

Sanguma Accusations as an issue for Development in the Enga Province

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Sanguma is something new for Enga

The sorcery, popularly known as *sanguma* is associated with the idea the sickness, death and misfortune is caused by people (known also as *sanguma*) who are possessed by a *sanguma* spirit which goes out to steal and eat peoples' hearts.

The Enga response to misfortune and death changed rapidly after about 2010. Up until around 2010 any mention of sorcery or witchcraft (*sanguma*) in Enga would direct people's thoughts to other parts of Papua New Guinea, such as Simbu province or the Sepik or Rabaul.

Sanguma as “yama nenge”

The new magic is referred to as *yama nenge* in the Enga language. *Yama* refers to peoples' thought or lustful desire closely associated with food, especially the desire for pork meat.

During feasts the parents will normally tell their children not to eat meat in the public or not to eat meat while other elderly women are looking. They explain that “If others see you eating, their *yama spirit* will come to you. In Enga, they will say *yamame nengenge natami*” literally meaning *their yama spirit will eat you*.

Sanguma as an explanation of misfortune

An example... late in 2018 people were travelling up to the Tsak Valley on a PMV bus. The engine stopped while the bus was climbing up a hill. The passengers got out but noticed one woman was still sitting inside the bus. Since the lady was new to the place, she decided to stay inside the bus. The other passengers started investigating about that lady. One among the passengers announced that she was a *sanguma*. “*Enda angeme kate mona yuku nelyamo*” (literally “this woman takes the heart of the vehicle and ate”).

Legal Response

Enga has developed a form of joint “super” village court called Operation Mekim Save (OMS), with more authority than a village court and with magistrates drawn from throughout the Province. OMS can operate at a district level imposing hefty sentences generally based on Enga cultural values. In the case in 2018 between the Yokoenda clan and the Maine clan near Wapenamanda, the Yokoenda clan (perpetrator) was asked to pay K30,000 and 50 pigs to the Maine clan.

OMS is laying heavy demands on the perpetrators not only as a punishment but to discourage other potential perpetrators from getting involved.

Police Intervention

Research by the SARV research team finds that the rates of formal responses such as arrests and the charging of suspected culprits occurs in less than a fifth of recorded incidents.

Example: Inspector Epenes Nili at Teremanda village

“The challenges faced by the criminal justice system in dealing with SARV include the lack of witness protection, difficulties with gathering evidence, intermittent and weak responses, and the limited capacity of the police to respond.”

A UN survey estimated a median of police to population ratio of 1:300 worldwide in 2006, while in PNG it was approximately 1:1,400



Awareness Programs

An example: the Caritas Office within the Catholic Church in Enga province uses its network to conduct awareness on the negative effects of sorcery belief in the sixteen parishes in the province.

The office has used the “*papa grup*” (fathers’ group) network in each of the parishes in Enga, joining their voice against sorcery awareness. People from the Caritas office have conducted seminars and training for village court officials, councillors and community leaders

The Papa Grup bases awareness on legal issues (law), religious perspective (Bible) and cultural norms and values, to educate people to stop SARV.

Awareness teams have conducted public awareness through organizing walkathons, and presentations at market places and at church gatherings.

Church Interventions

The SARV research team findings show in Enga police have intervened in 25% of cases and that pastors or religious figures have intervened in 35% of cases

Bp Arnold Orowae: “This is a moral evil that should not be practiced. It also gives a bad image of this country and its people. We are seen and regarded by many as a good and warm hearted people living in this part of the world. So let’s promote the good side of our lives and Country and do away with the bad practices”

Another initiative is the program of church conferences by the Constitutional law Reform Commission: *National Churches Strategy to address Sorcery Accusation Related Violence (SARV)*: “Creating Community living that is Godly, safe, peaceful, just and harmonious”.

Conclusion

Carrad, Lea and Talyaga published the *Enga: Foundations for Development (Enga Yaaka Lasemana)* in 1982. Inter-group fighting is reduced but SARV has emerged as a new form of violence affecting society. Sorcery or witchcraft is confusing many people because it was not part of the traditional belief system, so that there are no ready traditional mechanisms to deal with it.

The suspicion, confusion, fear and violence coming from SARV runs contrary to the indicators of development chosen by PNG

-the smart, wise, fair, healthy, and happy pointers of the PNG Vision 2050, or even the vision of the current Prime minister, of PNG as a
- rich black Christian nation (well-being, gutpela sindaun)

This belief, foreign to Enga culture runs contrary to the core Melanesian values of relationship, unity and wellbeing, and the fundamental value of life in the community.

Papua New Guinea has a SARV National Action Plan but despite NEC approval it has not received funding for it to be fully implemented. <http://www.stopsorceryviolence.org/the-sorcery-national-action-plan/>