

Campaigning for change

Papua New Guinea Leadership And Decision-Making

December 21, 2019

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Project name: Women in Leadership Support Program

Project partner: Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University

Total funding: \$1,937,590

Funding timeframe: December 2016–June 2021

The Women in Leadership Support Program has been working with women intending to contest the 2017 and 2022 national general elections and the 2018 local-level government election in Papua New Guinea. The project, delivered by the Department of Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University, trained women in 10 locations in election campaigning ahead of the 2017 national elections and the 2018 local-level government elections.

Prior to the 2017 Papua New Guinea national general election, 127 women participated in candidate training. Upon completion, 75 participants said they had been planning to contest the election but decided not to run because the training highlighted the need for more preparatory work. The 47 training participants who contested the election comprised approximately one quarter of the total number of women who ran (179 of the 3,340 candidates, or 5.4 per cent, were women).

Although no women were elected to parliament in the 2017 national election, those who undertook the training consistently placed higher and obtained a greater overall vote share than women candidates who did not participate. Training participants were six times more likely to finish in the top 10 per cent of candidates in their electorates.



Papua New Guinea Women in Leadership Support Program training in Kundiawa in April 2018. Photo credit: Thiago Oppermann.

Following the election, researchers at the Papua New Guinea National Research Institute identified barriers to women's success in elections as logistical support for women candidates (few women candidates are endorsed by political parties), weak campaigning laws, and candidates' dependency on personal relationships and affiliations for support. Women voters still encounter intimidation and undue influence by husbands and male relatives on how they should vote.

Ahead of Papua New Guinea's local-level government election in September 2018, the Women in Leadership Support Program provided tailored training to 145 women in seven workshops across six locations. Training facilitators noted that prospective candidates demonstrated close links to, and intimate knowledge of, their electorates which, according to research, is critical in elections in Melanesia.