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Successful Women's Coalitions in Papua New Guinea and Malaysia: Feminism, Friendships and Social Change

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The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) is an international research initiative based at the University of Birmingham, and working in partnership with La Trobe University in Melbourne.

DLP aims to increase understanding of the political processes that drive or constrain development. Its work focuses on the crucial role of home-grown leaderships and coalitions in forging legitimate institutions that promote developmental outcomes.

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Contents

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Executive summary

What makes a successful women's coalition? This paper examines and compares two women's coalitions in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Malaysia to understand why and how they have endured and achieved notable successes. It aims to:

- deepen Fletcher et al.'s (2016) work on coalitions in the Pacific, by adding a further case study from PNG;

- explore the mechanisms by which coalitions 'play a leading role in creating change in gender norms' (Fletcher et al. 2016); and

- extend the Developmental Leadership Program's exploration of the importance of context to the shape and work of coalitions (Fletcher et al. 2016; Tadros 2011; Hodes et al. 2011; Denney & McLaren 2016).

This paper nuances the claim that coalitions play a leading role in creating change in gender norms: it argues that prevailing socio-political conditions have a significant bearing on how women's coalitions approach advocacy and action in any given context.

The paper draws on case studies of two successful women's coalitions, one in PNG and one in Malaysia. The PNG coalition is the Business and Professional Women's Club of Port Moresby (BPW), which brings elite women together 'to work for equal opportunities and status for women in the economic, social and political life in Papua New Guinea', particularly through sponsoring girls' education. The Joint Action Group on Gender Equality (JAG) in Malaysia is a coalition of feminist civil society groups that advocates for women's rights across a broad range of issues and contexts.

By focusing on successful women's coalitions the study adds to Tadros' (2011) insights about the factors that help build success, while demonstrating that definitions of 'success' differ according to a coalition's aims and the contexts in which it operates. The findings also support Hodes et al. (2011)'s finding that 'soft advocacy' and 'backstage politics' can be more effective strategies in some contexts. For instance, in PNG, BPW worked to slowly transform women's lives in a relatively non-threatening way, while those involved with JAG were more explicitly feminist in their aims and activities.

Factors promoting success

Why and how have these two coalitions been successful? Three common factors emerged:

- long-term engagement and commitment by key people and organisations to the coalitions' objectives;

- sensitivity to potential challenges and the socio-political terrain; and

- strong bonds of trust among coalition participants.

Broadly, these findings echo Tadros (2011). Other potential factors that might be regarded as promoting success, such as the narrowness of a coalition's objectives and the role of donor funding, were important for each coalition, but in different ways given their different contexts. The narrow scope of BPW's goals and the breadth of JAG's are appropriate to each.

Overall, the different stories of these coalitions show the limited value of determining a list of 'ingredients' for a successful women's coalition. Women's coalitions sometimes do their work quietly and over a long period of time, rather than in an explicit or highly visible way.

A key finding of this study, then, is the importance of strong trust and friendships among coalition members that are developed over many years. Friendships and mutual support to achieve shared goals are the foundations of both BPW and JAG. In both BPW and JAG, trust was fostered through shared hardships, joint ventures and activities and common values. Tadros (2011) also observes that '[p]re-existing social networks between individual leaders commonly form the basis for successful coalition formation' and help coalitions to withstand resistance and attack in authoritarian or closed policy environments.

Friendship among women in BPW has led to their collaborative efforts to raise and manage funds for the education of girls and women. In turn, this has resulted in a shared commitment to maintaining control over decisions on how these funds are used. As external donors become increasingly interested in working with them, BPW members rely on one another to make joint decisions about accepting funds from outside agencies.

In Malaysia, interviewees noted that bonds of trust were important in a context of authoritarianism and heavy workloads. The mutual support provided by members gave women greater confidence to challenge perceived threats to human rights in an authoritarian context and to engage with the state in ways they determined were needed to address diverse issues.

In both Malaysia and PNG, sensitivity to the cultural and political terrain is crucial. A sophisticated understanding of cultural mores and of the potentially punitive power of the state enables activists to push their agenda while, for the most part, not provoking state and non-state responses that would risk the coalitions.

Triggers and contexts for coalition formation

The coalitions in PNG and Malaysia have evolved in very different political contexts: PNG can be described as a democratic clientelist state, while Malaysia is more authoritarian. One might assume that women would have more opportunity to work with bureaucrats in PNG than in Malaysia because the latter cannot be said to have a dominant leader who favours the advancement of women's rights (see Hickey et al. 2016). But this is not the case. Instead, in PNG women have tended to engage in 'quieter' versions of feminism (Spark 2016) than their Malaysian counterparts.

Both BPW and JAG emerged in the 1980s, but while BPW was the result of the actions of a donor, JAG's development was more organic. JAG came into being as the result of Malaysian feminists working together to build awareness of violence against women (VAW). BPW emerged when an Australian chapter of BPW asked Carol Kidu (an expatriate married to a Papua New Guinean judge who went on to become a parliamentarian in PNG) to found a chapter of the organisation in PNG to support the education of girls and women.

Vision and scope of the coalitions' work

BPW seeks to address the issues that women face in PNG by supporting their education. The idea is that this in turn will empower individual women and improve the position and capacities of women in PNG more broadly. As the club states on its website: 'BPW affiliates contribute to society by enabling women to sustain themselves economically'. The implicit theory of change is that if women are educated they are better equipped to participate in all aspects of society and to achieve equal status with men.

In contrast, JAG has undertaken diverse activities. Beginning as a coalition that focused on VAW, it has evolved into a group that promotes the broad goal of gender equality, including through lobbying, media engagement and theatrical activities. JAG brings together 'progressive women's and feminist organisations to monitor, document, and advocate on all aspects of women's human rights'. To do this, JAG works both proactively and opportunistically, to capitalise on events and controversies. Its targets range from the general public to individuals in positions of authority. Its theory of change recognises that the systemic nature of the issues women face in Malaysia requires a suite of interventions.

Challenges

The coalitions face diverse present and future challenges. Although these tend to be specific to each coalition, one shared challenge is the inclusion of women from beyond capital cities. The urban base of both coalitions has meant that they have needed a firm commitment to ensuring the voices of rural women and women in other provinces are included and heard.

For JAG in Malaysia, a key strategy is engagement with different arms of the state. However, the government is often unresponsive and beholden to constituencies that hold contrary views. Increasing authoritarianism further threatens JAG's approach.

In PNG, BPW has gained respect as an organisation with a long record of supporting women and girls to complete their education. Overall this respect is positive, but it can mean that donors and new gender activist groups are keen to align themselves with BPW. Consequently, BPW members sometimes find it challenging to assess how and when to affiliate with these other groups without compromising their commitment to their own specific and time-consuming agenda.

Issues for donor consideration

This study supports many of the findings of Mariz Tadros (2011: vi-vii, 49-51). Most notably, donors need to be sensitive to the specific historical and cultural contexts in which organisations are working. As Combaz (2016) notes, the effectiveness of interventions can be greatly enhanced if managed by 'politically savvy national and international staff who are highly familiar with the political economy of gender in a specific place.' Donors 'who play a successful enabling role are the ones that recognise the importance of positionality' (ibid.: 24) – that is, they reflect on their own and others' power within the international development system, and the impact this and any branding requirements may have on the work they are funding. The initiative and agency of locals should not be compromised, nor should there be the appearance of compromise.

Both coalitions wanted to put more resources into their work, but saw acquiring a dedicated office and paid personnel as somewhat risky. For JAG it was thought that this might undermine the culture of passionate volunteering they sought to foster, weakening the sense of purpose and drive that some felt was needed for a viable social movement. Donors wishing to support local movements need to be wary of funding staff positions without engaging in nuanced discussions of the potential benefits and risks.

For BPW, who were ready to consider seeking funding for a coordinating office or secretariat, there were concerns about sustainability and maintaining their independence from funders. Given that most funding cycles are short-term (one to three years) the BPW Executive are wary of establishing a funded office to coordinate their work if this is unlikely to be funded in the future. In PNG, where there is little to no record of groups acquiring government support, long-term donor commitment is fundamental to sustainability. Donors wishing to support local coalitions need to consider the 'issues, politics, contextual dynamics, and organisations' involved to provide effective, flexible and sometimes long-term support (Combaz 2016).

1

Introduction to the two cases

The goal of the research

This paper explores two women's coalitions that have endured over significant periods of time and have achieved significant positive outcomes. These are the Business and Professional Women's Club of Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea (PNG), and the Joint Action Group on Gender Equity in Malaysia. The paper asks why these coalitions have succeeded and what lessons emerge from their very different stories. In particular, it offers insight into the ways in which social and political contexts shape women's activism and into the internal factors that have made the coalitions sustainable. It seeks to inform donors and other interested parties about what role they might usefully play in supporting such coalitions.

Case study selection

Researchers and policy makers alike are increasingly aware of the significance of local agency and coalitions in promoting sustainable development (Laws 2013; Hudson, Marquette & Waldock 2016). This seems particularly evident in PNG, a country about which Edward Laws (2013: 3) writes, '[o]verseas aid appears to have made rather limited positive lasting impact on the most pressing development problems'. Academics and development practitioners are seeking to increase the impact of development work through greater emphasis on understanding local political dynamics and solutions. As part of this, it is important to analyse success stories (Laws 2013: 24).

Tadros (2011) identifies the following factors as important indicators of a coalition's success:

- having won a particular goal – e.g. influencing policy or law;
- having shaped the broader political climate or influenced public opinion on gender issues;
- having strengthened ties and solidarity and having an enhanced capacity to act in the future on similar issues.

Both the coalitions examined here meet these criteria, albeit in different ways and to different degrees.

This paper's case study selection enables exploration of the mechanisms by which coalitions help change gender norms. The Pacific focus of the PNG case enables it to build on the work by Fletcher et al. (2016) and Denney and McLaren (2016), to delve deeper into the mechanisms by which a successful coalition has functioned in this context. This enables the study to explore how coalitions take a leading role in driving transformative change. Interestingly it finds that in PNG, one of the most long-lasting and respected women's coalitions has done this in a broadly non-confrontational way and with a clear and circumscribed strategy for achieving its objectives.

Malaysia was chosen as the site of the second case study to explore how 'coalitions play a leading role' in an authoritarian context outside the Pacific, but one not as distant as Jordan and Egypt, where Tadros (2011) conducted her case studies. In Malaysia, despite challenging social and political conditions, the case study coalition sometimes engaged in activities that might be considered confrontational.

These differences between the coalitions point to the importance of the specificities of context, the coalitions' histories, and their constituent personnel. Their similarities are also illuminating: these coalitions share some similar mechanisms – including, for example, operating on bonds of friendship and trust – that underpin their success and longevity.

Evidence of success

Business and Professional Women's Club of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

The tangible achievement of Port Moresby's Business and Professional Women's Club (BPW) is the provision of support that allows girls and women to complete their education, including at the secondary and tertiary levels. Between 1993 and 2010 BPW supported 600 girls and women who would otherwise have been unable to complete their education. Since 2010, BPW have aimed to support 100 women a year, a figure they often exceed. For instance, BPW supported over 135

women in 2010 and 'between 2011 and 2014 would have funded at least 600 girls'.[1] While BPW have not had the resources to collect data about the career outcomes of those they have supported, there is much anecdotal evidence to indicate that '[s]ome are now very successful. There are women working in senior positions in the public service; there are doctors and lawyers, and at least one is a tutor at UPNG [the University of Papua New Guinea]' (*Post-Courier*, 8 March 2010).

BPW's significant work in this area has opened the door for them to educate members about various matters affecting women in PNG, including HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence and other human rights abuses. At monthly meetings, panels and guest speakers address these and other issues, thereby building local women's knowledge and promoting awareness about gender discrimination and empowerment. Similarly, in an under-resourced environment, BPW has played an important role in training and mentoring young women, offering courses on how to apply and interview for jobs, for example.

BPW's contributions over more than thirty years have led to their members 'having a place at the table' when it comes to debates about gender equity in PNG. For example, BPW's chairperson Susil Nelson has taken part in round tables with Hilary Clinton and other high-profile international visitors. She also plays a leading role among local groups advocating gender equality, including serving as a board member on the Business Coalition for Women (formed in 2014), as the Vice President of the Business Council of PNG, and as the Vice President of the PNG Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The Joint Action Group on Gender Equity, Malaysia

The Joint Action Group on Gender Equity (JAG) has had an array of impacts that can be regarded as successes. Two notable ones are legal amendments in which JAG played an influential role: amendments to the rape law in 1989, and the making of the Domestic Violence Act. While formally not a JAG victory because the mobilising coalition was Citizens Against Rape (CAR), the amendments to the rape law are told as part of the JAG story because they involved many of the women who were involved in JAG, as well as child rights groups (see Lai 2003). The Domestic Violence Act was the result of over ten years of work, and is described in more detail below (Ng & Leng 2006).

Other successes include JAG's profile within civil society and with government. JAG, although often vocal in its criticisms of diverse practices and actions taken by the Malaysian government, is often a go-to point when the government seeks consultation and support for initiatives (e.g. WAO 2012: 169). This is also the case within progressive Malaysian civil society, which regards JAG as the key representative body for women. Civil society initiatives seeking the views of women and women's groups will turn to JAG for their input and support. Thus JAG's impact may be felt not only as a result of its own endeavours, but through its influence on those of other elements of civil society in Malaysia.

A final success that the interviewees reported, and which is described below, is that JAG has created a space and grounds for the creation, maintenance and strengthening of inter-organisational and inter-personal networks (see also Lee forthcoming, chapter 6.). This space and the lines of communication that the JAG coalition enables was reported as being highly valuable to individuals in member organisations. Being able to share knowledge, contacts and experience assists those in member organisations to carry out their work more effectively (Hodes et al. 2011).

A note on 'success'

This paper takes a broad view of 'success' that is not limited to the attainment of an initiative's stated goals (Amenta & Young 1999; Amenta, Dunleavy & Berstein 1994). The creation of networks of trust and communication, connections with diverse stakeholders, reputation and goodwill, are important goods. They enable small successes to occur, but are also important during moments of wider crisis and opportunity. Although a group's beliefs and ideas might not yet have sufficient traction to be adopted by those in power, their presence is nevertheless important when an opportunity arises (see Green 2016: 17-19). In considering the success of JAG and BPW, it is important to note that they have accumulated symbolic and social capital on which they can draw when required.

Research method

Both case studies drew on the connections the researchers had already established through their work in PNG and Malaysia. Leaders of BPW and JAG helped the researchers arrange interviews with coalition members. Spark conducted the BPW interviews in September 2015 in Port Moresby, and Spark and Lee conducted the interviews with JAG members in April 2016. In both cases, additional interviews were conducted by phone, email and Skype. A total of 16 participants were interviewed in relation to BPW and 13 in relation to JAG.

In both PNG and Malaysia, questions were designed to encourage participants to speak about the establishment and history of the coalition, key events and activities, benefits, challenges and outcomes, and to gain a sense of the coalitions' effectiveness within the contexts in which they operate. Interviews from both case studies were transcribed for analysis. The material was then coded according to key themes emerging from the interviews. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations used in the paper are derived from this research. Participants are identified, as agreed during the consent process.

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1   Interview with Susil Nelson, BPW's current chairperson.

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The contexts and the issues

PNG: politics, gender and women's groups

Papua New Guinea is a parliamentary democracy, but is typically characterised as being a 'weak state'. Inertia and the problems associated with corruption are seen as perpetuating the country's social, economic and political problems (Dinnen 2000). In this context, despite their constitutional rights, women face entrenched discrimination at every level of society, including as victims of violence. Moreover, they are largely excluded from formal politics (currently no Members of Parliament are women). While some tertiary-educated women have made gains in the private sector, and those with financial autonomy are able to achieve a degree of decision-making power in their families and communities (Spark 2017), the majority of Papua New Guinean women experience multiple disadvantages and marginalisation on a daily basis.

Against this backdrop, church groups have long provided forums where women can gather for support, conduct fund-raising and lead community activities and training (see McLeod 2015). Although the church continues to play a key role in supporting women across PNG, several new women's rights and interest groups have formed in recent years. These have emerged partly in response to the increasing influence of global human rights discourses (see Macintyre 2012), particularly on people living and working in urban areas.

Typically based in Port Moresby, these new groups have developed to tackle two main issues, women's economic empower-ment and gender violence. Examples of groups focusing on economic empowerment include the Business Coalition for Women (est. 2013), the Port Moresby Chamber of Commerce Women's Advisory Centre (est. 2011) and the PNG Women in Business Foundation (est. 2006). Groups focusing on the goal of ending violence against women include the National Haus Krai movement (est. 2013), Coalition for Change (2012) and the Leniata Legacy (Kaperi Leniata Project). Educated, urban women tend to take a prominent role in leading these newly established groups, a number of which reflect an underlying focus on women's role in developing the economy.

Malaysia: politics, gender and women's groups

The Barisan Nasional (National Front) is the world's longest serving government. It has held office since Malaysia's inde-pendence from Britain, which it gained on 30 August 1957. At that time, a communist insurgency provided the ostensible grounds for the existence of legal and governance infrastructures to combat the threat of this insurgency (Comber 2008). The contemporary description of Malaysia as semi- or quasi-democratic – that is, possessing both democratic characteristics and numerous authoritarian ones – can be traced to this historical context (Weiss 2006; Means 1996; Case 2007).

Although there is a vibrant civil society in Malaysia, the public sphere is constrained and fraught. Critics of the government and opposition party politicians are regularly subject to diverse forms of harassment, legal action, demonisation and arrest (Lee 2014). It is challenging for groups regarded as unaligned with the government to engage with governmental authorities. Furthermore, in Malaysian society cultural and religious norms have often limited women's access to the public sphere and their ability to exercise and advocate their rights (see Lee 2011a: 97-108). In this context, the presence of conservative Islam is increasingly being felt across society, politics and the law. Legally enforceable *fatwa* have been issued against diverse behaviours including the celebration of Valentines Day and women behaving like 'tomboys' (ibid.) Discourses, often couched in religious and cultural terms, also reinforce women's role as housewives and mothers (Stivens 2006) and their subservient position to men. Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak recently stated that '[i]f our wives started acting up, our heads are frayed and we cannot become good leaders or elected representatives' (see Lee 2016).

Compared to PNG, Malaysia is a much more economically developed nation with a history of manufacturing-sector employ-ment, in which women were often employed, leading to them becoming breadwinners (Lee 2011a). Women are also generally better educated than in PNG. Furthermore, in the latter part of the twentieth century, Malaysians frequently attended universities in the global north, where women would have been exposed to progressive feminism. In addition to educational attainment and literacy, Malaysian's common use of English is another factor that enables access to global literatures, including, of course, feminist literature.

3

The coalitions

PNG case study: Business and Professional Women's Club

The issue

Although Papua New Guinean girls and women have the same constitutional rights as their male counterparts, girls have had poorer educational outcomes owing to a range of economic factors and cultural conventions. These conventions continue to dominate PNG society, although there are shifts in urban areas and with modernisation (see Macintyre 2011, Spark 2017). The following application from a student (shared with permission) is an example of the thousands that were submitted to BPW every year before the introduction of the tuition free policy in 2012. As in this application, many girls and young women emphasise their marginal status when it comes to the right to an education:

> In my family we are four plus my mother total of five family members, three boys and I'm the only girl in the family. … My mother is the house wife she used to sell peanut on the street to pay our school fee. Our father left us when I do my grade 3. He go and enjoy himself with the new lady in Port Moresby with his fortunate money. …My mother has some amount of money she pays school fee for our elder brother. So she told me and my small one to stay out and we will continue next year. I feel very bad because this is my final year and I really want to complete it. I thought to myself then they don't love me. I cry to myself and I get very mad, what I was born to this world.

While the need for school fees was alleviated when the tuition free policy was introduced, there are many other costs associated with keeping children in school, including bus fares to commute to and from school, living in safe boarding houses near schools in rural areas, and the costs of attending technical colleges, vocational training courses or university. Since the introduction of the tuition free policy, BPW has been able to redirect funding to support girls and women with these other costs.

Origin and objectives of the coalition

BPW Port Moresby is a chapter of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW). BPW International was founded by lawyer Dr Lena Madesin Phillips in 1930. It is a network of business and professional women that has affiliates in eighty countries in five continents. The Port Moresby chapter of BPW was established in 1982 by Carol Kidu (now Dame Carol Kidu), the Australian-born PNG politician who later served three terms in the PNG National Parliament and was the only female Member of Parliament for two of those five-year terms.[2] In 1969, Carol Kidu had married Sir Buri Kidu, who in 1980 was appointed to the role of PNG's first Chief Justice. Together they had six children and made their home in Pari (Port Moresby), reflecting Carol Kidu's integration into Papua New Guinean life and society (see Kidu and Spark 2014).

When Kidu established BPW she was a teacher and a writer of school textbooks who had seen first-hand the need to actively promote the education of PNG's girls and women. She explains BPW in Port Moresby was established in response to a request from the Toowoomba chapter, which had struggled to gain traction on supporting scholarships for girls in PNG.

> So that's how it all started. It was with Toowoomba Business and Professional women's club asking me to facilitate a meeting … so that the scholarship scheme which they ran from there, from their province in Queensland could become grounded in Papua New Guinea.

Although BPW began with expatriates, according to Diane Purare 'PNG women felt welcomed'. Given the number of founding members who were married to Papua New Guinean men, it is perhaps not surprising that existing members were keen to ensure the group included Papua New Guinean women as quickly and as much as possible. This was not always easy. As Zen Alaluku said of the early days:

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2   Kidu served as Minister for Community Development under Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare from 2002 until 2 August 2011, and as Opposition Leader from February 2012 until her retirement from politics in July 2012. She became known for her passionate campaigning on poverty alleviation, against domestic violence and child abuse, and for the empowerment of women.

> [a]lthough there were some PNG members, I remember we had struggled to attract more and to keep them and there were a number of discussions about why they were not joining us. My own theory was that PNG women were under too much pressure (work, family) and if they had time, they'd rather spend it playing sports or being in a church fellowship group than in an afternoon of much talk.

Since this time, however, more Papua New Guinean women occupy professional roles.

BPW has always sought to ensure that scholarship recipients become members of the club to expand their networks and knowledge. This strategy has proved successful, completing the 'full circle' in which the girls who are supported with scholarships join BPW and contribute to raising funds to support others. It is a strategy that also ensures intergenerational contact and continuity. According to the current chairperson, Susil Nelson, 'there are now more Papua New Guineans then there are expatriates'.

Strategies to achieve objectives

Fundraising is central to BPW's objective of supporting the education of girls and women. As Zen Alaluku, a member in the 1980s and 1990s put it:

> I think the scholarship scheme was our most important project because it was a practical way of addressing a critical issue in the education of girls and women – the opportunity for those in need to continue with their education.

Yogi Barampataz, an expatriate Indonesian, has been a BPW member since 1989. She says that the goal of 'progressing women' has always been 'close to [her] heart' and that assisting BPW to enable girls to complete their schooling was 'an obvious thing to do'. She says that in the early days of the 1980s and '90s, BPW raised funds by hosting theatre and arts nights. Members cooked food for the patrons and their only costs were 'paying Moresby Arts Theatre for the seats'. BPW's commitment to raising its own funds has been important in that has allowed them to establish their own agenda, and as noted by Judith Bona, a long-term member, this prevented BPW from being beholden to the demands of international donor agencies.

As the Club membership has changed so too have the methods of fundraising. A number of the PNG women at BPW's helm are respected leaders in Moresby's corporate sector and possess strong networks in companies, including, for example, Exxon Mobil, Steamships and Price Waterhouse Coopers. Valentina Kaman is a BPW member who plays a key role in raising funds to support the scholarship program. She works for Exxon Mobil and says that the professional women who work for these high-profile companies provide 'the bridge', 'translating and communicating the goals and dreams of BPW and what it's doing out there [to] get the corporate buy in to support the programs'. While the class position of these individuals and their professional roles in the corporate sector enable them to garner significant support, it is possible their positioning may consolidate a pre-existing tendency to take a non-confrontational approach to advancing women's causes. Thus, the group remains 'acceptably different' (Corbett & Liki 2015) while taking an intersectional approach to gender and class.

In addition to raising funds for its scholarships program, BPW holds monthly meetings to which all members and subscribers on the mailing list are invited. While club membership officially stands at about 70 paying members, these meetings are attended by up to 300 girls and women of diverse ages, educational levels and careers. Susil Nelson says that meetings provide important opportunities for networking and informal mentoring:

> When you attend a monthly meeting, you meet other women and make those connections and they can also assist in terms of mentoring or being role models and that's easier once you've met them to be able to ask them questions or get a contact with them. The sort of environment that we try to foster is one that can also lead to other interaction outside of that monthly meeting.

According to Nelson, these interactions lead to employment opportunities because employers are aware of the coalition's work and give preference to BPW members when hiring. Diane Kala, a one-time recipient, now a member, supported this: '[BPW] can use their networks to get you on board to actually do something with your qualification'.

Despite the rapid expansion of business and professional opportunities in Port Moresby, little training is available to prepare women to take their places in this competitive environment. BPW fills this gap and Judith Bona says the courses they offer help to 'address the huge gap between kids who are in year twelve and … what's needed for the work force'. BPW's capacity to deliver courses depends on the availability of volunteers with suitable skills. However, as BWP member Karen states, many members also provide one-on-one support to younger women who 'specifically ask for something and then someone will work with that person'.

BPW's inclusiveness is appreciated by members, with many commenting that there were few other contexts in which women and girls of diverse ethnic and class backgrounds and ages came together in such a mixed and welcoming environment. For example, Brenda who has been a member since 2010, says the sense of equality and respect between women was 'different' from anything else she had experienced in PNG. She joined because the club 'attracted me in the way they … dealt with the women… especially women who were really, unfortunate [or] at the grass roots level'. That a range of women feel included

is significant in light of the fact that class is an increasingly important aspect structuring life in PNG, as elsewhere in Melanesia (see Gewertz & Errington 1999; Barbara et al.. 2015).

In PNG, women of various backgrounds are acutely aware of distinctions between those who have obtained markers of success, including educational qualifications and formal employment, and those who have not. The success of BPW is its ability to minimise the potential divisions caused by these differences by virtue of its emphasis on including women of diverse backgrounds. One of the main ways they do so is by inviting girls and women who are receiving monetary assistance to come to meetings and join the group, becoming part of the process of fundraising on behalf of others. According to Karen, a BPW member who assists with the financial records, some of the monthly meetings are attended by '75-80% of the girls who receive financial support'. She says they are expected to participate in the running of the meeting and that coming along offers them networking opportunities but also teaches them to give back:

> so even though they are recipients, their participation in the meeting, there are times they are asked to do various things that they may lead the prayer, or they may lead the pledge, or they may help set up activities. They may help sign in other students as they attend the meeting, because we do keep record of their attendances. So we have duties that they can also participate in when they come to the meetings.

In this way, the boundaries between 'recipients' and members is collapsed, thereby undermining class distinctions between those who in 'an increasingly unfair system' (Gewertz & Errington 1999: 42), have had differential access to education and material wealth.

Thus, while BPW does not represent itself as 'political', it pursues what Bona calls 'small p politics', expanding local versions of femininity to include those that challenge the idea that a woman's place is in the home. Through its long-term commitment to educating women and girls, the club sends a message that Papua New Guinean women are capable of participating in public and professional life alongside their male counterparts.

Moreover, as a result of its strong positive reputation, BPW is regularly asked to work with other women's coalitions and to participate in high-level discussions about promoting gender equity in PNG, including for example, Susil Nelson's participation in a forum with Hilary Clinton and her role on the board of the Business Coalition for Women. The club is also affiliated with the Coalition for Change (CfC) whose mission is 'to work towards achieving cultural change in PNG, where violence especially spousal violence and violence against children is not tolerated and the rights of women and children are respected'. Consequently, while the coalition is led by elite, well-connected and influential women, these same women see themselves as understanding the challenges faced by less well positioned Papua New Guinean women because they are involved with them through the work they do. While they are open to working with some of the emerging women's coalitions, Bonas says that BPW first makes sure 'that it's an organisation that we want to be associated with'.

Outcomes

Susil Nelson and Judith Bona say that because everything has been run by volunteers, BPW 'don't actually have numbers for how many girls we've funded since inception' nor have they been able to track the career progress and influence of scholarship recipients. However, recent scholarship figures are available and these show that between 2011 and 2014, BPW funded education for 600 girls and women to the value of 500,000 PNG Kina (AUS $250,000). Since the introduction of the tuition free policy, BPW have supported girls and women to attend university, technical colleges, business schools, TAFE, nursing school and teachers' colleges. In 2013 alone, 60 girls were supported to attend Don Bosco Technical Institute, from which graduates emerge with the skills to fix cars, computers and other electronic devices.

Women graduates of any course, but especially in non-traditional areas, embody a challenge to the prevailing gender norms in PNG society, which continue to depict women as wives and mothers, rather than as educated professionals who earn a living and support their families as breadwinners (Spark 2010; 2011). Challenging the idea that being born female necessarily entails lifelong exclusion and disadvantage, BPW has enabled thousands of women in Papua New Guinea to participate in social and economic opportunities usually seen as the province of men. Moreover, the girls and women supported are from various parts of PNG; BPW funds scholarships in many provinces. Thus while the club itself is based in Port Moresby, its reach extends into rural and remote areas. While led by elite and influential women, BPW remains connected to the realities of life for grass roots women in PNG, a significant achievement in any context.

The next section discusses JAG, a coalition with a more explicit and wide-ranging feminist agenda. The comparison indicates that while through BPW in PNG women have behaved like 'insiders' working to extend rather than transform the systems through which women might advance, in Malaysia, feminist activism has tended to be more overt. This might seem surprising given Malaysia is a more authoritarian context, but it makes sense given that Malaysian women have already 'entered "modern" sector work in large numbers … and made enormous advances in education', increasingly outnumbering men at universities (Stivens 2006: 358). Thus while women's identities have shifted through their participation in the economy and the state needs them in particular ways, this shift collides with changing, yet resilient, norms of gender that regulate women and their place (see Elias 2011).

Malaysia case study: Joint Action Group for Gender Equality

The Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) is an active coalition of non-governmental organisations in Malaysia. It coordinates a number of activities that support women's rights and needs. Some of these occur on an annual basis, such as Evaluation and Planning Meetings among member organisations, and the Aiyoh Wat Lah! awards, a mock awards ceremony that highlights sexism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia. Other activities are issue-based and target pronouncements by, or activities of, government and non-government actors that impact negatively on women's rights in Malaysia. Through JAG, the twelve member organisations provide mutual support, share experiences and expertise, and engage in joint ventures designed to promote human rights in this challenging context.

The issue

JAG began in the 1980s focusing on tackling violence against women. The coalition has since broadened its agenda, stating that its aim is to 'work towards gender equality'.[3] With broad aims and the involvement of the various member organisations, JAG seeks to intervene in debates and activities that affect women, whether directly or indirectly.

Today there are twelve member organisations in JAG. [4] These are located across East and Peninsular Malaysia, and the island-state of Penang, although a lot of JAG's organisations and activities are located in the Klang Valley (in which Kuala Lumpur lies). However, JAG members are conscious of this Klang Valley bias and work towards mitigating this to better realise their agenda of working on behalf of all Malaysian women. Operating within an authoritarian environment affects JAG'S work, but they provide a key service through members' mutual support: many members have much hard-won experience to share.

Origins and objectives of the coalition

Discussing origins, JAG members point to the mid-1980s and the issue of violence against women. In their book Feminism and the Women's Movement in Malaysia: An Unsung *Revolution*, Cecilia Ng, Maznah Mohamad and tan beng hui [sic] note that '[s]everal new women's organisations, all coalescing around the issue of Violence Against Women (VAW), were formed in the early to mid-1980s' (2006: 24).

Initially JAG was informal – a flexible collective of organisations. From the 1980s 'until at least the late 1990s', according to tan, JAG did not have a formal structure:

> and it still isn't [formal] in the sense that [it is] not registered – but I believe [that in] the early 2000s/late 90s the people who were active decided that they would cement the structure of JAG in a way [such] that people will understand that when you say JAG, these are the groups involved. Prior to that JAG was an ad hoc coalition; so it meant that whoever was interested in a particular issue that was being advocated could sign on.

Ivy Josiah noted that with respect to the work of the particular women's groups, she and others came to realise that 'you cannot just focus on services'; broader advocacy was needed to improve the lives of women. Josiah once worried that engaging in advocacy would draw the ire of the authorities:

> Initially we were scared [thinking] if we were to do advocacy and challenge the police…we're going to get shut down. And I tell the story over and over again…it was Irene Xavier…who said that if you start getting scared about the police…then we are all like battered women. And then the penny just dropped for me…We have to be more daring…but to be extremely factual about it: Evidence based advocacy.

While each organisation could function without JAG, the coalition both facilitates the work of each member organisation and provides a platform from which to pursue shared goals. Thus, JAG's ambit is wide. This is reflected in tan beng hui's quip that its purpose is 'just to make sure that women don't have shitty lives, you know. Simple as that.'

JAG member organisations engage with a range of issues and provide various services to women. For example the Women's Aid Organisation runs shelters for women requiring immediate protection, and the All Women's Action Society specialises in running training sessions (including on safety and violence against women, gender sensitisation, and CEDAW and leadership). Suguna Papachan noted that her organisation Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (PSWS; Selangor Friends of Women) supports workers, and might easily be regarded by some in authority as a 'trouble making' organisation that should just be ignored. However, she noted being part of JAG helped to avoid this:

> Being in JAG sort of helps [us] to raise some issues [that are important to PSWS] by people who not so labelled as – you know – trouble makers, left, and whatever. So it [JAG] is a good space for us to be in, a less offensive space. And I think that is beneficial for us.

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3   See http://www.awam.org.my/advocacy/jag/ (accessed 29 August 2016).

4   Those organisations are: All Women's Action Society (AWAM), Association of Women Lawyers Malaysia (AWL), Justice For Sisters, Perak Women for Women (PWW), Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (Empower), Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (PSWS), Sabah Women's Action-Resource Group (SAWO), Sarawak Women for Women Society (SWWS), Sisters in Islam (SIS), Tenaganita, Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), Women's Centre for Change (WCC)

Irene Xavier, who also works for PSWS, elaborated on the benefits for her organisation of engaging with others in JAG who operate in different spaces and with different demographics. If not for JAG, 'we will only be working with very like-minded people all the time, but whose influence is very small. So, JAG sort of gives us a broader access to influence.' This resonates with Hodes et al.'s (2011: vi) finding that '[o]rganisations join coalitions to increase their own capacity and skill base, establish wider networks … and expand their sphere of influence.'

The comments above of Irene and Suguna indicate the middle-class appearance of most of JAG's member organisations. This makes JAG's advocacy more palatable for their targets, often politicians and other elites, who would not respond well to appeals that are either too blunt or which appear to come from working class groups.

Overall, JAG seeks to promote gender equality in Malaysia. It does this through diverse ventures, including liaising with people in authority to influence laws and policy. JAG also enables member organisations to draw on collective knowledge and experience, and the specialised expertise that the different members possess.

Strategies to achieve objectives

JAG's activities can be divided into those that are public-facing and those that are inward-facing. With respect to the latter, the interviewees made clear that JAG members are bound by deep bonds of trust. As tan beng hui noted, 'for a coalition to work, you have to have trust. So personal friendships make a big difference.' Lainey Lau of the Women's Aid Organisation echoed this sentiment, saying 'we work through friendship.' She continued, '[it]'s very personal for all JAG members…So I guess that makes it really powerful [and] there's ownership to it. It's not because you're employed by an organisation.'

Wei San confirmed this: 'I think there's an amazing kind of sense of trust within the coalition … a sense of generosity … we have the same goal and let's see how we can support each other'. Discussing the role JAG plays in supporting the member organisations to carry out their work, Meera Samanther said, 'The benefit is that we discuss and that's the friendship we have built – that has helped our work … when we need assistance in a certain area we will ask.' Given the authoritarian context in which JAG operates, the emphasis on strong bonds affirms Malcolm Gladwell's argument that for activists, it is 'strong-tie connections that help us persevere in the face of danger' (Gladwell 2010). This is in contrast to the much-hyped activism associated with social media, which is formed around 'weak ties [which] seldom lead to high-risk activism' (ibid.).

These strong bonds are cemented annually at JAG's Evaluation and Planning Meetings, where representatives from the member organisations gather for several days of workshops. Lee Wei San describes one of the benefits of these meetings as social engagement:

> … which I think strengthens our ability to work with each other... 'Cause I know personally from myself through coming for the JAG E-and-P every year I have made friends – like new friends within the movement. And I know [in] almost every organisation … there is someone I can call if I need to check something. So [there's] that ability to like oh pick up the phone and just call someone and know that they will actually talk to you.

These bonds are also especially useful in the contemporary era in which many interactions occur online. Online interactions supplement face-to-face work and help overcome issues of geographical distance, which can be significant in Malaysia. However, as tan noted, 'it's…easier I think online to have misunderstandings. So this is where the deep and long friendships actually make a difference'.

Nevertheless, Skype has been useful in enabling the participation of members who are too far from Kuala Lumpur to attend face-to-face meetings. When asked if the geographical distance reduced JAG's cohesiveness, Loh Cheng Kooi of the Women's Centre for Change answered 'Not with social media. No, not at all; we have email and all this [social media].' Some ventures are coordinated using email and Whatsapp, and technology enables people to be rapidly aware of issues that arise. Ivy Josiah noted that 'Now somebody sneezes in parliament, we're talking about it. Why? Because the communication tools have improved'.

Public-facing activities take diverse forms. JAG regularly issues press statements, which are printed or published in the news media in Malaysia. These often criticise statements or actions by a public figure or authority (JAG 2012a; 2016), support a besieged individual or group (e.g. JAG 2012b), or promote a JAG activity (e.g. JAG 2015). However, although important, JAG interviewees felt that press releases were not enough. As Josiah put it when describing the origins of the Aiyoh Wat Lah! Awards, 'we were tired of coming up with press statement upon press statement … we wanted to have another way – more creative – …to continue advocating'.

This more creative way became a mock award ceremony that highlighted egregious statements and actions by people in authority. Mirroring the Ernies in Australia and the Alamak Awards in Singapore, the Aiyoh Wat Lah! Awards aim to expose sexism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia by using comedy to attract media attention and generate interest. As Lee Wei San put it, 'we can't write letters to the editors for every single issue … so let's do one thing where we pull together all these horrible statements and then let's make fun of it, because we're so tired of being "angry feminists"'.

The awards began in 2012, with the aim of engaging young people and students. tan explains that they seek to 'highlight to members of the public that … people who are public figures … say really ridiculous things to do with women and LGBT community' and 'should be called out'. tan also stressed that although individual people and entities are nominated and 'awarded' prizes for their remarks, the Aiyoh Wat Lah! Awards do not seek to 'penalise certain individuals', but rather to 'mak[e] people understand why it's wrong to say that' (see also Lee 2016).

Because of the authoritarian context in which JAG works, humour might be an especially effective tool, as it can 'act as a fear breaker by lessening the tension surrounding [an] issue' (New Tactics 2010). With reference to Malaysia, Lee (2005: 129) has described how crackdowns by authorities may be mitigated by campaigns that are more overtly comedic. Using humour has the potential to be especially effective in modifying behaviour as it puts an 'opponent in a dilemma – no matter what he does, he has lost' (New Tactics 2010). This point is affirmed by Yasmine Masidi:

> You know, Aiyoh Wat Lah! is definitely a, you know, like, fist raised to the state. But it's laughter, and not like [an] actual fist. And the thing is the state hates being laughed at. You know […] they don't care if you get angry at them, but they care very much if you laugh and make fun of them. […] They can't stand people mocking them.

Outcomes

Ng, Maznah and tan have noted that the women's movement in Malaysia has worked despite the absence of a mass movement behind its demands. Rather its achievements have arisen from the efforts of relatively small groups of activist women, 'largely through a process of negotiation with the state' (2006: 61). That does, however, give the state 'the upper hand in dictating what the reforms should be' (ibid.: 46). The dangers of this reliance on negotiations with the state was highlighted by a number of interviewees who referred to long-term ongoing discussions with the Attorney General on amendments relating to domestic violence. For instance, Meera Samanther of the Association of Women Lawyers, said:

> We had meetings… every few weeks with the attorney general's chambers on amending the Domestic Violence Act and all that year's work came to naught, when … there was a change in the AG.

However, JAG has made, and contributed to, many significant advances.

In the area of policy and the law, an important 'win' was the enacting of Malaysia's Domestic Violence Act. The work of women's groups (which later evolved into JAG/JAG-VAW) to bring this about took twelve years, but a key moment referred to by many interviewees was a modest demonstration in 1996, after a two-year wait for the DVA to be implemented. This small protest gathered sufficient media coverage to precipitate the action required to implement the Act (see Ng, Mohamad and tan 2007: 52-55).

JAG also appears to have become a key contact for the Malaysian government. JAG provides feedback when requested and is able to access important decision makers when it wishes to express members' views. JAG members frequently noted that they regularly engaged with diverse politicians and representatives of the State to provide feedback on laws and policies. Some of this occurred through formal channels and consultations; some through personal connections. Such background work has increased discussion of, for example, a Sexual Harassment Bill, and has affected laws, including the Child Act.

It is likely that JAG has also played a role in changing public attitudes towards women's issues in Malaysia. Loh Cheng Kooi of the Women's Centre for Change in Penang observed, 'I think JAG has actually expedited the whole consciousness on women's issues'. She noted that the way Malaysians now react to reports of rape is much more sympathetic to the survivor, and that 'when a silly politician makes a stupid remark you … have condemnation.'

JAG's ability to affect public attitudes stems in large part from its effective engagement with an array of stakeholders, especially those in the media. It is frequently able to have its voice heard in diverse fora, including mainstream newspapers, and on a range of topics – whether as JAG itself (e.g. Malay Mail 2015; Yap 2016) or via its member organisations. Various other initiatives that target specific constituencies – such as journalists or students – have also helped to raise awareness of particular issues. For example, the organisation of the Aiyoh Wat Lah! Awards in 2016 sought to bring in university students studying law. As Syarifatul Adibah Mohamad Jodi noted, 'it is to teach them to think critically because they are students…and it is easier to influence their mind.' Puan Halida Ali comments that this venture also served to engage younger people in JAG's work: '[Aiyoh Wat Lah!] is a very good move to expose younger generations [to know] … when there is gender discrimination'.

Other positive outcomes from JAG's work include those relating to the internal functioning of JAG's member organisations. Yasmin Masidi, discussing the NGO Empower, which does highly political work, said 'we could always count on JAG you know. They may not agree with our political position, we may differ … on certain things, but they will always watch out for us, and they will always accept us.' Aliah Ali of Sisters in Islam noted that on diverse issues 'we can share resources and [ask each other] "what's the best way to approach it?" and "who are the best people to get in touch with?"'.

As an organisation that addresses issues of religion in Malaysia, Sisters in Islam receives considerable criticism from both state and non-state actors. Aliah from Sisters in Islam noted that:

> Having JAG together, it gives us a sense of security…[P]eople become very critical and you know start condemning. So to have ten other women's rights organisation[s] backing us up, that gives us a sense of security.

Similarly, Suguna Papachan of Sabahat Wanita said with respect to JAG's attempts to discuss sexual harassment legislation, 'If Sabahat Wanita alone had [done] this, nobody would pay attention'.

These comments show that a coalition can function while encompassing a diversity of opinions. Differences are surmountable in JAG because diversity is seen as a strength on which to build. They are worked through in regular gatherings such as the annual Evaluation and Planning Retreats. The importance of such occasions has been described by Julian Lee and Joseph Goh (2015) who have noted that what might be regarded as common knowledge within a group 'often turns out to be not that common'. Gathering together in what might be regarded as a kind of fellowship 'teases out the common and uncommon, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the known and the unknown' (Lee & Goh 2015:180). Furthermore, such occasions 'can be seen as a way to foster a sense of security for [all] parties in successfully locating and being in the company of like-minded people' (ibid.). It is through infrequent activities such as Evaluation and Planning Retreats, as well frequent online communications, that JAG establishes what it stands for and how it will work to achieve its goals.

4

Discussion of key findings

BPW and JAG have been selected as case studies for this report because of their capacity to provide insight into the mechanisms of successful women's coalitions. From the interviews and other research conducted, four areas in particular emerge that help to explain why BPW and JAG have functioned well and how they have worked to bring about change in gender norms: 1) vision and scope; 2) strategy; 3) networks and bonds; and 4) context. This section concludes with a discussion of the challenges facing each coalition.

Does a focused vision and scope enable success?

No: BPW and JAG are opposites in the breadth of their vision, but both can be regarded as successful.

BPW's specific goal is to empower PNG women and girls by supporting their education. Although a clearly defined objective for a coalition might be thought of as desirable, the example of JAG shows that it is not essential. JAG carries out a wide range of activities in pursuit of its broad goal – to advance gender equality. These include making interventions in policy and law, commenting on social and political events, hosting events that tackle sexism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia, engaging with key figures in authority and producing media content.

From the two coalitions' experiences, there appear to be different strengths and challenges associated with having a focused versus a broad scope. A clear and narrow vision makes it easier to prevent 'mission creep', to focus minds on specific objectives, and to measure success. A broad scope can pose challenges: for example, decisions need to be made on what ventures to support with limited resources, and burnout is more likely. The Malaysian interviewees were aware of these issues. However, at the same time, a broad ambit permits a holistic and systemic perspective and an appreciation of the interconnections that women's issues have with other issues, while providing a foundation for interventions in many domains.

How do the coalitions strategise for success?

Both coalitions develop their strategies in view of their objectives, their resources, and the opportunities their environments afford.

To achieve success, it is necessary to have clear strategies. JAG undertakes many and varied forms of activity to achieve its broad goal of advancing gender equality. These include regular press releases and media-grabbing activities such as the Aiyoh Wat Lah! Awards, as well as less public activities such as workshops. JAG also enables member organisations to undertake their own work more effectively. This includes by enabling knowledge and experience to be readily shared, and by generating a network of support when member organisations hold positions that will subject them to criticism and other pressures.

BPW meanwhile has remained focused on supporting girls and women to complete their education. While their fundraising methods have changed, the reason for their existence has not. To some degree, this commitment has earned BPW a 'place at the table' when it comes to gender issues in PNG. As the coalition has nationalised, members have played an increasingly prominent role in decision-making about gender equity in PNG.

How do coalitions' networks and bonds influence success?

Strong bonds of trust and camaraderie are at the core of these coalitions' successes and underpin the work they do, especially when activities involve risk.

The importance of friendship bonds were emphasised by JAG representatives in Malaysia. It was frequently noted that the sense of trust between people involved in JAG enabled it to persist and function well. Such bonds were born of shared values, but also through hardship and shared endeavours. Although not everyone in JAG knows everyone else equally well, the ethos of trust is strong. The issue of trust and strong bonds beyond shared aspirations has been observed in other circumstances, including Argentina, where Sian Lazar has described the importance of amity and commensality among unions (Lazar, 2016; see also Gladwell 2010).

The strength of the bonds was affirmed by JAG members even though member organisations are dispersed across Malaysia. Those located outside the epicentre of the Klang Valley to whom we spoke felt included in JAG and its activities despite the geographic distances. This was in part owing to cheap and frequent flights, but also the rise of digital forms of communication.

By the same token, it was also noted that the many of the key players in JAG tended to be located in the Klang Valley, which limited JAG's ability to reach, support or represent women throughout Malaysia. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that JAG members tended to be middle-class and English speaking. The latter is not to say that they were born outside of Malaysia or would be regarded as in any way 'foreign', but rather that their background might limit their ability to engage with or represent the 'grassroots', i.e. those who spoke languages other than English and who were located beyond the Klang Valley.

By contrast, BPW has achieved a transformation in membership over the years. While originally made up mostly of expatriate women, it is now led and dominated (in terms of numbers) by PNG women. Moreover, where it could easily have been comprised only of professional educated women, BPW actively encourages diverse membership, including by inviting scholarship 'recipients' to become members from the outset. Like JAG, BPW members placed great value on their relationships with one another, especially at the executive leadership level.

How does context influence the coalitions' work?

The contexts impose constraints on what can be undertaken and the coalitions are always mindful of these.

Tadros (2011) describes the contexts of women's coalitions in Egypt and Jordan as 'inhibitive'. This description also applies to PNG and Malaysia, although in different ways. In PNG, the context is both socially and politically inhibitive. There, violence against women is commonplace and those in positions of authority have shown a limited commitment to addressing it. Furthermore, the low representation of women in politics has exacerbated the challenge of addressing issues including VAW.

In Malaysia, the state is authoritarian and access to the public sphere is limited. The social place of women is often affirmed as subordinate to men on cultural and religious grounds. However, the repressive context has also meant that there is a vibrant and tight-knit civil society that has sought to challenge this repression through various forms of activism, including legal activism. This milieu has doubtless informed JAG's work and enabled it to draw on the 'repertoires of contention' used by other activists and NGOs (Lee et al. 2010).

What challenges do the coalitions face?

The two coalitions face diverse present and future challenges. Although these tend to be specific to each coalition, one shared challenge is the inclusion of women from beyond capital cities. The urban base of both coalitions has meant that they have needed a firm commitment to ensuring the voices of rural women and women in other provinces are included and heard.

Ensuring a steady flow of younger participants was a challenge in the Malaysian context because women become involved through their participation in JAG's member organisations. While both coalitions actively seek to encourage new participants, this appears to be more straightforward in PNG, perhaps because BPW offers members the prospect of benefiting from the connections and networks of those already involved.

Operationally, JAG's broad ambit and occasionally politically confrontational approach is a risk factor, as activists in Malaysia have been charged with various crimes, including sedition, for what are sometimes trifling activities (AFP 2016). Human rights organisations also face the risk of being harassed by the state (e.g. Malaysiakini 2012). The threat of a raid was noted by Ivy Josiah, whose organisation WAO has been raided. She cited such threats as a reason why she believes JAG member organisations should not coalesce under one roof. If JAG members were located in one building, 'one raid would be like ten raids you know. [W]e need to disperse our resources; we are living in a very difficult time.'

BPW's key challenges are to do with managing growth while remaining in control of their operations. They have more requests for assistance than they can fund, but have been cautious about expanding beyond the capacities of their volunteer base. While BPW have been offered support by international donors to expand their operations, these offers have been short-term, meaning that the coalition would have to sustain the work beyond the life of the grant. Increasingly, BPW's positive reputation means they are asked to align themselves with newer women's groups, some of which have yet to establish their own credentials. Such challenges reflect BPW's success but they are complex nevertheless, and require thoughtful leadership.

5

Emerging lessons for donors

The conclusions that Tadros (2011: 49-51) draws from her study of women's coalitions in Egypt and Jordan are applicable to the cases discussed here. A sensitivity to specificities of context, and an awareness of what Tadros refers to as donors' 'positionality' is important in ensuring that authentic coalitions are supported and that they involve people who have the drive and local sensitivity to carry out the activities that enable their objectives. However, the following issues also emerge from these PNG and Malaysian case studies.

Potential for donor funding to undermine volunteers' motivation: While JAG receives little direct donor funding, it does receive a small amount, which is administered by a member organisation. JAG uses this to undertake specific activities, including running the awards. It does not receive funding to run an office or employ personnel. Instead, member organisations invest in JAG by allocating a portion of worker time. When asked whether it would be beneficial to have a dedicated JAG office and staff members, interviewees had mixed responses. Caution was expressed about paying people to do the activism work that JAG does. As noted by tan beng hui, 'we've seen in a lot of the organisations – that the minute you [pay] someone, volunteers step back.' Volunteers will question why they should labour unremunerated when others might do the same work for payment. That said, Lainey Lau considered that, with respect to the work that member organisations do for JAG, 'it would be great if there was one dedicated person just to do that sort of work for us'.

The decision to support a coalition like JAG by providing salaries or office overheads will be greatly influenced by organisational leadership at a given time. While support might be considered an indubitable good, there can be unintended consequences – including corroding the spirit and energy that drives dedicated people to work for passionately held beliefs and values (e.g. Bowles 2009; Gneezy, Meier & Rey-Biel 2011). Other risks include negatively formalising and 'projectising' the coalition (Denney & McLaren, 2016: 19).

Perceptions of foreign influence: Although JAG in particular expressed wariness about the impacts of funding, in the future the pros may be regarded as outweighing the cons. This being so, donors will need to be sensitive to issues that apply broadly to NGOs and activists who often need to manage accusations that they are agents of foreign intervention or undue foreign influence. Although activists in Malaysia usually accept and welcome foreign funding, there is sometimes wariness about how this might be perceived in specific cases, depending on the prevailing socio-political context (as per the remarks on 'positionality' by Tadros 2011). In PNG, the same risk applies, particularly when actors are perceived to be advocating 'feminist' causes.

Donor requirements and independent decision-making: The BPW case study also highlights an additional challenge – how local coalitions maintain control over decision-making if funding is accepted. BPW is ready to establish an office to coordinate its activities to enhance their capacity to support girls and women in PNG. However, this needs to be 'untied' from expectations that BPW will perform certain services or functions beyond its core business. BPW also noted that the need for donor branding to be prominently displayed at fundraising events was sometimes felt to be an imposition.

Importance of long-term donor commitment: The importance of sustained long-term commitment has been highlighted by Emilie Combaz (2016), who affirms the importance of the support being 'nuanced' and 'flexible'. This is especially important given the considerable time it can take to achieve results, as was the case with the Domestic Violence Act in Malaysia. In the case of BPW, as there is little to no chance that the PNG government will fund the organisation in the absence of donor support, BPW require a long-term commitment from any potential donors in order to make the change from being an entirely volunteer-based coalition to one that receives core funding to enable its work. Combaz notes that 'Donors need to dedicate time, resources, and political acumen to the actors and the process, rather than to any project-bound outputs or purpose' (ibid.: 3), suggesting that it is necessary to trust that activists' judgments are sound and take into account local conditions, and that successes may be long in coming and difficult to measure. An example of a valued activity that might be funded but which might produce few direct perceivable results is JAG's annual Evaluation and Planning Meetings, which have been important for deepening trust and networks.

6

Conclusion

BPW and JAG are significantly different coalitions that operate in unique national, social and cultural contexts. But examining them together supports the argument that coalitions can 'play a leading role in creating change in gender norms' (Fletcher et al. 2016).

The comparison also demonstrates the need to consider coalitions, and women's coalitions in particular, in relation to the circumstances in which they operate. The social and political context of BPW and the circumstances of its founding have led to a strategy for improving the lives of women in PNG that rests on the education of young women, many of whom go on to support BPW in continuing its work. In Malaysia, JAG operates in a vibrant and highly networked civil society that overtly challenges authority. Many participants in JAG are also active in other causes and have learned the repertoires of contention used elsewhere. Whereas the confrontational approach regularly (although not solely) used by JAG is unlikely to be sustainable or effective in PNG, in Malaysia activists have had some successes using this approach.

This is not to suggest that either BPW or JAG are merely products of their contexts. As this paper has shown, they are deeply rooted in their historical origins and the leadership of key protagonists whose savvy, social and other capital, and sustained efforts brought these coalitions into being and have sustained them.

The willingness of coalitions and their members to expose themselves to risk is also important. Fletcher et al. (2016: 24) note that local actors must determine their own appetite for risk. In PNG, the absence of a large, active and sympathetic civil society is also a factor, making it unlikely there would be strong support for overtly feminist activism. To set the stage for such advocacy, more groundwork and socio-cultural change is required: this is the kind of change for which BPW is laying the foundations.

However, in undertaking the research for this report, the authors have been struck by a key factor seen in both case studies. This is that both coalitions are underpinned by strong bonds of trust and friendship, and guided by a shared objective and vision of what they want to achieve. Whether the strategies for doing this are highly focused, as in the case of BPW, or range widely between the conventional and creative, as in the case of JAG, the high levels of trust and commitment among the respective participants support these efforts. Donors seeking to invest in the work of long-standing women's coalitions need to consider this valuable resource of trust, and work with coalitions to ensure that any funding is thoughtfully granted and used so as not to jeopardise precisely that which has enabled them to endure.

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