men in the solution to problems of which they are a part, little is likely to change.

H cites examples of nuns from her own order providing counselling to women who are victims of violence, and the challenge that they put to the perpetrators of that violence by confronting them with what they have done. The action taken every Thursday where each nun from the FMIC convent in Aitape wears a black badge condemning domestic violence is an example of nuns being proactive and advocating
on behalf of all women. This practice has spread to other women and even some men. This act of political activism has been made possible by the nuns.

**Equality**

The teaching of the Church of a doctrine of equality is one that is emphasised in the courses and the programs organised by and conducted by the nuns. The Family Life program emphasises equality as a Biblical teaching and insists that couples, at least while they are participating in the program, act and treat each other as equals. The fathers of the nuns in the case studies demonstrated an acceptance of this fact by forgoing a bride price for their daughters and allowing them to choose their life path. The father of H went even further and paid a bride price equivalent to H’s aunty to placate her demands for compensation for what she believed she had missed out on because no bride price was received for H. From my own observations, which I have verified with many young married couples, there is less insistence that young people comply with marriage arrangements that are made on their behalf by parents. Many young people choose their own spouse. This is an effect the cause of which is difficult to determine but is no doubt the result of a changing social environment. The biggest change agent upon the social environment in the Diocese of Aitape has been the Catholic Church (see section 2.4, above, for other change agents).

X has seen many changes in the relationships between men and women. “Men and women are much more companionable. You often see men doing work for women like carrying firewood. Especially caring for children; you never saw that before. Some men even attend the birth of their children. That was unheard of not so many years ago. Women see themselves as being worth something; it is not just the husband’s view that has changed. There is still a long way to go though.”

**A nun’s perspective of the women**

The nuns have seen their role as being one of working with communities to improve their lives physically, emotionally and spiritually, but what of the people themselves, in particular the women? What have they done? When women gain in confidence, they also gain skills they need to be able to act.

“That some women leave the order and become mothers and members of the broader community is seen as a positive contribution to the mainstream of women in the
While living in the bush in the Diocese of Aitape my wife and I observed one married couple in particular who were involved in many activities associated with the Church, but unlike many others also involved, they were both involved, as a couple. We commented on their public support and affection for each other, the family togetherness they displayed and the way they encouraged other men and women to be involved in activities such as Lotu, supporting the teacher’s work at the school by assisting and organising working groups for clean up efforts, and both were driving forces behind the facilitation of Family Life programs offered in the parish of Wasisi while we lived there. I later found that the male partner had been a religious brother and the female partner had been a religious nun. Perhaps, it was their experience within the religious orders that formed their attitude to their relationship which to my wife and I appeared to be (publicly at least), more affectionate than any other we observed.

“Many women’s groups initially set up by the nuns are now run by the women themselves. They have a president, executive and sometimes request support from the nuns. These committees provide the opportunity for women to develop a collective empowerment with the potential to exert political influence. The solidarity behind the message coming from the women’s group is more powerful than a single voice. The exchange of views and the discovery of their rights has been a very empowering aspect of these women’s groups.” (H). The women in these situations have taken control of their situation and have experienced ‘power from within’ (Scheyvens 1995).

“I remember when I first saw a young women leading the rosary in church. You just never saw that before. Men always did that sort of thing. Then older women began to speak out. When we first came here a woman never spoke in public or approached you without a man with her.” (X).

There are fewer and fewer expatriate nuns still in the Diocese of Aitape compared to the numbers of local women in the religious orders. The two main religious orders with the novitiates for the training of new nuns, of which there seems to be no
shortage, are being run and organised by Papua New Guineans. The Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception have an occasional newsletter, which they began in their very early days in the Diocese of Aitape, called ‘The Seed Grows’; the nuns who were members of the first group of expatriate nuns to arrive in the Diocese in 1949 would say that it certainly has.

6.6.2 The Catholic Women’s Coordinator
The Diocese has for many years had an official salaried position designated to the needs and issues of women of the Diocese. This position is occupied by a Papua New Guinean woman. The existence of the position is itself an acknowledgement by the Diocese that women do require special assistance if they are to overcome the social bias towards men (see Sepoe 2000; Brouwer et al. 1998; Scheyvens 1995; Strathern 1988; Mandie 1983). Such a position also suggests that a strategic approach to addressing women’s needs is a better long term approach than might be achieved through merely addressing immediate practical needs through a series of projects (see Brouwer et al. 1998). This strategic approach could be seen as an extension of the role that the nuns played in the early days of the Diocese in providing education and health to women. Providing a well resourced office and officer with the specific goal of addressing women’s issues and promoting women’s rights has very often been a missing ingredient in the mix of efforts to empower women (World Bank 2000). This position also recognises that the changes in attitudes towards women by men that must occur for real changes to take place must be culturally appropriate (Mantovani 1991; Brouwer et al. 1998).

This position works with and supports women’s groups across the Diocese and the other Dioceses of PNG and provides a point of contact and interaction with provincial, national and regional (Pacific) women’s groups and initiatives. This provision of a conduit for the input of women at the grassroots to the highest level of women’s activity is a practical demonstration by the Diocese of Aitape of the ‘doctrine of equality’, which is regularly preached by the Church within the Diocese in all of the Church’s public liturgies.

For instance, on the occasion of International Women’s Day in 1999 this office of the Diocese of Aitape facilitated the first-ever public event to mark this day. The Catholic
Women’s Coordinator worked closely with representatives of women’s groups across the Diocese as well as local schools, police and government authorities to organise what became an enormous (by local standards) march and rally in Aitape town. Assistance was given to help people from the bush travel to Aitape town and then be accommodated.

The event comprised a march along the foreshore from the Diocesan Office to the Town Oval followed by speeches and drama condemning the acts of and the effects of (amongst others) domestic violence, polygamy and rape. There was tremendous public interest and support demonstrated by observers (including myself) men and women. The Diocese of Aitape provided significant logistical and financial support to this very public demonstration of women’s demands for a recognition of their right to be treated as equals in marriage and society in general.

Such support from the Diocese may be seen as part of the ambiguity of support for women to be active by the institution of the Church but at the same time conform to and accept certain stereotypic roles within the Church’s structure. It is a paradox that the Church that is run almost exclusively by men can be the provider of opportunities for women when secular institutions such as government seem to be reluctant in many instances such as in Papua New Guinea (see Sepoe 2000; Walker 1999).

In the context of the predominantly rural Diocese of Aitape the provision and resourcing of, and ongoing support for a position dedicated to addressing women’s issues by women themselves is a positive input to the empowerment of women acting across the continuum; from a level of individual consciousness to political empowerment albeit at a local level of politics (see Sepoe 2000).

**6.6.3 Catechists and Prayer Leaders**

At the time of research and during the time I lived in the Diocese of Aitape there were no women working as Catechists, nor was I aware of any trained women Catechists who were not working. This is still the case at the time of writing.

The position of Prayer Leader is a less formal and time consuming position and one held by a number of women. The prayer leader position is very often a position
assumed by a nun or religious brother when such a person is present or resident in an area. In the more remote and sparsely populated areas, prayer leaders play an important role in the religious life of the people. It is a position which attracts a degree of status and respect from the general population and is recognised as having the authority of the Church to organise prayer meetings in a formal way when a priest, catechist or other religious order person is not available. Some men and women who were formerly members of a religious order and are now lay members of the Church are often active in the prayer leader role. Many of the prayer leaders are women.

The prayer leader role enables women to play a public role in the activities of the community without necessarily compromising or being constrained by her role as mother and carer (see Sepoe 2000). Most of the activities that a prayer leader is engaged in are at times when a woman would most probably be involved in the activity as a participant, such as at night in the village or Sunday at a time when people would attend Lotu anyway. Prayer leaders are sometimes the people who give out the Eucharist during Lotu, assisting the priest or the catechist. According to X, not so long ago such public activity by women would not have been possible. When meetings of prayer leaders are organised by the Church women, prayer leaders generally are able to attend. One female prayer leader told me that when she has prayer leader work to attend to, her husband always allows her to go because to forbid her to do so would be to, “stop her working for God and Jesus.” Her husband takes responsibility for the care of their young children when she does her prayer leader work (personal communication with a female prayer leader 1999).

The prayer leader role, however, is normally an extra role for most women and also requires a level of literacy that is often lacking in older women in remote areas. It is nonetheless a position which enables women to make choices and act publicly in leadership, a role which traditionally, and still in most public spaces outside of Church activity, is the preserve of men. The authority given by the Church to the position and the fact that it is part of ‘God’s work’ gives those persons involved a degree of respect that they would may not have without the prayer leader position.
6.6.4 Women’s Groups

Women’s groups play an important role in the empowerment process for women (see Scheyvens 1995; Sepoe 2000; Barnes 2000) at all points along the continuum that is the process of empowerment (Kabeer 1999; Afshar 1998; Rowlands 1995; Batliwala 1993). They provide a space for women to gather, discuss, plan activities and strategies that are of interest to them, both practical and strategic. At times the process may, to the outsider, appear to be a long and tedious one or of little significance, but in the context of the life of a village woman in a remote part of the Diocese of Aitape or the lives of the many women living in the camps\(^{36}\) in Aitape town, these activities and actions can be greatly empowering moments.

“Because of the Church we have groups like this. We have members in groups from all over the parish as long as the women can get to the meeting. This means that we can go to other villages and talk to other women.” (Focus Group)

“The women’s group does many things. It gives women a chance to discuss things without the interference of men.” (Focus Group)

The freedom of movement and the degree of independence afforded to women through membership of a women’s group is clearly demonstrated in the views expressed by the women themselves in the focus group discussions.

In the early days of some women’s groups a man would be the group president. The women concerned accepted this (although they probably had little choice) and would conduct their meetings in the presence of the ‘president.’ In most of these situations though, the women ensured that the business of the meetings was so trivial and women’s business only, that eventually the man would not come to the meetings. The women then discussed and organised their ‘serious’ business (personal communication with a women’s group leader 1995). Although this situation could be seen to show a subjugation and control of women by men, it also demonstrates a strategic approach by women appropriate to achieving a longer-term goal rather than a reaction that may well jeopardise the group’s existence. Such organising is very much the type of local political process described by Sepoe (2000) as an important one in

\(^{36}\) The ghetto-like areas in which people from similar language groups congregate and live in Aitape town are referred to locally as the (name of the district or village the people come from in the bush) Camp.
the changing gender relations in Papua New Guinea, and that political process is necessarily very local for most women in Papua New Guinea.

The group provides for education, discussion, personal development and political activism for many women who would otherwise not be able to participate or contribute, and for these activities to be carried out at a level of professionalism not otherwise achievable by many women acting alone (Sepoe 2000; Barnes 2000; Scheyvens 1995).

The following quotes taken from the focus groups demonstrate the recognition of achievement of women individually and collectively. They also show the range across which the women’s groups activities spread to cater for the varying needs of the membership and of the broader communities of which they are a part.

“We support women who have been beaten by their husband. Sometimes we have supported women in court (Village court).”

“The women’s group also makes suggestions to the LLG (Local Level Government) for projects in the community …”

“Once we organised a protest march to Naku….“

“Since I started coming to the meetings I have learned to write my name.”

“After I had been coming to the Legion of Mary I gained confidence and wanted to have more to do with the Church so I became a prayer leader. Now I conduct and lead prayer meetings in my village and I sometimes give out communion at Lotu.”
An important role played by women’s groups is their role in continually bringing the issue of women’s inequality to the attention of men and their role in ensuring that the ‘good’ aspects of cultural tradition are incorporated into Lotus which is probably the most common reason for any large communal assembly in the Diocese of Aitape.

“We (Legion of Mary women’s group) organise Lotus for special women’s days.” (Focus Group)

Special dramas, and services are organised to celebrate particular occasions and to get certain messages across to the broader community. Issues of violence, respect for others, affection and caring are often acted out in a drama within a church service (Lotus) to reinforce the main message of the scripture readings for that day or to highlight the reason for the special day itself. The women’s groups, often supported by the nuns, are very often the force behind what are very powerful forms of communication and education.

Women’s groups are also an entry point for the delivery of services to communities. Organisations such as NGOs often rely on the input and support of women’s groups to obtain project funding and to implement projects. The women’s groups are invariably linked to the Church by activity, name or membership, and the Church uses women’s groups to help organise its own pastoral activities throughout the Diocese of Aitape. Nuns, brothers and priests regularly use women’s groups as a means to organise activities and meetings in communities. In societies where oral communication is the norm, a ready and willing network of organised groups plays a vital role in getting information to the people. Women’s groups are both the ears and the voices of women. Because of the role women play in the community, the carers, the ever present community member (unlike many men who often travel to far-off places for extended periods) they are a vital means of communication to the community as a whole because information gained by women at a group meeting or elsewhere is more likely to be shared with other women.

6.6.5 Lay Women (the individual)

A common sight in rural Papua New Guinea is that of a woman alone, or in the company of very young children, carrying a heavy load of water and/or firewood and/or food from the garden. This may have been a complementary role of the women
in traditional, subsistence society within Papua New Guinea (Strathern 1988; Sepoe 2000) but it is a role that is not supportive of women being able to readily associate with other women and thereby participate in and organise activities of mutual interest. The ‘agency’ of women using their skills and abilities as described by Kabeer (1999) for collective, effective use of ‘power within’ needs to be facilitated by a society or an institution within a society which does not have such a mechanism. In the Diocese of Aitape, the Catholic Church has provided a number of opportunities for women to exert agency on their own behalf as described above. For the individual woman not so fortunate to be involved in a women’s group, or who does not wish to be, or is prevented from being involved, there are still opportunities for the Catholic women to be informed.

In all the time I lived in the Diocese of Aitape, Sunday Lotu was found to be the most informative of times or events. At the end of the service, regardless of who has officiated, priest, catechist or prayer leader, there is an array of announcements to be made. These announcements relate to all manner of activities and are not just confined to Church matters. They will include health matters such as immunisation times, and locations, dates and locations of visiting specialists such as doctors, optometrists and any other medical service which may be visiting and is not normally available, social events, school related activities involving children and parents, Local Level Government (LLG) activities, Village Court sittings, youth groups and women’s groups meetings and activities. If one does not attend Lotu one may miss hearing what may be very important information that could have a real effect on one’s life. Similarly important Church information is given on these occasions. For most people, and especially the rural women, these oral information sessions are of great importance as many may not be informed through a secondary source, and such is the nature of the often solitary life of a woman.

After Lotu, politics (local, provincial and national) and local issues are often discussed in a very public manner. If one is present, one can become quite well informed as to the state of the political climate from more than one point of view. I have witnessed lively discussions leading up to national and local elections outside of the Church following Sunday Lotu.
The regularity of these gatherings, being weekly on Sundays, and the fact that attending them has the legitimacy of attending *Lotu* and not some political rally or group meeting, means that women are much better informed than they would otherwise have been. Women have expressed to me the importance of these occasions to them as sources of information.

A church building with no centre aisle also enabled men and women to sit close to one another without attracting undue attention. In most churches, the women all sit on the left hand side of the church and the men on the right hand side (this arrangement is the same at almost all public gatherings). For my wife and I, it was possible to sit together in the local church without offending the local practice of separation of the sexes, by sitting in the centre as there was no centre aisle. There were many other couples, married and unmarried, who regularly sat as my wife and I did and I suspect for the same reason as us; that is, to practice non-separation without making it obvious. The church at Wassisi, where my family and I attended church services, is the only church, as far as I am aware, in the Diocese with no centre aisle.

*Lotu*, whether a mass with a priest or without a priest, or a prayer service, gives women the opportunity to speak in public without fear of rebuke from their husband, brother, father or anyone else. Women regularly read the passages from the Bible, which form part of the service; they introduce and participate in dramas they have prepared for the service; they introduce the hymns to be sung during the service, and some hand out communion. These activities are all significant opportunities for a woman, young or older, to act publicly without fear of rebuke or insult because they are a part of a Church sanctioned and therefore, legitimate activity for women to be involved in.

I have observed and spoken with many women over the years in relation to these activities and have formed the view that for the majority of bush village women who perform these activities, these activities were their first public ‘performances’ as adults. For many, they were quite traumatic and anxious events as being ‘public’ is generally quite foreign to women. However, most women I have spoken to about this over the years say that they enjoy the opportunity. There are no doubt others who do not, and do not go ‘public’ a second time, if indeed at all.
The general social environment created by the overwhelming influence of the Church and its religion has mediated in many respects what would otherwise have been an even more subjugated and uninformed existence for women, especially for uneducated village women.

There are no doubt women who do not necessarily agree that the Church is their friend. E, who works for the Diocese, and who grew up with her family in Aitape town where her father worked for the Diocese believes that the Church, by its exclusion of women from its major roles, acts against the interests of women. E acknowledges that her education and her current employment were and are facilitated by the Catholic Church and the Diocese, but she has joined an Assembly of God Church in Aitape as she feels more fulfilled as a woman within that congregation. Nevertheless, her ability to choose was made possible by the Diocese of Aitape.

### 6.7 Education

Education for all (which by definition includes women) is one of the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals. Without education there is little hope of changing the status quo. In the Diocese of Aitape, the Catholic Church has been and continues to be a significant provider of formal and informal education. Case study participant B makes it very clear that the Church made it possible for women to become educated in a formal way.

“*Without the Church there was no education for girls. The Church broke the barrier for women.*” (B)

Education beyond that of the traditional education one might receive while growing up in the village, has been primarily provided by the Church. The primary, secondary and vocational education provided to the people of the Diocese of Aitape is still mostly provided by the Diocese. The community (primary) schools and secondary schools provided by the Diocese are still the most common throughout the Diocese. Girls vocational schools provided by the Diocese and often run by teaching nuns, are the only opportunity for any form of vocational training or education for girls who cannot attend high school. Much of this vocational education is centred around nutrition, food production and education and other domestic related activities such as
sewing. Although this form of education for girls is limited, the benefits of such activities can be very beneficial to the individual young woman as it can enhance confidence, provide an opportunity for income generation and also provide a degree of independence (Scheyvens 1995; Sepoe 2000).

There is also a degree of education provided in the informal educational environment of the women’s group. An example of this is the statement from the Focus Groups; “Since I started coming to the meetings I have learned to write my name.” I have seen the confidence that being able to write one’s own name can give to a person. It gives a person an identity beyond the local where they are known by sight as well as by name. But by writing their own name, a person can be identified by persons unknown to them. “People will know it is me who wrote this because my name is there” (personal communication with a village man, 1995).

6.8 Employment
Paid employment within the Diocese of Aitape is limited to government employment, a very small number of private business and the Diocese itself. There is also the situation where people work in family businesses, but these opportunities are generally limited to serving in a trade store\(^{37}\) or collecting and drying copra, or harvesting cocoa or coffee for sale. The Diocese employs a number of women in responsible positions of management and coordination as well as administrative and office roles. Women may also be employed as housekeepers and cleaners in some religious communities or the house of the parish priest.

\(^{37}\) Trade store is a small, family run retail outlet usually selling processed food items and perhaps a limited range of hardware and sometimes second hand clothing.
The money earned by these women is no doubt put to various ends by the women and their families, but the fact that they are employed and working can be an empowering experience in itself.

“I am empowered. I have my job and my income. I drive a car - I’m in control. I’m licensed to drive. I am free to move around. I can make choices.” (B) To know there are choices to be made for many women is significant in the empowering process. To be able to make a choice is a degree of empowerment not reached by many women for a range of reasons ranging from ignorance of the choices, inability due to other responsibilities, lack of freedom to do so due to coercion from others or just a lack of power within to make the decision (see Sepoe 2000).

“To become a nun, to not get married was not easy; it was challenging.” (G)

6.9 Christianity

The nuns cited in the case studies all expressed the impact that Christian teaching and Christian faith have had upon their being able to make the decision to become a nun by pointing out the support given to them by their parents, in particular their fathers. The doctrine of equality, that men and women are made equal, and the invocation of God to justify and/or support a position, gives an option that may not have been available to women prior to the arrival of the Christian missionaries. For young women to say ‘no’ to sexual advances by men is, according to women spoken with, an extremely difficult thing. The claim that a ‘love magic’38 has been placed upon a girl by a man can make it almost impossible for a woman to resist that man’s advances. However, many women have invoked the creation of men and women as equals and in God’s image as a defence against such ‘magic’ (a personal communication between myself and a female high school teacher, 1999). Although the Catholic Church in so many ways has engendered religion by designating specific roles for men and women and by delineating areas of activity and space within the Church, it is within the environment of the Church and the religion that women find empowerment (Batliwala 1993).

---

38 If a man claimed to have a possession of a young woman or e.g a hair from her head, he could let it be known that this was ‘love magic’. This is not uncommon in secondary boarding schools.
The indirect effect that the Church has had on the lives of women by providing an opportunity to organise, to hear news and to act publicly have been as important for all women as the opportunity to work and to be educated has been for those women who have been able to avail themselves. The improved health status of women, albeit still low by world standards, has improved the life expectancy of women as well as their life quality, especially in relation to childbearing.

“*We had medicine like penicillin; it worked so quickly on these people. To be able to remove a retained placenta saved the lives of so many women...The midwives that would attend the women would only catch the baby when it was born and help to wash it. They didn’t know anything about difficult births, bleeding or retained placentas. So many women must have died from something so easily fixed.*” (X)

6.10 The Male Observers

The two men included in this research to provide a male observation seemed quite surprised that there might be a disparity between men and women. Both men thought that women should be regarded as equal and believed that they treated women as equals. They confessed to not ever really thinking about what life may or may not be like for women.

Both men gave, albeit independently, very similar responses to questions regarding women. They thought that women should be treated as equals and that the majority of women in their lives were treated fairly by the men close to them. They acknowledged that women in the bush lived more arduous lives than most ‘town’ women and this was probably due to education levels and income of both men and women.

Both men, however, accepted that women and men had distinct roles within the household and even though a man might help sometimes with ‘women’s work’, men should not be expected to be responsible for that work. When asked to reflect upon how life might have been for their mothers they both confessed to not having thought about it before. One man said that his mother was a very important person in his life as an adult but he did not recall her playing a big part in his younger life.
The daughters of each of these men attended school and would have the same access to education as their brothers. However, they did not think that their daughters would expect to be anything other than mothers.

When asked if they thought that the Church and or the Diocese had had an influence on the lives of women, both men confessed to not having thought about what had or had not had an influence upon women’s lives, nor indeed their own. Even education was seen by them (both former teachers) as something to help one get employment and to be able to read and write. The intangible benefits of self-esteem and empowerment had not been something they had considered.

From the information gained from the men, it would appear that the relative levels of empowerment of men compared to women are such that men accept their ‘better off’ position without question. Even if the position for women is improving, as long at it does not impact too dramatically upon the lives of men then it is accepted. If the gains made by women are for the most part at the levels of consciousness then many men may not even be aware of the changes. This may be particularly so where men are in paid employment and spend a large amount of their time occupied doing ‘important’ things.

At least for the two men specifically asked about women as part of this research, it could be said that they did not feel threatened by any improvement in the relative empowerment of women. This may or may not be the case generally, especially in the more remote villages.

6.11 Conclusion

The views of the participants in this research are presented initially as the participant’s views alone and can be read as knowledge obtained by the particular participant/s in their own socio-economic and physical environment. In the analysis of the data, parts of this knowledge have been used to highlight various ways in which the Catholic Church has provided opportunities for the empowerment of women within the Diocese of Aitape.
From the analysis of the data, the women participants in the research indicate that the Diocese of Aitape, and by association, the Catholic Church has indeed been a contributing factor in whatever levels of empowerment these women enjoy. As the participants were selected as representative of the women of the Diocese, it seems likely that this finding applies to women throughout the Diocese.

In the next chapter the Diocese of Aitape will be assessed by applying the assessment tool, the Gender Equality Wheel, to the information presented in this chapter.
CHAPTER 7  Enhancing Empowerment

7.1 Introduction
In the previous chapters this thesis has focused on the Diocese of Aitape’s, and by extension, the Catholic Church’s efforts to improve the lives of the people of the Diocese of Aitape. In particular, the views of a number of women have been highlighted to gauge the degree to which women feel that the Diocese has impacted upon their lives. In this chapter a recognised framework/tool, used to track the progress of women from a state of isolation to one of engagement with their community, will be used to assess the Diocese of Aitape as an enhancer or otherwise of women’s empowerment. The framework/tool is the Gender Equality Wheel.

7.2 The Gender Equality Wheel
The Gender Equality Wheel is a framework/tool used to categorise project outcomes in regards to gender equality. It has four components against which projects are measured (James-Sebro 2005):

1) Engagement of women to come out of isolation - an awareness or consciousness raising of the individual;
2) Empowerment with ideas, knowledge, skills and resources - a building of self confidence in women and men;
3) Enhancement of lives in households and communities - the application of new ideas and knowledge and skills to improve the family and community lives of men and women;
4) Emergence into the public sphere - involvement in social and political activity.

James-Sebro uses the Gender Equality Wheel in an African context to measure whether development projects produce positive impact when the implementing organizations have integrated or mainstreamed gender into their organisational structure and culture. She concludes that the project’s effectiveness is positively impacted when gender has been mainstreamed into implementing organisations at all levels and in all policies and practices.
Assessment of the degree of gender mainstreaming within the Diocese of Aitape is marginal for this thesis, as the thesis is concerned with the impact of the Diocese upon women’s lives as seen by women themselves. How much better or worse this may or may not have been depending on the degree of gender mainstreaming within the Diocese may be an interesting area of investigation but is only reflected upon marginally in this thesis. When conducting the field work for this thesis, it was clear that the Diocese of Aitape was seen by the participants as having contributed significantly to the environment in which they, the participants, lived out their social lives. The degree to which gender has been “mainstreamed” within the Diocesan organizations, staff, policies and practices will no doubt have an impact upon the lives of the individuals, women and men. In Chapter 6 this is made clear from information provided by participants. By applying the Gender Equality Wheel assessment tool to the information gained from the research a more objective assessment, using a previously tested tool, can then be made as to Diocese’s impact upon the lives of women.

7.3 Using the Gender Equality Wheel to critique the Diocese of Aitape
In this section the responses from the participants, as presented in Chapter 6, are used to briefly assess the Diocese against the components of the Gender Equality Wheel.

Figure 7.1 Gender Equality Wheel

Adapted from James-Sebro (2005)
This exercise is not to measure any degree of empowerment but to assess the Diocese of Aitape’s effectiveness in enabling the empowering of women, as a result of the influence of the Diocese of Aitape. In doing this exercise there is an assumption that to increase one’s level of empowerment is to decrease one’s degree of inequality. This means that as an individual or a group become more empowered they become more equal with other individuals and/or groups within their community. As one of the four components of the Gender Equality Wheel is empowerment with ideas, knowledge, skills and resources this component in the adapted Gender Equality Wheel (see Figure 7.1) is called Education and Resources to avoid any confusion that may arise from using the word empowerment in two contexts, that is, a component of the Gender Equality Wheel and an outcome. For this exercise the components in the Wheel are: Engagement of women to come out of isolation; Education and Resources; Enhancement of lives in households and communities; Emergence into the public sphere (see Figure 7.1).

7.3.1 Engagement of women to come out of isolation

Providing a supportive environment for women to form into groups where they can give one another mutual support is an important aspect of engaging women to come out of isolation. The nuns, in particular, have been instrumental in the establishment and facilitation of women’s groups that provide opportunities for women to engage with other women who have the same concerns, interests and lifestyles as themselves. The act of meeting with other women in itself can be a rewarding diversion from the monotony of life for many women.

“Women have come out of themselves because of the nuns; in their marriages, in their own groups and in their own lives.” (Case study H)

“... women’s groups initially set up by the nuns now run themselves. They have a president, executive that the members elect……they (groups) facilitate an exchange of views; women can discover their rights.” (Case study H)

The issue of rights and equality is intrinsically linked to gender awareness. As long as women and men are treated differently because of their biological sex, inequality will
continue. That women and men can both contribute to a fuller, more productive life needs to be realised by both men and women (James-Sebro 2005).

“Family Life is very good. We have men who have been gender sensitised and consider women’s reproductive rights.” (Case study B)

“Men see (case study D) as being in a responsible position and able to achieve things. This means a lot to women. It shows men that women can do important things.....the more women are seen by men to be doing things like reading in Lotu, they can see that women are capable and it does not (negatively) affect them as men.” (Case study F)

The role of the Church, through the influence and the example of the nuns’ work with communities in establishing schools, health clinics, women’s groups and programs such as Family Life, have provided both overt and subtle examples of the value of men and women being able to contribute positively to the life of family and community in a variety of ways without adversely affecting the status of men. The role models provided by women for other women are also an important factor in bringing women out of their isolation.

“Driving a vehicle, I’m in control. I’m licensed to drive. I’m free to move around. Men and women see me and it encourages them.” (Case study B)

The Diocese of Aitape has provided the opportunity for women’s groups to form under the auspices of the Church. It has supported and encouraged the work of the nuns and it continues to support the Family Life program by employing a married couple to coordinate this program and to conduct the training programs throughout the Diocese. This ongoing support from an institution such as the Diocese of Aitape has led to outward manifestations of the mutual support that is an important aspect of engagement of women. Two such manifestations in the Diocese of Aitape are the annual International Women’s Day marches in Aitape town and the large protest march by village women in 1995 in the Nuku District to protest the lack of pay for nurses and the deterioration of health services in the bush. Both these events have been described elsewhere in this thesis (see Chapter 6, 6.3, 6.6.3), but are mentioned here to reiterate the point that women organised these events to highlight their own
and their community’s concerns. These events also had the support of many men. The support by men of women’s initiated activities is a significant advance towards gender equality by acknowledging the value of the activity.

The mutual support by women for women that is seen as an important aspect of engaging helps to develop solidarity and respect amongst women which can lead to greater public involvement through greater self confidence as a group and as individuals (James-Sebro 2005; Sepoe 2002; Kabeer 1999; Scheyvens 1995; Moser 1993).

“When we have our meetings I always come because we always have a good time. Since I started coming to the meetings I have learned to write my name.”

“I know that I have rights and that women are equal to men.”

“After I had been coming to the Legion of Mary I gained confidence and wanted to have more to do with the Church so I became a prayer leader. Now I conduct and lead prayer meetings in my village and I sometimes give out communion at Lotu.”

“We get support from other women. When you have a problem it is good to know that you are not the only one with that problem even if you cannot fix it.”

“I represented the Legion of Mary at a conference of the Legion in Aitape. I had to report on all the things that we do here in Wassisi Parish. I had to represent all the Legion women from the Parish.”

“We support women who have been beaten by their husbands. Sometimes we have supported women in court (Village court).”

(Quotes from the Focus Groups)

From the responses of participants quoted here, it is obvious that these women are not so isolated and are actively engaging with their peers, and other members of their communities.
7.3.2 Education and resources

The Diocese of Aitape was the provider of formal, primary and secondary education within the Diocese for many years until the government of Papua New Guinea took responsibility for primary education. Still the Diocese plays a significant role in the provision of educational services and the nuns were the first providers of education for many, especially for girls and women.

“Without the church there was no education for girls. The Church broke the ‘barrier’ for women......people trusted the system........fathers trusted their daughters to the nuns.” (Case study B)

The skills learned by women in the vocational schools established by the nuns are seen as important by both men and women and provide opportunities for women to become more independent through earned income and activities outside of their traditional routine. Such skills as sewing and bread baking, although sometimes considered domestic and gendered by westerners, are highly valued skills in the villages of the Diocese of Aitape and can allow women to earn their own income through the sale of the products they have produced as well as the associated skills of literacy and numeracy that are taught in the vocational centres to enable this marketing activity.

“The nuns run vocational schools ......give women many skills. This enables women to move around, mix and to discuss. They make for themselves (instead of always for others).” (Case study C)

The education of women by the Diocese of Aitape has not only been formal and vocational but has also involved education in issues of health, family planning and women’s rights. The office of the Women’s Coordinator, as supported by the Diocese both financially and with staff provides women in the Diocese with an opportunity to gain information and support regarding issues affecting women at the local level as well as regionally, nationally and internationally. The holder of this official position within the Diocese has travelled widely to various forums and seminars and brings information back to the women and men of the Diocese who would otherwise have no access and knowledge of the information and outcomes coming from these events.
The nursing school which is run by the Diocese, and is located in Aitape town is a formal training institution providing men and women with accredited training as nurses. The location of this facility provides the opportunity for training nurses to visit remote communities as part of their training to provide care and information to women in particular, about health issues of which they might otherwise be ignorant.

Much of the health provision in remote areas is provided as a “treatment of symptoms” service by Aid Post Officers who have little training themselves in the preventative aspects of health provision. The trainee nurses and the public health service provided by the Raihu (Diocesan) Health Service provide an opportunity for people in remote areas to get some education in primary and preventative health.

The Family Life Program of the Diocese has a family planning component which, for the bulk of women in the remote villages of the Diocese of Aitape, is the only access they have to any form of education regarding their own and their husband’s reproductive functions, sexuality and relationships. Within these programs, issues of family planning and child spacing, sexually transmitted disease, as well as pregnancy and maternal health are discussed in a way that is both culturally and contextually appropriate.

“It helps the married couples (husband and wife) understand each other better. Men learn to accept that women have a right to be treated well.”

“Men and women are equal. God made both men and women to be equal; to be partners.”

“Men have more respect for women.”

“My husband sits with me in the church now, in the centre. Before he used to sit over with all the men.”

“When I am too tired to go to the garden or too tired to do all the work in the garden my husband does not get angry with me.”
“My husband’s first wife died because she had too many children. Since we learned the ‘ovulation method’ he understands that sometimes we cannot have sex. He does not get angry when I say I don’t want to have another baby yet.” (Focus Group responses regarding the Family Life program).

The provision of these specific inputs by the Diocese along with the consistent preaching of a doctrine of equality through the liturgical activities of the Diocese reinforces that women and men are equally important and the knowledge provided through the education program, formal and informal, gives people the knowledge to back up the preached message of equality thus encouraging the empowerment of women.

“Family Life (the program) improves women’s self image. Women and men learn to value their spouse. A woman begins to see herself as a valued individual. It is not just the man’s view of women that is changed, a woman’s view of herself is changed for the better.” (Quote from X)

7.3.3 Enhancement of lives in households and communities

The increased participation of women in various activities, public and private, social and political has already been highlighted. The activities of women in the public sphere of reading at Lotu, taking part in the conduct of church liturgy and the role women play in health and education as teachers, nurses and administrators are roles that have been made possible by the Diocese of Aitape through the provision of education and training, enabling women to take on these roles, and by the recruitment of women into roles of responsibility within the Diocesan administration. The role of Women’s Coordinator and the Diocesan Office Manager are specific examples of women in highly influential positions without being members of the religious structure of the Church.

“The Church allows women to be heard.” (Case study D)

“Men’s attitudes are changing; they are sharing workloads and caring for children……Men and women walk side by side, this is a big change (in local behaviour), but it is a slow change.” (Case study A)
The confidence gained from the acquisition of knowledge and skill has had an impact upon the lives of women and men especially within families. The ‘Say No To Violence’ campaign, which is an ongoing public awareness campaign led by the nuns of Aitape, is also supported by and has the active participation in by many men. On Thursday of every week many people, men and women, in Aitape town wear ‘Say No To Violence’ badges. The objective of the campaign is to raise public, and the individual’s awareness of the level of violence, especially within marriage, with a view to impacting positively upon the behaviour of the perpetrators of violence. The Family Life program promotes the relationships between men and women and gives people an understanding of their own and their spouse’s needs and emotions which participants claim has improved gender relations within the family and the community.

“Family Life has made an enormous impact upon the relationships between men and women.” (Case study G)

“I can make choices........Men need to be included........ I can say no to my husband.” (Case study B).

The role of the nuns has been extensively discussed and their influence and example has affected both men and women within the Diocese. They have in some ways played a trail blazing role for other women that has enabled others to take on roles and make decisions that they may not have otherwise been able to make.

“The sisters (nuns) play a very important role as role models and as spokespersons. A young girl at a high school wanted to be a nurse until she met a nun at the haus sik (health centre) who was a doctor. The girl said, ‘I didn’t know that women could be doctors’. That girl became a doctor and is now in charge of a hospital.” (Case study B)

The unifying effect of the Pidgin language and the fact that Christianity also brought a uniformity to what had previously been a disparate religious environment have been discussed previously but are mentioned again here to emphasise the impact upon
community relations that the Church has had within the Diocese of Aitape. This degree of unity among people, who once were separated by both language and religion, has enabled a freedom of movement for women in particular, that previously did not exist, as described earlier in this thesis.

### 7.3.4 Emergence into the public sphere

The emergence of women into leadership roles both within the community of women and the broader community are examples of women taking a more public role than was traditionally possible for women. Women are prayer leaders within the Church which means that they have been trained and authorised by the Church to conduct formal religious activities within their communities with the approval of the Church. Women distribute the communion host during Mass and perform various pastoral roles either as nuns or as lay women of the Church.

Women forming their own groups either as nuns or as lay women, or groups of both nuns and lay women working together is also a public expression of women being active in the public sphere. The politically motivated rallies already described – the protest rally at Nuku in 1995 to demand better health services, and the International Women’s Day marches in Aitape demanding greater equality and justice for women – are clear examples of women entering the public sphere.

The significant roles within the health and education sector as nurses, teachers and administrators have been discussed previously but are mentioned again to highlight the public space that women do fill within the Diocese of Aitape.

“I joined the Women’s Council. With my work as a nurse I get around and combine my health work with the work of LLG (Local Level Government) members……Educated women must assist the uneducated women and men; we are all the same.” (Case study C)

“I am a role model. Men have said to me, if you can do this, my wife can do it too. Women (and men) approach me to help them to achieve their goals. They have land and they want to do things.” (Case study D)
The political influence of women at the local level is of greater importance to the women than is often recognised. Women's issues are often seen by the women themselves as local issues of significance to their and this is where they want to have influence.

“Most women live in the village and that is where they want things to happen. UNDP measurements of women at the national level are irrelevant to their lives.” (Case study D)

7.4 An Assessment
The Diocese of Aitape is not a project. It is not a discrete event with a time frame and a specified objective and outcomes as is the case with most development projects. The Gender Equality Wheel is used to assess such projects, however, in this instance it is used to assess the Diocese using the responses of the research participants as indicators of outcomes of the Diocesan engagement with the people.

Assessed under the component headings in the adapted version of the Gender Equality Wheel (see Figure 7.1), the environment created by the Diocese of Aitape in the form of activities, values, lifestyles (as practiced by nuns) and a single religious doctrine, has indeed allowed for the empowerment of women and has enabled the process to take place.

The groups that meet and activities that occur within and around the Church within the Diocese are a result of a process that firstly brings women and men together and informs the broader community that these women are the equal of men in God’s eyes. The women then, individually and collectively as a result of the impact of one or a number of activities, encounters or programs, move along the empowerment continuum described earlier in this thesis.

The participants in this research are themselves at different points along the empowerment continuum. Where they are as individuals it is not possible to say, but where they are relative to another person can be assessed. This point highlights the fact that where a person starts on the continuum can be dependent upon where they are placed by their surroundings; parents, siblings, culture and other institutions such
as Church, schools and the access to services such as health. This was highlighted in
the case studies where participants clearly attributed aspects of their life and experience
to the attitude of their parents, often their father; to the behaviour of others in their community such as the treatment of women by men; the role models provided by nuns and other women; the access to schooling and health for them and their parents; the relationship of their parents to one another. All of these influences are not discrete; they are a result, in large part, of an ongoing mission of the Diocese to a commitment to the betterment of the people as outlined in Chapter 5, (Section 5.4). The Franciscan’s ‘Decalogue of Development’ and their ‘summary of resolutions re development’ show a commitment to people. This, like the attitude of parents and the provision of role models, has set the foundation for a process facilitated by the Diocese through its various elements which includes the nuns and specific programs such as Family Life, to perpetuate itself as the women, as individuals or in groups, provide for the following generation. Within the Diocese of Aitape, this is happening more and more with the approval, and often, the assistance of men.

7.5 Conclusion

For women in Papua New Guinea, and more specifically women of the Diocese of Aitape, the greatest strategic issue is their marginalisation (as individuals) and their almost total lack of decision making on issues where it counts, both locally and nationally. The spheres where they make decisions and contributions are for the most part invisible (Sepoe 2000). In 1999, the organising committee for the installation of the new bishop of the Diocese of Aitape did not have one woman member, even though women were expected to, and subsequently did, play significant roles in the work for the preparation and conduct of the ceremony and subsequent celebrations (personal correspondence with a number of female informants). Decision making forums at the village, regional and national levels within Papua New Guinea are all dominated by men (Sepoe 2000). However, as has been shown in this thesis, women’s collective voices can have an impact. It is clear from this thesis too, that there is a distinction between the Catholic Diocese of Aitape and the Catholic Church even though they are inextricably linked and interdependent. There is more space for women to be engaged, heard and effective within the Diocese than within the Church itself where women’s roles are more prescribed, either as nuns or as liturgical participants.
It would be wrong to expect that all the gains in empowerment made by women of the Diocese of Aitape are attributable to the Diocese and/or the Catholic Church. However, it is clear that the social environment resulting from the Diocesan institutions and the Church’s influence are significant contributors to whatever gains have been made in the empowerment of women and the improvement of gender relationships. Through the networks of organizations such as Caritas, parish women’s groups and the Legion of Mary, the Diocese/Church provided a means by which women could connect with and have access with the wider women’s movement and changing ideas about women’s role in the rest of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific more broadly. The Diocese has been a channel through which village women have connected to ideas from the wider world.
CHAPTER 8  What does it all mean?

8.1 Learning from the research

It is not always apparent within this thesis that there is a distinction between the Catholic Church and the Catholic Diocese. The Church is the religious body with specific teachings, rules and structures. Like the culture of the people (as described in Chapter 3), it has a set of ideas that are inherited and shared and are used to govern the behaviour of the people belonging to and acting under the authority of the Church. The Diocese on the other hand, although a creation of the Church, impacts upon the lives of people whether or not they belong to the Church, and whether or not they participate in its religious activities.

The Diocesan health and education services are two aspects of Diocesan activity that are not overtly religious and are non-denominational in their implementation (although they educate and operate respectively within the culture of the Catholic Church). Other aspects of Diocesan associated activity, such as women’s groups, the work of the Women’s Coordinator and the work of the nuns are for the most part, non-religious in nature and are not exclusive to Catholics (see comments by X, Chapter 6). Although the reality may be that the women engaging in these activities and groups are indeed Catholics, the activities and engagements themselves are not necessarily religious, nor does one have to be adhering to the teachings of the Catholic Church to be involved.

However, having made the distinction between the Church and the Diocese, albeit in a limited way, the reality is that for most people living within the Diocese and certainly for the participants in this research, the distinction is probably not apparent. As pointed out in Chapters 2 and 5, the spirituality of the people makes religion a
constant in their lives and there is probably little consciousness of a distinction between the Catholic Church and the Catholic Diocese for the majority of the people. From my own experience I am aware that many people refer to the office building in Aitape town from where the Diocesan activities are managed, as ‘the Diocese’. Any distinction may become even less obvious in the minds of the people as the Church itself becomes more localised within Melanesia. Case Study B observed that the Church is becoming Papua New Guinean and she thinks that is a good thing. The culture of a more ‘local’ Church will be important in the ongoing influence that the Church will have on people and their relationships. For as Fr. Greg Bourke noted, the attitude of (local) men towards women does not change in the seminary. For the present though, and looking back through the eyes of the research participants to answer the question posed earlier in this thesis (Chapter 4, 4.2), does the Catholic Church provide an environment for the empowerment of women within the Catholic Diocese of Aitape, Sandaun Province, Papua New Guinea? it is not possible, nor indeed necessary to distinguish between the Church and the Diocese.

Throughout this thesis there are occasions within the narrative where there are apparent contradictions. At times the narrative appears to be saying that women are subjugated and that men wield power over women at almost all levels while at other times, such as in Chapter 6 in particular, the narrative highlights women’s empowerment. However, one could expect that in any society an individual’s situation and the situation in relation to a group of people will change from time to time. The intention in this thesis is to demonstrate the progress being made by the women, in relation to their degree of empowerment, from the perspective of the women themselves. The narrative also points out that women did have power in traditional societies and that men recognised and acknowledged this power and the complementary nature of men’s and women’s roles. Early Western observers, however, did not always recognise these relationships for what they were when they wrote of their observations. These writers saw subjugation and oppression. Ironically the writers themselves generally came from societies emerging from a culture similar to that which they thought they were observing. As Mies (1986) points out, the common ‘mindset’ of the colonialist was that men should dominate women for the social, political and economic good of all. As a result of the efforts by colonialists to ‘Westernise’ and modernise the local people, traditional roles and relationships were
altered so that now, in contemporary Papua New Guinea, women are in many aspects of life, subjugated by men (Sepoe 2000). So rather than contradictions, these varying descriptions show changes over time. These changes show an initial regression followed by a slow but real improvement in the level of the empowerment of women.

The representation of how empowerment is built, as shown in Chapter 3, Figure 3.3, describes an empowerment continuum beginning at the level of individual consciousness and moving through collective consciousness to political power. This research has engaged women from the Diocese of Aitape who are at various positions on the continuum with some (some members of focus groups) possibly at a pre-individual consciousness stage. In Chapter 6 the responses from the participants demonstrate that the inputs shown in Figure 3.3 have had a very positive effect and made a significant contribution to women being able to move along the empowerment continuum. An indicator of this movement along the continuum is the recognition that there are choices to be made, and subsequently, the making of choices on one’s own or the group’s behalf. The responses show women making choices that indicate a range of positions along the continuum. For example, choosing to join a women’s group, choosing to speak in public, choosing to become a nun or a doctor, choosing to take collective political action and in the case of one participant choosing when she will have sex with her husband. The making of these choices within the social, economic and religious environment of the Diocese of Aitape fits Kabeer’s (1999) three dimensions of choice: resources, agency and achievement.

From the individual consciousness level to the collective consciousness level, these resources include access to services in the form of education and health; access to programs such as the Family Life Program; access to information gained through the women’s groups and the Catholic Women’s Coordinator. Beyond the collective consciousness level resources in the form of support from other women and the collection of skills within the group become more important.

The agents through which these gains in empowerment by women have been achieved are numerous, and each of them is under the auspices of the Diocese. They include the role of the nuns as initiators and role models, and their facilitation of positive contributions to the lives of both men and women; the women’s groups which make it
possible for solitary women to find common cause with other women; the Catholic Church and the Catholic Diocese giving encouragement and sanction to the nuns, and the various women’s groups, through the authority of the Diocese, an authority which comes from the Catholic Church.

The achievements outlined by the participants themselves in Chapter 7 are many and varied. They range from learning to write one’s name, self awareness and confidence, better understanding and more assistance from one’s spouse and a sense of being in control as expressed by one participant in that she drove a car and she was in control.

That all this was apparently achieved by women within the Diocese, through agency under the auspices of the Diocese might indicate that for women in this part of the world, the Diocese of Aitape and the Catholic Church is their best friend. However, there are limitations and constraints to what women can achieve in this environment. Case study E makes it quite clear that although the Catholic Church and Diocese assisted her, she had to leave the Catholic Church so that she could continue to feel empowered in a spiritual and religious sense. She chose to join another church where she feels a person’s sex is not a barrier to total participation in church activity, a situation which she believes is not the case for women in the Catholic Church. That she is employed by the Catholic Diocese shows that this woman is capable of making multiple and varied choices to suit her spiritual, social and economic needs as she sees them. This also shows, at least in this instance, that the Diocese is non-discriminatory in its support for people outside of the Church’s religious hierarchy.

In Chapter 6 a regular theme among the responses/voices of the women is the attitude of their father. If the attitude of the woman’s father was positive towards women then the daughter found it a lot easier to achieve a degree of empowerment and as seen from the women’s responses, some attained a significant degree of empowerment. In each case where women spoke positively of their father’s attitude, the women attributed this positive attitude to the influence of the Diocese and/or the Church. In at least one case the father had been a catechist, which meant having a more than superficial knowledge of Church teachings and the promotion of these teachings. A positive and encouraging attitude towards women was obviously not the normal attitude of a father and men in general towards women. Such change in attitude
indicates a change in behaviour by men. In some instances women indicated that men’s attitudes are changing on a broader scale than just a few individuals and the attitudes are changing on a range of issues such as allowing women a freedom of movement and proximity to men other than spouse or brother, as well as a degree of political involvement. All these changes in attitude could be described as behaviour change in men as they relate to women; an improvement in gender relations.

This change in the attitude and behaviour of men towards women, and towards spouses in particular, is also emphasised by women in their reflections upon the impact which the Family Life Program has had. The improvement in gender relationships between spouses following their participation in the Family Life Program is a recurring response from women. Women also indicated that this change in attitude and behaviour of men towards women extended beyond the spousal relationship to women more broadly within the community.

As Mantovani (1988) points out, empowerment and its determinants are cultural and for significant changes to be made in relation to empowerment, and in particular, the empowerment of women, then culture must change. Culture, as defined in this thesis, is a set of ideas that is inherited and shared among a group of people who use those ideas to govern their lives. As this thesis has shown, there have been many changes over time in the lives of the people within the Diocese of Aitape. Many of these changes have been intentional and positive and have been brought about through the agency of the Catholic Diocese of Aitape and its policies and practices. Overlaid upon these policies and practices is the teachings, and their interpretation, of the Catholic Church, especially those relating to relationships between men and women. The importance of women and the relationship between clergy and women is clearly spelt out by Fr. Greg Bourke in Chapter 3, section 3.3 where he sets out the ways that the clergy are endeavouring to raise the status of women.

A strength of the Diocese’s approach to engagement with people is that its engagement is not time bound; it does not have a funding period like a development project after which the project will be evaluated to determine its degree of success; a process which may enable a further funding period. The Diocese is a real life situation with lifelong timeframes. Similarly it is not constrained by the outputs written in the
logframe (logical framework) of a project design by which projects are managed and monitored. The Diocese and the people involved with it are a dynamic, integrated whole that responds to the changing situations as they occur, in a way seen as appropriate by them.

The Diocese of Aitape has achieved many of the same outcomes ascribed to the GAD and WID paradigms of development simply through bringing a degree of uniformity to otherwise disparate groupings of people, through its daily interaction and approach to the people of the Diocese, and also through a doctrine of equality promoted through the efforts of individuals and programs such as the Family Life program, as well as from the pulpit.

However, the paradox of the patriarchy of the Church hierarchy and the teaching of gender equality remains. That women can achieve a degree of empowerment within this paradox has been shown within this thesis. While the Diocese of Aitape and the Catholic Church continue to have such great influence on the lives of women within the Diocese, it would seem difficult within the present Church hierarchy, dominated as it is by men, that women could attain high levels of political empowerment as shown in the empowerment continuum diagram, Figure 3.3. The ultimate degree of empowerment achievable by women within this environment requires more research.

8.2 Limitations

Father Greg Bourke’s observation that (local) men’s attitudes do not change in the seminary is perhaps as much a reflection upon the Catholic Church as it is upon the men themselves. The segregated nature of seminary life potentially may reinforce the sense of men and women as an ‘us and them’ within the minds of those men training to become priests. The life of a seminarian was not an aspect of this research and is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, on the surface it would seem that the seminary is like other aspects of the Catholic Church and the ‘new religion’ as shown in Chapter 1; the Catholic Church and religion has much in common with the traditional religions which promoted segregation.

As James-Sebro (2005) notes, development of people, and by extension their real empowerment, will not be complete until there is real gender equality, and real gender
equality can only be achieved when gender is truly mainstreamed. This thesis has shown the explicit efforts by the Diocese of Aitape to address women’s issues and to improve gender relations. Many of these efforts have been initiated and implemented by persons who themselves stand in the way of mainstreaming. These persons are the male clergy and the nuns, and they stand in the way of mainstreaming by supporting and perpetuating a segregated hierarchical structure, albeit a structure that attempts to positively impact upon gender outside of itself. If there is no political will at the top of an organisation for complete gender mainstreaming, the outcomes will always be limited (James-Sebro 2005).

The situation (as described in Chapter 6) where the organising committee for the ordination of the new Bishop of Aitape, (who was appointed by a male in Rome, Italy), was comprised totally of men is telling. The ‘really’ important work is done by men.

In the Diocese of Aitape, the numbers of the Franciscans are diminishing. Of the original expatriate Franciscan Friars (priests and brothers) who have been responsible for the Diocese, those who remain are ageing. Some locally ordained Papua New Guinea nationals have joined the remaining expatriate Franciscans in Aitape. However, the vast majority of new priests within the Diocese are Papua New Guinean nationals who have been ordained as Diocesan priests and do not belong to a religious order. Most of the new Diocesan priests live in the parishes of the Diocese in the priest houses and are generally the sole, official occupant of the house. If Father Greg Bourke’s reflection that these men’s attitudes toward women do not change in the seminary is accurate, and as these priests become more the future of the Diocese, the future for women within the Diocese may not be as positive as past experience might indicate. As one informant who is herself a nun expressed to me, the attitude of many of the local (Papua New Guinea national) priests towards women is not good and reflects an attitude which recent efforts have endeavoured to change. She claims that one of these priests said to her, “Yupela (nuns) em meri nating”. That is, you nuns are only women.

As pointed out in this thesis, the attitude of men towards women is considered by women to be critical in empowering women. Most of the men cited by the women
have been their fathers and other married men within the communities. The celibate, segregated and sometimes solitary life of the parish priest in the bush parishes of the Diocese of Aitape may well serve to reinforce negative attitudes towards women by the priests themselves. As the priest can be an influential figure at the local level, the situation for some women at the local parish level of the Diocese may not be as empowering in the future as it was in the recent past. This remains to be seen but if the opinions of the Father Bourke and the informant nun quoted above are indicative of priests in what is becoming a more Papua New Guinea Church, the gains made by women may need to be defended.

Case study E found the situation for women within the Catholic Church untenable in its present form. If more women are not to feel this way, women as a body may need to work hard to ensure that the Diocese remains an overall positive influence on the lives of women.

8.3 Conclusion
From the information provided by the women who participated in this research, and they being representative of the women living within the Diocese of Aitape (see Chapter 4) it can be fairly said that the Catholic Diocese of Aitape provides an environment within which, and opportunities by which, women can become empowered. The empowerment realised by most of the women of the Diocese is at the levels of either individual and/or collective consciousness. Although there will no doubt be exceptions, real empowerment resulting from gender equality for women will probably not be realised under the auspices of the Diocese of Aitape nor the Catholic Church because of the absence of gender equality at the ‘top’.

To attribute what has been achieved by way of empowerment for women entirely to combined effects of the Catholic Church and the Catholic Diocese of Aitape is also not possible as there have been many other changes and influences from other sources impacting upon the lives of the women of the Diocese. Many men and indeed numerous women have spent time outside of the Diocese and have no doubt been influenced in some way by their experiences during this time. The changes concurrent with the arrival of Christianity described in Chapter 2 have also had an effect. The cumulative effect on the lives of the women living within the Diocese of Aitape is that
gender relations appear to be improving as is the level of empowerment of women in general. Just as it is difficult to attribute success, it is also difficult to imagine what the situation would be for these women without the Catholic Diocese of Aitape.
Bibliography


Aitape, History Of The Diocese, www.global.net.pg/diocese_of_aitape/history.html

Allen, B.J. 1983 ‘A bomb or a bullet or the bloody flux: population change in the Aitape Inland, Papua New Guinea, 1941-45.’ Journal of Pacific History, Vol 18, No 4, pp. 218 - 235


Botchway K 2001 ‘Paradox of Empowerment: Reflections on a Case Study from Northern Ghana’ *World Development*, Volume 29, Number 1, pp.135 - 153,


Bourke, Fr Greg ofm 2000, direct communication with author


Douglas, Bronwyn 2003, Prologue, Oceania vol 74, nos 1&2, pp.1-5


Endeley, Joyce B 2001, ‘Conceptualising women’s empowerment in societies in Cameroon: how does money fit in?’ Gender and Development, No 9


Herdt, GH; Poole, FJP 1982, ‘Sexual antagonism: the intellectual history of a concept in New Guinea anthropology’, Social Analysis No 12, pp 3-28


Jannsen, Herman 1971, ‘Mid-course correction. The role of the Church in Melanesia’, *Catalyst*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 5 - 23

Jolly, Margaret 2003, Epilogue, *Oceania* vol74, nos1&2, pp.134-147.


Kabeer, Naiila 1992, ‘Triple Roles, Gender Roles, Social Relations: The Political Sub-Text of Gender Training’ Institute for Development Studies, Sussex, United Kingdom


Kilby, Patrick 2004, ‘Is empowerment possible under a new public management


La Barre, W 1980, Culture in Context, Duke University Press, Durham, NC


Mantovani, Ennio 1991 Traditional and Present Day Melanesian Values and Ethics, Occasional papers of the Melanesian Institute, No. 8, Melanesian Institute, Goroka.

Mantovani, Ennio 1993 Male-Female Relationships in Melanesia, Occasional papers of the Melanesian Institute No. 8, Melanesian Institute, Goroka.


Narakobi, B 1977, ‘What is religious experience for a Melanesian?’ in *Christ in Melanesia*, Melanesian Institute, Goroka pp.7-12.


Opie, A 1992, ‘Qualitative Research, appropriation of the “other” and empowerment’, Feminist Review, Vol. 40, pp. 52-69


Rowlands, Jo 1997, Questioning Empowerment: Working with women in Honduras, Oxfam, UK.


Gallery, Port Moresby.


Warren, Carrol 1988 Ideology, Identity and Change, South East Asia monograph series, no. 14, James Cook University, Townsville.


World Bank 2000, Expanding Development through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources & Voice, Washington DC.

Appendix 1

Letter to participants.

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The purpose of the study is to see whether the Church in the Aitape Diocese gives women opportunities to have more control over those things that affect their daily lives. For some women this may be related to the position they have as an employee of the diocese. For others this will be related to the effect that the role of those women working formally for the Diocese has on their lives.

During the interview with you will be recorded and the content used to write up a case study to be included in the final written report on the study. The information asked in the interview will relate to your role and position in the Diocese and how you believe this has affected your life, relationships and your standing within your community and your relationships within your family. The interview will also seek to find out how you see your role and position affecting, if at all, the lives of other women, especially women in the village.

The published information will not identify you personally, that information will be known only to myself and of course to you. I will keep the recording of the interview and a copy made available to you if you so desire. A copy of the written case study will be made available to you.

The purpose of the study is to examine the work done by women in various positions in the Diocese of Aitape to see if these positions and the work done has a direct benefit for women in terms of empowerment. That is do women have more control over their lives as a result. If the study finds this to be the case then this information can be shared with other areas for the benefit of women. If it is found to not benefit women then other ways will need to found which do.

I look forward to working with you in this study.

Sincerely,

John Donnelly.

NB.
Most women in the focus groups are either illiterate or unable to read English. A Pidgin (Tok Pisin) version of a letter to be read to the group by the group convenor would be required.

Thank you for agreeing to share your views on how women in the Diocese, such as nuns, prayer leaders, nurses, and women in the office, affect your lives here in the village. Your opinions will help to determine whether the Diocese is helping to make life better for women in the village or not. Does the work done by the nuns and the
other women help to improve the position of women in the family, in the village, and in the community. If it does how does it do this. If not, why not. The information you give will not be able to identify you either as an individual or as a group. The information will be put together with that from other groups and written up as a report. This will take some time, but when it is done the information will be useful to both you and to the Diocese.

Sincerely,

John Donnelly.
Appendix 2

Translation

When recording the data provided by the Focus Groups, the data was recorded in a written form by the author. The record was done in English even though the discussion of the Focus Groups was conducted in Pigin (Tok Pisin). The author translated the collective conversation into English rather than the many individual comments. Thus the narrative under the heading 6.3 Focus Groups, is an English translation of what the author considered to be the essence of the discussion and is made up of direct quotes and paraphrase.

The decision to transcribe directly into English was taken for two reasons. Firstly it is the author’s first language and while the author is fluent in both written and oral Pigin, the author determined that to quickly record the Focus Group data would be more accurate in English. Secondly, the Pigin language can be quite repetitive and due to the limited vocabulary, a number of words are often required to express what might be easily expressed in one or two English words. The following are examples of Focus Group data expressed in Pigin and then in English.

Example 1
Sios emi bin bringim dispela samting blong ol meri long hia. Meri blong olgeta hap long dispela paris I cam long bung, olsem, sapos emi gat rod long cam long bung. Sapos mipela meri nogat grup olsem displea grup, mipela bai noinap go long narapela hap long tok tok wantaim ol meri long narapela hap.

Because of the Church we have groups like this. We have members in groups from all over the parish as long as the women can get to the meeting. This means that we can go to other villages and talk to other women.

Example 2

We know more people and we see them often. If we did not have Lotu and our groups we might not meet all these people or we would only see them at sing sings or funerals and they are not as often as our meetings.
Appendix 3

The Research Participants

The women who participated as individual interviewees were:

A  Married; a few years of primary education; with her husband she delivers Family Life Programs to village people.

B  Married; well educated; at the time of interview was working as a trauma counsellor.

C  Married; is a nurse with a lot of responsibility.

D  Catholic Women’s Coordinator for the Catholic Diocese of Aitape.

E  Married; works in administration for the Catholic Diocese of Aitape.

F  Nun; completing her secondary education via correspondence.

G  Nun; only has primary level education.

H  Nun; provincial head of her order.

The Focus Groups:

The focus groups were two existing groups of village women. One group was a Legion of Mary group while the other was a existing parish women’s group.

The observers:

X  An expatriate Australian nun who has lived and worked in the Catholic Diocese of Aitape since 1949.

The two males  Both men are married with families, have responsible, paid positions, one with the Diocese one in commercial employment.
Appendix 4

A celebration of the women of the Diocese of Aitape