

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Papua New Guinea, an independent member of the Commonwealth since 1975, is an island nation located in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, encompassing the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and a chain of tropical islands. In ethnic terms, it is one of the world's most complex societies, embracing more than 700 distinct ethnic entities. Two large groupings predominate: Papuans, constituting some 80 per cent of the population, and Melanesians, roughly one in six of the nation's inhabitants.

Migrations to the Papua New Guinea region from southeast Asia are believed to date back some 50,000 years. In the modern period, Portugal was the first European power to make a landing, while Spain laid claim to the territory in the mid-sixteenth century. However, colonial annexation did not occur until the late nineteenth century, when Britain seized the southeastern portion of New Guinea and Germany took the north-east.

In 1906, British New Guinea passed to Australia, which occupied the German colony during the First World War and later won a League of Nation mandate to administer the territory. The Second World War brought Japanese occupation, but after this Australia regained control. The administration of Papua and the New Guinea mandate was then combined, and the resulting Territory of Papua New Guinea became self-governing in 1973. Independence followed two years later.

The 1975 Constitution, while retaining the British monarch as the nominal head of state, vests executive power in a national executive council headed by a Prime Minister, elected by a majority vote in the single-chamber national parliament. The latter's 109 members are elected for terms of up to five years on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

Since independence, Papua New Guinea has been under coalition rule; no party has been able to win a big enough majority to form a government on its own. Major parties include the People's Progress Party (PPP), the Pangu Pati, and the People's Democratic Movement (PDM). A coalition of the PPP and the Pangu Pati ruled the country for much of the 1990s, with Sir Julius Chan as Prime Minister. This period saw the growing challenge posed by an armed secessionist movement on the island of Bougainville.

After national elections held in June 1997, a new governing coalition was formed, comprising the PPP, the Pangu Pati, the PDM and the People's National Congress (PNC). The leader of the PNC, Bill Skate, was elected Prime Minister by parliament on 22 July 1997.

Women in Politics

While the number of women candidates standing for national election has increased in recent years, Papua New Guinea's national parliament

has never had more than three female members at a time. Two women returned to parliament in the general elections of June-July 1997. A similar situation prevails in provincial and local government. Only one woman has ever been elected head of a provincial government and the female presence in provincial assemblies has never exceeded two or three.

Interestingly, the only three women to have been elected to Papua New Guinea's national parliament to date have this point in common: each has, or has had, an expatriate husband or partner.

The constitution provides for one nominated female representative in parliament, but as yet no woman has been nominated to this reserved seat, partly as a result of disagreement on how the choice should be made.

NAHAU ROONEY

Former Minister of Justice

Former Minister of Culture and Tourism

Member, Constitutional Reform Commission

Founder Member of the People's Democratic Movement

President, Pihi Manus Council of Women (Manus Province)

Back in the 1980s, when she was Papua New Guinea's Minister of Justice, Nahau Rooney found herself sentenced to eight months in jail. In what became known as the "Rooney Affair", she was judged by the Supreme Court to have interfered in the working of the judiciary in a landmark deportation case. In the event, the intervention of the then Prime Minister, Michael Somare, ensured that she did not go to prison. What the incident revealed, however, was the readiness of this woman political leader to place herself at the centre of controversy and go into battle. As she put it to an interviewer, "politics is not for the faint-hearted."

Early Life

Nahau Rooney was born in 1945 in Lahan village on the south coast of Manus province. She had four siblings, making her family a relatively small one by the standards of Papua New Guinea. She did not begin attending school until the age of ten, but this was in a context in which very few girls received any education at all.

At the primary level, she attended a boarding school in Lorengau, the administrative headquarters of Manus district. Since there was no provision for secondary education for girls in the district, she travelled to Morobe district and enrolled in Busu High School, set up in the early 1960s to prepare young women for positions in the colonial administration. It was in fact the only school in the country to give women an opportunity to enter the emerging educated elite.

After completing school, Rooney underwent training as a teacher, grad-

uating from Port Moresby Teachers' Training College. She went on to win a scholarship to study home economics in Fiji. Later she won a Winston Churchill Fellowship which enabled her to study for a year at Melbourne Teachers' College in Australia. She then read for a Bachelor's degree in social work at the University of Papua New Guinea.

Entry into Politics

It was while she was studying at the University of Papua New Guinea that Rooney first became involved in politics. During her time at university, the campus was the hub of lively political activity, with students debating such issues as self-government and independence, citizenship and the form the constitution of an independent Papua New Guinea should take. Rooney was elected President of the Student Representative Council, her first leadership position.

In 1973, she stood as a candidate of the Pangu Pati for the National Capital District City Council and won. She served as a City Councillor for one term.

Before Papua New Guinea's independence in 1975, Rooney worked as a research officer for Michael Somare, then Chief Minister and effectively Prime Minister-in-Waiting. Her work as a researcher, consultant and advisor involved her in the interplay between decision-making and representation. She decided that the political arena was the one in which she would make her contribution.

She began work as a Special Projects Officer within the local government council of Manus province; this body later became the area body. Her responsibilities included the handling of land disputes, and she found herself listening to case and clan histories which she then wrote up and got recorded ready for submission before dispute settlement committees.

By this time, the mid-1970s, decentralisation of decision-making was a live issue; the secessionist movement in Bougainville province was already active, and in Manus plans were being drawn up for the establishment of a provincial government. In 1976, Rooney was asked to assist in the preparation of a constitution for the new body. She was appointed executive officer to the planning commission on the constitution. This required her to travel throughout the province interviewing people about the form of provincial government they wanted. She gained not only visibility but also the confidence of the people she met. "They felt that perhaps I should represent them in the national government," she recalls.

In the 1977 general elections, Rooney stood for and won the Manus open seat in the national parliament. She was one of three successful women candidates. Prior to the election, she had informed the Pangu Pati of her candidacy, but it was only subsequent to her victory that the party gave her official endorsement.

Rise to the Top

In parliament, Rooney's assertiveness and articulateness soon impressed the Pangu leadership, in particular the Prime Minister, Michael Somare. In August 1977 she was appointed Minister for Corrective Institutions and Liquor Licensing – the first woman to enter the National Cabinet.

From March 1979 to September of the same year she served as Minister of Justice. This was the period of the so-called Rooney Affair. The controversy centred on a deportation order served by the government on a political science lecturer at the University of Papua New Guinea. In June 1979, the Foreign Affairs Minister revoked the lecturer's entry permit, which was valid until 1982, and gave him two weeks to leave the country. The lecturer took the matter to court, and the Supreme Court issued an interim injunction restraining the government from deporting him for a period of one month.

As Minister of Justice, Rooney took issue with this ruling, arguing that four weeks was too long a period. In a letter to the Chief Justice, she was critical of the judiciary, accusing it of meddling in political matters which should be left to the executive. She also made it known over the radio and in the press that she did not have confidence in the judiciary. Foreign judges, she argued, were administering foreign laws.

Her letter to the Chief Justice, the broadcast on national radio and newspaper reports became the basis for three charges of contempt of court brought against the minister by the Public Prosecutor. The Supreme Court found her guilty of contempt of court and sentenced her to eight months' imprisonment. The same day, Prime Minister Somare pardoned her, using mercy powers provided by the constitution. His action outraged the Chief Justice, who resigned, and so did other members of the judiciary. It also ignited a parliamentary and public outcry that quickly evolved into the country's first major constitutional crisis. Looking back on the experience, Rooney concedes having made mistakes. But most of her comments since the Rooney Affair have focussed on the relevance or otherwise of "foreign" laws in Papua New Guinea and the need to raise the indigenous content of the judiciary.

Her brief stint as Minister of Justice ended in September 1979. From January 1980 to March 1980 she served as Minister for Decentralisation in the Somare government.

In 1982, Papua New Guinea held its second general elections since independence. At that time, Pangu had three strongholds: the National Capital District and the districts of Morobe and East Sepik. What Rooney did was to take the party to Manus district. In the months before the election, she campaigned widely, projecting herself and the party through posters and calendars carrying her name and photograph.

In the event, the election result in her seat was extremely close. After the first count, she and her main opponent had equal votes. A recount

gave her opponent a majority of one. She appealed to the Court for Disputed Returns, which ordered a second recount. The final result was a victory for Rooney by a margin of eleven votes.

Rooney was the only woman to be elected in the 1982 elections. She did not become a minister in the new Somare government; the cabinet had been formed before her electoral dispute was resolved and a ministerial berth had been given to another Pangu representative from Manus. In Papua New Guinea, Prime Ministers must ensure that all regions are represented in their cabinet – and that no region can be construed as over-represented.

A New Party

In March 1985, Rooney was one of fifteen members of Pangu to break away and form a new political party, the People's Democratic Movement (PDM). Led by Pius Wingti, the PDM embodied in part the impatience of younger members of Pangu, including Rooney, who found themselves waiting on the back benches. Rooney became Secretary-General of the new party.

In November 1985, Rooney played a key role in the success of a vote of no confidence against the Somare government. In order to ensure victory, she took the unorthodox step of locking all doors to the parliamentary chamber so that the inmates could not leave and upset the projected outcome.

As a result of the successful no confidence motion, the Somare government resigned. Pius Wingti, the new Prime Minister, named a caretaker cabinet in which Rooney was included. When the finalised cabinet took shape, she was given the portfolio of Culture and Tourism, a post she held until March 1987.

In the 1987 general elections, Rooney contested as an independent rather than as a candidate of the PDM and was not re-elected. In the elections of 1997, too, she failed to win a seat in parliament.

Since leaving parliament, Rooney has involved herself in women's issues as well as in the running of her own business interests. She is currently President of the Manus Council of Women, or Pihl Women's Association, and is a member and former Vice-President of the Women in Politics (WIP) group, based in Port Moresby. She also serves on the country's Constitutional Reform Commission.

Enabling Factors

Rooney, who is married to an Australian, emphasises the importance to her political career of the support given by her family. She is of the view that traditional extended family structures, as found in Papua New Guinea, in fact make it easier for women to enter politics. As she notes, "a woman politician spends long hours talking and attending meetings at odd hours.

The help of extended family in domestic and maternal duties is essential. In Papua New Guinea, one can count on one's sister, mother, aunt or in-laws to look after the children as if they were their own."

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

Rooney, one of very few women to have been elected to Papua New Guinea's national parliament, does not favour affirmative action as a means to get more women into politics. "Women," she argues, "have to earn their place in parliament and not be placed here because of special circumstances. She also advises women against being projected or labelled as "women's only" candidates. Reviewing her own experience, she says that in spite of her commitment to women's empowerment, she avoided taking up women's issues on the floor of Parliament. She did so in order to weaken the perception of male colleagues that, as the only female Member of Parliament, she was bound first and foremost to represent women.

She believes that work in local government offers potential women politicians an effective training ground. Travelling about Manus province as a local government officer, she became extremely knowledgeable about the workings of politics. Her knowledge helped make her articulate and persuasive, besides bringing her to the attention of the leaders of the political party she supported. She also gained visibility among ordinary voters. "This kind of exposure is vital for woman politicians", she says. "If a woman is a completely unknown personality who simply turns up during elections, the chances are she'll be perceived simply as a woman – rather than seen for her ability or for what she represents."

During her parliamentary career, Rooney showed she was not afraid to play the games male politicians play. At the same time, she recommends that women in politics not allow personal ambition to take over and rule their careers. In Papua New Guinea, she points out, "ambitious politicians have fallen very quickly; they lose respect amongst their peers and their local support base."

ENNY MOAITZ

Former Premier of Morobe Province

Former Provincial Minister (various portfolios)

Founder and Patron of the Wanchef Women's Association

When Enny Moaitz, a teacher and an active member of the Lutheran church, was approached by colleagues within the church to register as a candidate for the 1980 provincial elections in Morobe province, she was

dumbfounded. “I told them I knew nothing about politics,” she recalls. “All I wanted to be was a teacher.”

Her supporters pressed her to give “his new thing” a try. Accompanied by her pastor, she went along to the district office and duly registered. So great was her standing in the community through her work with the church that she won her seat almost without trying.

In the provincial assembly, Moaitz entered the cabinet, where she handled a variety of portfolios. Then, in July 1987, the former teacher became Premier of Morobe Province, prompting one national daily to run the headline: “Morobe’s New Premier – a Woman!”

Handling such entrenched male attitudes correctly, she says, is vital to women’s success in politics: “The first hurdle is to overcome the attitudes of the men. If you present yourself properly, men will respect you. You have to earn respect.”

Early Life

Enny Moaitz was born in Morobe in 1945 and was educated in institutions run by the Lutheran church. After completing six years of primary education at the Bula Lutheran Primary Girls’ School, she trained as a teacher at a Lutheran teachers’ college in Goroka in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. This was by no means a common step for a woman to take. As she explains, “I was singled out as an experiment to see whether women were capable of becoming teachers.”

Moaitz spent two years at the college before being posted to a demonstration school attached to Balob Teachers’ College. While teaching at Balob and later at Port Moresby, she attended evening classes to complete her secondary school education.

In Port Moresby, she married Papua New Guinea’s first commercial pilot. For a period she worked as coordinator of Lutheran women’s fellowship groups from the headquarters of the church. However, she felt a strong need to return to Morobe and help the women from her community benefit from the experience she had gained. Her husband resigned his job, ending a promising career, and the couple moved to Morobe. Moaitz resumed her work as a teacher, teaching for the next twelve years eventually reaching the position of deputy headmistress of St Paul’s Lutheran School in Lae.

In 1973, she became involved in the Girl Guides movement. As Papua New Guinea moved towards independence, its Australian administrator realised the need to fill certain symbolic or high visibility positions with members of the indigenous population. Moaitz was appointed Territory Commissioner of the Girl Guides, a post previously held by the Australian administrator’s wife. At independence in 1975, she became Commissioner for Girl Guides. She held the post from 1975 to 1986, and again from 1994 to 1997.

Entry into Politics

In 1977, the people of Morobe began preparing for the establishment of a provincial government. An interim government was put in place in 1978 and a seat in it was reserved for a woman's representative. A number of women in the province got together and agreed to nominate Moaitz for the job. She served as women's representative in the interim provincial assembly for the next two years, while continuing to teach full-time. During this period she was Minister for Youth, Women and Home Affairs.

When the first Provincial Elections were held in 1980, Moaitz was "conscripted" as a candidate. Hopeful of becoming headmistress of St Paul's Lutheran School, where she had worked for the preceding twelve years, she was initially reluctant to get involved in the rough and tumble of electoral politics. But her supporters in the local church and community eventually persuaded her, and she won the Wanpa seat, beating six male opponents in the process.

In this first election, Moaitz says she did little by way of direct campaigning. Electoral politics were still a novelty at both the national and the provincial level, and for her the support of the Lutheran church, which put out the message that voters should choose "a good church person", was enough to get her elected. In subsequent elections, the element of competition grew and she was obliged to campaign more actively. As she recalls, "some male politicians began bribing voters and so it was necessary for me to campaign to give the correct impression about my policies and platform."

As a precaution, she made a point of screening carefully people who wanted to campaign on her behalf. She also set up committees of four members in each of the forty villages in her constituency.

Moaitz served as an elected Member of the Morobe Provincial Legislature from 1980 to 1991. During this period, she held a number of ministerial portfolios, including those of Education, Women, Youth and Home Affairs, Finance and Forestry.

It was in her third term as a Member of the Assembly that she was elected Premier of the province. The former Premier, Utula Samana, was the leader of the party to which she belonged, a Morobe-based organisation called the Morobe Independent Group (MIG). Samana and the MIG dominated the politics of Morobe in the 1980s. In 1987, Samana resigned as Premier in order to contest national elections. Moaitz was elected unopposed to replace him.

She did not contest the 1991 provincial elections because she was already a candidate for the national elections of 1992. Her chosen seat had no less than nineteen contenders, and she came fourth. She was again unsuccessful in the general elections of 1997.

Of late Moaitz has dedicated herself to work among women and young people. She was a founder member of Wanchef, a women's organisation involved in literacy promotion, better health and hygiene, Aids aware-

ness and training programmes for women. Wanchef is affiliated to Papua New Guinea's National Council of Women and is also active in the Morobe Provincial Council of Women. In addition, Moaitz continues her involvement in the National Girl Guides movement.

Enabling Factors

Moaitz pays tribute to the support she has received from her husband, who fully backed her political career while continuing to pursue his own professional interests. The latter point, she feels, is important: "A husband who has his own career and is doing well is less likely to be intimidated by his wife's success."

Perspective on Women in Politics

Moaitz believes that strong community involvement is the key to women's success in politics. Over the years, she points out, her work within the church and among women and young people enabled her to build a firm base within her constituency. This level of involvement also placed her in a position to use pre-existing networks, for example that built up by the church.

Women, she argues, must also ensure that they belong to strong party organisations. In her own experience, it was her membership of MIG, the dominant provincial political force prior to its eventual split, which enabled her to be elected premier. As an independent candidate, she might have made it to the legislature, but there would have been no chance of ministerial office.

She also stresses the importance of training campaign workers so that they can accurately put across a woman candidate's values and message. "I want them to say what I would say, not what they would like to say," she argues.

As for the personal traits that women in politics need to foster, she highlights thoroughness and professionalism. "Once you show that you can perform as well as men can, that your gender does not affect your performance and competence, then there are no problems."

DAME JOSEPHINE ABAIJAH

Member of Parliament

Former Governor of Milne Bay Province

Founder of the Papua Besena Movement

Former President of the National Council of Women of Papua New Guinea

Dame Josephine Abaijah has been active in the politics of Papua New Guinea since 1972, when she first ran for election. At that time, men in the country frowned on their wives or partners running for political office. She remembers that when she was campaigning in Goilala, a rural inland

region of the Central Province, male voters would tear up her pamphlets in front of her to register their disgust. In fact, she was able to garner her strongest support from outside her home area – an unusual achievement in a country at that point still in the grip of tribal and ethnic politics.

Once elected, Abaijah became active in opposition to the colonial plan to unite the two territories of Papua and New Guinea. As a native of Papua, she was instrumental in forming the Papua Besena Movement, which at first had secessionist goals. The Papua Besena swept the Central district and the National Capital district in the 1977 elections, and thereafter functioned as a regional party, largely divesting itself of its separatist aims.

Abaijah's achievement has been to live through, shape, and survive politically, different phases in Papua New Guinea's recent history. A successful businesswoman who has also headed the National Council of Women, the largest women's grouping in the country, she is now back in Parliament, having defeated a number of male opponents in the 1997 General Election.

Early Life

Josephine Abaijah was born in 1940 in Wamira, a village near Dogura in Milne Bay province. She was the eldest of seventeen children, four of them adopted. Soon after her first birthday, her parents – ordinary working people – moved to Samarai Island, the administrative headquarters of Milne Bay province, and then to Misima Island. Here, Josephine grew up and received her primary education.

For her secondary schooling, she won a scholarship to a Church of England Girls' School in Queensland, Australia, from which she graduated with a junior certificate. She then returned to Port Moresby, where she enrolled in the newly established Papuan Medical College – one of the first women in the country to do so. She went on to matriculate, attending adult education classes while working full time as a secretary at the medical college.

Abaijah, one of very few women in pre-independent Papua New Guinea to have received formal secondary education, then proceeded to London University, where she obtained a diploma in health education. She also studied at the University of the Philippines, where she completed a two-year postgraduate course in health education.

Entry into Politics

When Abaijah made the decision in 1972 to get involved in politics, she found herself at a disadvantage. She had lived away from her tribal home for so long that mobilising her "tribal vote" seemed problematic. Instead, she decided to concentrate her efforts in Port Moresby, whose relatively high population density allowed her to reach large numbers of people.

From the start, she made clear her opposition to the colonial government's plan to merge the two territories of Papua and New Guinea. Her separatist proclivities came under fire from the government, and she enjoyed enhanced media publicity as a result. She made adroit use of the print media, placing full-page advertisements carrying her platform and photograph in a daily paper.

Once elected to the House of Assembly, she was the only Papuan representative vigorously to assert the demand that Papuans remain Australian citizens until they were ready, in her words, "to take over the independent government of their own country." She toured rural areas of Papua, explaining to villagers the political and economic situation of Papua as she saw it.

Her work in and outside Parliament helped prepare the way for the Papua Besena ("Papua Tribe" or "Descendants of Papua") movement, formally launched in July 1973. It was clear from the start that she was the movement's leader.

Using both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary methods (the latter including marches and mass demonstrations), and putting to work her considerable personal charisma, Abaijah built Papua Besena into a major force, particularly in the Central province and the National Capital district. In the 1977 General Elections, Papua Besena swept the board in these two regions, garnering all eight seats. Abaijah herself defeated the country's Deputy Prime Minister, at that time the second most powerful Pangu Pati leader after Michael Somare.

This was the height of Papua Besena's influence. The movement subsequently split when other elected Papuan politicians formed a political party to enable them to function more effectively on the floor of Parliament. Abaijah concedes that she tended to see Papua Besena as her movement and that she was reluctant to let others help decide its fate.

Enabling Factors

Abaijah identifies her political strategist, Dr Eric Wright, as perhaps her most important source of support. The fact that her adviser is white has drawn criticism in certain circles, but to this she retorts, "Pangu has its white advisors, so why can't I?"

She also pays tribute to a second advisor: Sir Percy Chatterton, a British missionary of the London Missionary Society who first came to Papua in 1924 and worked in different parts of the territory until his retirement. He served two terms in the pre-independence House of Assembly and put this political experience to use in the 1972 Elections, when he worked as Abaijah's campaign manager.

Abaijah emphasises her family as a source of support. She has been able to count on her large family for help with rearing her three children and handling her domestic arrangements.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Looking back on her own experience, Abaijah believes that her lack of a “tribal base” worked to her advantage in the long run. By successfully contesting a seat outside her home area, she was able to demonstrate – even before Papua New Guinea gained its independence – that politicians could cross tribal or other primordial boundaries. This, she feels, is the way forward for women politicians.

Conditions in Papua New Guinea, including great hostility among men to the idea of women running for public office, encouraged her to adopt placatory strategies. She recalls that in the Mekeo region of the Central province, she was able to win over male chiefs to such an extent that she was permitted to sit with them on their special platform. She avoided projecting herself as a “women’s candidate”, and focussed on issues of concern to both men and women as a means to make people see past her gender.

Abaijah emphasises the importance to women in politics of high visibility. Women, she says, must not only make careful and imaginative use of the media; they must also pay their electorate frequent visits. She attributes much of her electoral success to the fact that she was well known in her constituency even before campaigning started. “I went there on health patrols, and I took students into the rural areas. It was on this basis that I was able to build such strong, dependable support.”