Women's Intergenerational Leadership

Realizing Rights in Solomon Islands and Beyond

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Le YWCA des Iles Salomon est un organisme féministe en faveur des droits de la personne. Il a adopté une approche intergénérationnelle de ces droits entre l'organisme et le quotidien des femmes. Les stratégies comportent une participation égalitaire des jeunes femmes dans un leadership qui a institutionnalisé le pouvoir partagé. Ces dernières connaissent et réclament leurs droits de la famille et de la communauté. Cette façon de faire du YWCA des Iles Solomon est un modèle qui prouve que le pouvoir partagé et la collaboration intergénérationnelle renforcent les droits de la personne et peuvent offrir des débouchés pour transformer la pratique de plusieurs organismes de femmes des pays du Nord et du Sud.

YWCA Solomon Islands is one of the most successful human rights organizations in the world; practicing intergenerational leadership that expands women's rights across communities, the nation, and the globe. In the face of paradigms that predicate global development and human rights on the whole world becoming more like socalled "developed" countries, YWCA Solomon Islands is one of countless organizations in the majority world blazing its own path toward social transformation. Instead of economic growth or resource management, at the heart of YWCA Solomon Islands' feminist rights-based intergenerational leadership approach are active respect and equality. Recruitment and retention of young women staff, members and volunteers through young women-led programs is the foundation of this approach. YWCA Solomon Islands was established in 1975 shortly before the Solomon Islands, a small country northeast of Australia, gained independence from Britain. The focus on intergenerational leadership is part of an overall strategy to support young women's current and future leadership in the organization and the country.

Why intergenerational leadership? In essence, to transform systems and structures of power to achieve women's rights and gender equality. Intergenerational leadership can be defined as women of different generations (Mannheim) working collaboratively, valuing difference, practising mutual accountability, and sharing power and decision-making. Too often *inside* feminist and women's organizations, we reproduce the very patriarchal (neo) colonial power dynamics we seek to transform in our communities and countries (Joshi; Wilson; Baumgartner and Richards; Sen and Grown). Intergenerational inequalities tend to be ignored in feminist and development literatures, obscuring conflicts of interest that privilege older generations (Croll; McDaniel; Hasso; Whittier) and rendering young women's¹ and girls' experiences all but invisible (Croll). Some young feminists recount empowering experiences within intergenerational organizations and movements (Purvis; Springer), others describe the privileging of older, established women at the expense of young women (Joshi; Plyler; Reger; Baumgardner and Richards). Sanushka Mudlair explains: "the intergenerational agenda often becomes a question of young women being invited into spaces already defined by older feminists, rather than being a part of shaping the spaces and agendas from the onset" and suggests instead, "a more nuanced understanding of intergenerational solidarity, built on a shared power to define, prioritize and act across generations of feminist activists" (qtd. in Horn 151).

Complex and dynamic, the intersections of gender, culture, ethnicity, generation, class and colonialism shape historical and contemporary intergenerational experiences (Crenshaw; Walker; Springer; Joshi; Williams and Konsmo). Naila Kabeer's theory of "empowerment from below" offers a framework for understanding intergenerational power dynamics: student, former young woman Executive Director, and World YWCA Vice President, I was searching for models that made the shared, intergenerational, transformative leadership so often talked about in feminist movements a tangible reality. I was eager to understand YWCA Solomon Islands' leadership model and, if it lived up to its reputation, participation affirms people's *power to* fully understand their rights and make decisions about issues that affect their lives (Nash; AWID). Rights-based approaches offer young women the potential to use international human rights treaties to claim their right to participate in decision-making in families, women's organizations, communities, countries, and international

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as power to make or refuse to make decisions about contested issues and situations, power over decision-making agendas, power within women to identify and overcome internalized oppressions, and *power with* others through group solidarity leading to collective action (245-246, 253). Young women are critical constituencies of feminist organizations, including those working on human rights. Forty-four percent of the global population is under the age of twenty-five (UNFPA), while in the Global South that figure jumps to 87 percent (Beyond2015). In order for human rights organizations to be accountable to, and have leadership representative of, their constituencies (Mutua "Human Rights NGOs"), they must share power and leadership with young women. "Our ability and willingness to share power within our own organizations" (Sen and Grown 95) is both a barrier and key to social justice.

Within the YWCA movement, YWCA Solomon Islands has a reputation for implementing its value of young women's leadership and achieving real transformation in women's lives. In 2012, as a Master's

with the team's permission, to share it far and wide as a framework for transformation. I spent three months at YWCA Solomon Islands conducting feminist ethnographic research (Naples and Sachs; Stacey; Wolf; Bhavnani; Harding). At that time, the amazing women leaders of YWCA Solomon Islands were from three generations, diverse in age, class, and sociocultural community membership, and from across all nine provinces. With five hundred hours of participant observation and more than thirty-five interviews with YWCA staff, volunteers, and members, staff of partner organizations, funders, and the Solomon Islands Government, and centring young women's voices and knowledge, I studied the organization's intergenerational leadership model as a strategy for realizing human rights.

Rights-based approaches aim to realize human rights by implementing the principles of participation, equality and non-discrimination, and empowerment through social, political, and legal processes that extend accountability for rights fulfillment beyond states to corporations and NGOs (Gready). The principle of systems. However, analysis by Sara Ahmed suggests that international human rights treaties will only protect young women's rights if they are used strategically by young women and others to hold duty-bearers to account.

Rights-based approaches, and human rights more broadly, are critiqued by some feminists as too inherently individualistic and colonial to offer a route to social transformation (Hickey and Mitlin; Grewal; Rajagopal; Mutua Human Rights; Kothari; Bradshaw; Binion; Charlesworth and Chinkin). Feminist rights-based approaches address these critiques by: (i) being grounded in the collective work of women's and people's movements to expand rights (Fraser; Stammers); and (ii) building on the CEDAW Committee's recognition of women's rights to freedom from violence, equality within the family, and bodily integrity; and multiculturalizing of human rights (United Nations; Mutua Human Rights). Feminist rights-based approaches creatively mobilize human rights law and discourse to realize human rights and "capabilities" (Sen; Bradshaw). In turn, feminist movements

and organizations are strengthened through a focus on responsiveness and regeneration, accountability to constituencies, and intergenerational leadership (African Feminist Forum; Wilson). Feminist rights-based approaches respect women in all our diversities as experts on our own lives and experiences (Smith; Harding). Centralizing equality, feminist rights-based approaches seek to build women's power with and power within as part of transforming the structures of power that maintain and deepen gender and other intersecting inequalities.

YWCA Solomon Islands' feminist rights-based approach to intergenerational leadership builds upon traditional painaha leadership based on egalitarianism, reciprocity, servant leadership,² and wealth redistribution (Pollard). It seeks to reclaim the emphasis on women as equal partners in leadership (Pollard) that has been eroded by capitalism, missionary intervention, and colonialism (Bennett). Key components of YWCA Solomon Islands' feminist rights-based include: (i) collaborative, dialogue-based decision-making to determine organizational policy and action; (ii) values-based leadership; and (iii) the Rise Up! Young Women's Leadership Program that builds the capacity of young people in Solomon Islands communities to know and claim their rights. Through this approach, YWCA Solomon Islands works to realize rights in women's everyday lives by practicing respect and equality:

One of the strengths is respect; we respect each other ... we create opportunities for young women to take up leadership roles and we trust and respect them. At the same time we build. We train them and we build their confidence and give them as much space as possible to be creative and come up with their ideas. And in terms of training, we keep opportunities for everyone. (Interview, October 10, 2012)

It wasn't always this way. Immediately prior to 2003, YWCA Solomon Islands was an organization led by "elite" women (YWCA member, October 22, 2012). Following a period of relative dormancy during the 1999-2003 conflict³ in Solomon Islands, young women have slowly reclaimed and rebuilt the YWCA as a grassroots organization responsive and accountable to a broad diversity of women and young women. Key turning points include: (i) democratic leadership elections in 2005 during which two board members who had previously held the balance of power were removed from office; (ii) elections in 2007 and 2009 of boards of directors with 40 percent and 44 percent young women respectively; (iii) the adoption in 2009 of a vision of "creating space for young Solomon Islands women to influence change" and the values of caring, integrity, empowerment, good governance, celebrating diversity, and respecting one another; (iv) beginning in 2010, the implementation of the Rise Up! Young Women's Leadership Program to grow the leadership of young women at all levels of the organization; and (v) three successive young women General Secretaries and Vice Presidents.

From communities and cultures across Solomon Islands, young women staff members, board members, Rise Up! peer educators, volunteers and program participants are seen as leaders equal to older women. Although YWCA Solomon Islands does not officially use the language "rights-based," it can be said to employ a feminist rights-based approach comprised of multiple strategies including: (i) participation of diverse young women as both a means and an end; (ii) a culture of power-sharing and mentorship; (iii) institutionalized supports for young women's leadership and priorities; and (iv) a growing number of young women knowing and claiming their rights. While each of these strategies is significant, together they form a leadership model through which power-sharing is sustained and the rights of diverse young women are fulfilled.

YWCA Solomon Islands' experience of intergenerational leadership is not without challenges. For example, several board and staff members report a concern that young women living in the YWCA hostel in Honiara are considered beneficiaries rather than leaders and as such as not invited by the YWCA to participate in leadership development and mentorship opportunities. Other challenges include tense power dynamics between some older and younger women based on the older women's perceptions of "good" and "bad" behaviour as well as limited organizational capacity to engage all one hundred members in decision-making. These challenges are being addressed through continuing efforts to fully implement YWCA Solomon Islands' feminist rights-based approach, including budget allocations and resource support for expansion of the Rise-Up! Young Women's Leadership Program, exploring different organizational structures that would allow more participatory decision-making, and sharing leadership with young women who are representative of the constituencies served by the organization.

Participation as Both a Means and an End

YWCA Solomon Islands is committed to participation as a means to develop young women as equal leaders and decision-makers at all levels, from governance to membership. This includes both informal leadership as well as the formal leadership positions young women hold including Vice President, Finance Committee member, General Secretary, Programs Manager, and Finance and Admin Officer. There is no distinction between women who are eligible to be program participants and women who are eligible to hold leadership positions. Four know? What if in Solomon Islands Parliament only one kind of person was there? Like, if we weren't allowed because of our village, our Province? What if women weren't allowed to be in Parliament, *olsem*? YWCA is for *all* women in Solomon Islands. YWCA *blo everi woman*. And *all* women should be that are involved in village roles. They are leaders themselves in their families. They are able to make, and are making, decisions in their families. They are able to speak out, to voice their views during meetings with the chiefs, with the leaders in the village, helping them to know and make changes. One of the changes is

"Women and young women see that they are not just women that are involved in village roles. They are leaders themselves in their families. They are able to make, and are making, decisions in their families. They are able to speak out, to voice their views during meetings with the chiefs, with the leaders in the village, helping them to know and make changes."

of nine board members are young women, while five board members and two staff members are former program participants or members. Older and younger women in YWCA Solomon Islands share leadership through sharing knowledge, skills, questions, and ideas. For example, the Treasurer, who is over thirty, and the former General Secretary and other Finance Committee member, who is a young woman with education and experience in accounting, share equally in overseeing the organization's finances and working with staff to ensure a financially healthy organization (YWCA member, interview, November 4, 2012). Another example occurred during the 2012 constitutional review process. One of the older women board members spoke against a proposed revision to include women of all faiths on the board, stating that it could be a threat to the Christian basis and values of the organization. A young woman staff member influenced the board to recommend that women of all faiths sit on the board, saying:

But what it would be like if Parliament was like that? You allowed on board. Not just like we make decisions and they can be members. No! Any woman, a Muslim woman, a Jewish woman, any woman could be a board member. We don't exclude, like Parliament olsem. (Field notes, November 10, 2012)

The organization is also committed to participation as an end; that is, the realization of women's rights in everydaylife. Women's empowerment is an essential component. As women of all generations and diversities gain knowledge of their rights and confidence to claim those rights, they create change in their everyday lives. Two staff members of YWCA Solomon Islands have been invited by the United Nations Development Program to participate in the Young Women's Parliamentary Group, while a staff member is one of only two youth representatives drafting the new Solomon Islands federal constitution. One board member explains that young women have become actively involved in influencing change:

Women and young women see that they are not just women

that ... in meetings women are not allowed so much to speak out. Only the men can speak out. But now having all these young women able to attend all these trainings, coming over to YWCA, they go: "It's my human right. I have the freedom to speak. I am going to speak out. I am not happy about the situation. It's not fair. We don't need to do it this way. Can we do these things another way, so we can be involved?" (Interview, October 20, 2012)

One important component of YWCA Solomon Islands' leadership model is supporting young women to identify and articulate their priorities. Created by young women staff and volunteers, the Rise Up! Peer Education Program is at the core of YWCA Solomon Islands' leadership model. Through workshops on gender, human rights, women's rights, leadership, public speaking, and social change, the program creates a safe space for young women to tell their stories, build common understanding of their rights and the impacts of violations on their lives and communities, and dialogue toward action and change. Safe spaces are defined by the World YWCA as "inclusive and empowering spaces for women and girls of all ages and in all their diversity ... based on respect and equality..." ("YWCA Safe Spaces" 3, 5). In these spaces, young women explore their priorities, speaking from their standpoints as people marginalized within their communities. Young women also build confidence through Rise Up! with public speaking highlighted as a critical skill in the Solomon Islands due to a predominantly oral culture in which public meetings are key decision-making spaces. Young women then use these skills and knowledge to challenge power and gender inequalities; claim rights in their families, communities, churches and organizations; and advocate for change through national and international policy processes. Two Rise Up! peer educators talk about the ways participation has changed their lives:

For myself, I really changed a lot. Because at first I am the kind of woman who just stays at home and does housework and doesn't really go out or be friends with other women. No, I was just staying at home and doing housework. But since I attended this Rise Up! training, I know that I have the potential to lead. I have the self-esteem I see that I have the potential but I never realized it. So since I attended Rise Up! I just stand on my feet and say, "oh, I can do it now. Nobody can stop me" ...Whenever there is training ... the women or the girls come to me and say, "Thank you. We too face the same thing. So now we can do it as you do." (Group interview, November 6, 2012)

My family, they think I am disability girl. And they said to

me, you stay at the house, do the work at the house, because you are disability girl. So when I escaped, when I attended the Rise Up! workshop, I realized disability girls can do anything. So in the last week I have been working on this [disability rights] policy to raise our voices to government to recognize us. Since Rise Up! I have been doing a lot of talking to government. (Group interview, Nov. 6, 2012)

A Culture of Power-Sharing and Mentorship

Another strategy of the YWCA feminist rights-based approach is shared leadership within the YWCA. Shared leadership crosses boundaries of generation, ethnicity, class, home Province, and board/staff/volunteer status. It is about collective responsibility for achieving the mission and vision of YWCA Solomon Islands, and creating opportunities for each woman to play a leading role in building the organization and the country. Shared leadership is part of Solomon Islands culture of sharing what you have with the people around you and reflects the Solomon Islands philosophy: "To lead is to serve" (Pollard 194). One YWCA staff member explains:

Shared leadership? I think it's how we give responsibility to each other or delegate opportunities to each other. Like, trusting one another. Like we are the same, like we can all do it together. So instead of only the one in the senior position doing things, also having confidence and trusting other colleagues to be able to do it, or encouraging them to be confident to take responsibility in coordinating things. So it doesn't feel like they are more or less than the other. So they feel like, yeah, we are just the same in doing things. (Interview, October 29, 2012)

YWCA Solomon Islands also supports young women's leadership through a culture of mentorship. Board members, staff members, volunteers and members of YWCA Solomon Islands talk about mentorship as an important part of achieving the Vision. Mentorship is understood to benefit all parties to the mentorship relationship, and is practiced informally in many day-today interactions. Early one morning, a young woman staff member described a challenging situation she was having with a colleague. She said that her colleague was not contributing equally on the staff team, and that she was frustrated about this situation. She was upset, and feeling pressured to complete the bulk of the work herself outside of work hours. I'm not sure what I expected her to say next, but to my great surprise she turned the conversation to mentorship. She said, "I know what I will do. I will mentor [my colleague]. I will be a good example and [my colleague] will see that this is the right way to work. I will not become angry. I will do the work and mentor [my colleague] with my example" (Field notes, Oct. 27, 2012).

Institutionalized Supports for Young Women's Leadership and Priorities

The success of YWCA Solomon Islands' leadership model can be largely attributed to the principles of respect and equality that form its foundation. Respect is institutionalized through policies, budgets, and young women teams. Since 1979, the YWCA Solomon Islands constitution has mandated at least 25 percent young women board members. While the constitution has not always been followed, since 2007 the organization has had at least 40 percent young women board members. The Strategic Plan, draft Human Resources Policies, and organizational budget also support young women's leadership. For example, YWCA Solomon Islands designates significant funding for young women's leadership development and capacity-building. When one young woman staff received a Solomon Islands had previously been unable to reach. Subsequently, the Rise Up! model has also been adopted by YWCA Papua New Guinea and YWCA Samoa.

Young Women Knowing and Claiming their Rights

Through Rise Up! as well as World

They believe that their work is to stay back home and produce babies and, yeah, their role is to work, like, washes the dishes and make gardens. And so they have no influence in the community. So mostly, men they are the ones who take all the opportunities.... There is change in my community. A lot of young women

Young women prioritize rights to informed decision-making about issues that impact their lives, freedom to share ideas and opinions with community leaders, education, economic benefits, sexual and reproductive health and rights, political participation, safety, and the freedom to choose when to come and go from their homes.

scholarship from the Solomon Islands government for an eight-month Community Development certification, the YWCA continued to pay 50 percent of her salary throughout the training (YWCA staff member, personal communication, September 19, 2012). While YWCA Solomon Islands has a small budget, spending decisions are made based on the vision and mission of the organization. Another example is by conscious decision, all but two of the staff and Rise Up! peer educators of YWCA Solomon Islands are young women. This critical mass (Childs) of young women actively use power with to influence YWCA decisions resulting in YWCA policies and programs that are responsive to young women's priorities. For example, the Rise Up! Program was created, expanded, and became the core of YWCA Solomon Islands precisely because young women saw its power to transform the organization, communities, and beyond. Seeking to share empowerment and rights fulfillment opportunities with increasing numbers of young women, Rise Up! Peer Educators decided to conduct Rise Up! training-of-trainers in rural communities that YWCA

YWCA training, young women come to know and claim their rights in extremely tangible ways. Young women prioritize rights to informed decision-making about issues that impact their lives, freedom to share ideas and opinions with community leaders, education, economic benefits, sexual and reproductive health and rights, political participation, safety, and the freedom to choose when to come and go from their homes. One young woman peer educator told me, "before, I never realized that I have the rights" (Group interview, November 6, 2012). In response to a question about what information she shares with other young women about rights, one peer educator responded:

I say about women's rights: as young women we have a right to share [leadership] and make decisions in the family. It's in the human rights articles, plenty of them. So women have the right to express their thoughts or opinions, to be involved in the community meetings.... You see, in our community, so many times women are neglected. They just stay back home.

started to realize their role; that they have rights.... When they started to know their rights, they got motivated to be involved. They got courage to stand in front and speak out; participate in community meetings. Young women are often not invited but when they know their rights they attend and speak; share ideas in meetings ... on logging in the community. Young women feel confident to discuss the impacts of logging companies in the community. They ask about impacts on future generations. When other young women see these changes ... they ask to also join in these community meetings. (Interview, September 26, 2012)

YWCA Solomon Islands has shown that a feminist practice of rights by diverse women and young women at the grassroots can achieve shared power, intergenerational collaboration, and increased recognition of women's human rights. Women's organizations everywhere can learn from YWCA Solomon Islands' practice. In an era of decreasing protection of rights by states increasingly concerned with security and trade, women, particularly young women, are increasingly vulnerable to rights violations and deepening global inequalities. Young women's lived experience provides them with expertise to generate solutions to human rights and global development challenges, while feminist rights-based approaches equip young women to claim their rights. Women's organizations committed to human rights can "change their own practices to be consistent with the objective of integrating and realizing human rights in development" (Rajagopal 224) by adapting and adopting the key strategies of YWCA Solomon Islands' feminist rights-based approach. Given the challenges faced by YWCA Solomon Islands, further research is needed to address the complexities of applying feminist rights-based approaches in different kinds of organizations and overcome obstacles to full implementation. Action research with women's organizations willing to adopt feminist rights-based approaches might be one way to learn more about intergenerational leadership as a strategy for realizing rights. Key to this work, and a strength of YWCA Solomon Islands' feminist rights-based approach, is transforming generational inequalities within women's organizations.

I travelled to YWCA Solomon Islands in search of an outlier; a women's organization that seemed to conscientiously practice equality through intergenerational leadership. YWCA Solomon Islands has no pretensions, and does not necessarily consider itself a site of leading practice. But as an organization that acknowledges its challenges, strives to foster and support the leadership and rights of young women, and truly lives its human rights values, YWCA Solomon Islands offers strategies that would transform the practice of many women's organizations in both the Global North and South. It is so easy

to call for others to change; to think of others as duty-bearers; to see others as responsible for fulfilling women's rights. It takes great courage to hold ourselves to account for equality. Part of the journey is to overcome conceptualizations of power as zero-sum, and to let go of the deep-seated fears that prevent us from sharing power. We owe our communities the courage to try.

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Endnotes

¹Across the YWCA movement, "young women" is defined as aged thirty or under (YWCA Solomon Islands; World YWCA, "Constitution").

²Within *painaha* leadership, servant leadership is understood as a paradigm in which the leader is responsible for caring for, protecting, and serving the community.

³The conflict of 1999-2003, called "the tension" by Solomon Islanders, was ostensibly a conflict between the Isatbu Freedom Movement of Guadalcanal province and the Malaita Eagle Force (Dinnen). However, the historical roots of the conflict are linked to resource scarcity in Malaita province and date back to the history of colonialization by Britian, includ-

ing resource appropriation and disruption of indigenous notions of land custodianship in favour of individual land ownership (Bennett; Fangalasuu et al.). Since that time many Malaitan "settlers" have relocated to the capital city of Honiara, leading to the perception among many Solomon Islanders that Malaitans dominate the labour market, economy and political leadership (Dinnen). The conflict, and subsequent public violence that erupted in 2006, have been in part caused by "the growing disaffection of many Solomon Islanders with their marginalization from important political and economic processes" (Hameiri 432-433).

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