

Making informed decisions as a voter

Autonomous Region Of Bougainville Papua New Guinea
Leadership And Decision-Making

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Project name: Voter Education Project in Bougainville

Project partner: Bougainville Women's Federation in partnership with International Women's Development Agency

Total funding: \$451,100

Funding timeframe: May 2016–December 2017

Women's leadership and decision making was promoted through the 20-month Voter Education Project in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. Voters were provided with information and skills to use during the 2017 Papua New Guinea National and Community Government elections and for future elections.



Bougainville Women's Federation Voter Education Project community trainer for a community in Atolls. Photo credit: Bougainville Women's Federation.

Implemented by the Bougainville Women's Federation in partnership with International Women's Development Agency and working with the Office of Bougainville Electoral Commission, the project focused on disenfranchised groups who had limited education opportunities due to the Bougainville conflict between 1988–1998. While working with both women and men, particular attention was given to women. It linked with other Bougainville Women's Federation projects, including young women's leadership initiatives and referendum awareness raising efforts.

Women took on project leadership roles, comprising over half of the 43 community trainers. They provided education about voting, elections and making informed voter decisions to 43,844 people in over 740 communities.

'Unfortunately, my office is only new, I have low capacity [staff] and no funds for field operations such as [voter] awareness,' said one electoral official. 'So, when you see organisations like the Bougainville Women's Federation come along, we are happy to partner with them.' This positive relationship laid the foundation for the project's success.

Strategies to distil complex processes into accessible information included using local languages, existing materials and good governance DVDs, and holding practice elections. A young person with a low level of literacy from Bana District said: 'Now I am relieved of the fear of voting after attending the awareness. I am confident that knowing my rights I am now able to identify a good leader to vote for.'

A further outcome of the project was an increased profile for the Bougainville Women's Federation. The project enabled the Federation to educate communities about the role it plays within community and government, particularly its work with both women and men to achieve equitable outcomes for women and girls.

Involvement with the project led to Bougainville Women's Federation staff and eight community trainers being selected to observe the 2017 National and Community Government election processes. Reports from election observers showed that women were well represented at the ballot boxes. Women testified to casting their votes confidently based on their own decisions, rather than as a result of influence from male family members.