Shield PNG

STANDING WITH THE WOMEN WHO DO THIS WORK



In every province there are women who step into other people's violence. They sit with families after a killing. They shelter women accused of sorcery. They run safe houses on donations because no government money comes. They walk into places men will not go, and talk to people nobody else can reach.

They are threatened for it. Some have been killed. In PNG, a woman who helps a survivor move provinces is accused of interfering in a family matter, and a woman who protects someone accused of sorcery is accused of interfering in custom. Defenders have said plainly that what they need most is protection for their own lives.

Most are unpaid. Many are doing it without anyone's backing, while carrying the same risks they are protecting other people from.

Here is what a community can do about that

1. **The most dangerous position for a defender is isolation**

   One woman, acting alone, who can be framed as a troublemaker. A woman publicly backed by her church, her clan or her council is much harder to attack.

2. **Never let her go alone**

   Nobody should walk into a tense situation without someone knowing where she is and when she is expected back.

3. **Do not ask her to do the dangerous part**

   She is the one who sees trouble coming. That does not mean she should be the one standing between armed men.

4. **Ask her what she needs**

   Usually it is phone credit, transport money, or someone to sit with her afterwards. One woman doing this work in Morobe walks from house to house and sometimes runs out of credit mid-call. It is rarely advice she needs.

5 Check on her after

She has absorbed other people's worst days. Nobody asks her about it because she looks like she is coping.

6 Know what it is worth

In communities where one woman has kept doing this, children start telling their parents to stop fighting. Village leaders stop staying silent and start ringing her when something happens. That is what one unpaid woman changes, if the people around her let her keep going.

One thing to do today

Name one woman in your area who does this work, and tell someone else what she does. Publicly, if you can do it safely.

