

Independent, educated voters in Bougainville

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Project Name: Voter Education Project

Project Partner: Bougainville Women's Federation and International Women's Development Agency

Total Funding: \$451,888

Funding timeframe: 2016-2017

The Bougainville Women's Federation and International Women's Development Agency are implementing the Voter Education Project to provide education on voting rights and responsibilities. It is having an impact on the way women exercise their right to vote, and on women's leadership more generally.

The project focuses on engaging those aged between 35 and 45, sometimes called the 'lost generation', whose education was limited because of the Bougainville crisis. It also specifically targets women to address the more generalised patterns of women's disenfranchisement from democratic processes in Bougainville. The project supports women to vote independently of wantok and family connections, and not to vote as proxy for their male partners or family heads.

The project has already far exceeded its original target of reaching 6,400 people in 320 communities. By the end of June 2017, the project's community educators delivered five-day Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) training, including holding mock elections, to 43,760 people across 506 communities. This represents about 15 per cent of Bougainville's population.

Under the project model, Bougainville Women's Federation provides training and mentoring support to community facilitators who plan and conduct community awareness workshops in communities. Half of the community facilitators are women. The recruitment of women trainers provides role models of leadership in the communities where training takes place. This sets

the backdrop for discussions on the value of women as leaders, decision makers, and parliamentarians.

Representatives from the Office of Bougainville Electoral Commission provide training to the community facilitators with the Bougainville Women's Federation. They provide additional information on electoral processes and basic electoral laws. They also encourage people to register on the electoral roll.

Linda is a 23-year-old woman from Hagogohe Constituency. In the lead up to the 2017 national elections, voter education workshops were held in her village. She received training that increased her knowledge and understanding of her voting rights. The project also fostered community ownership of fair voting practices. Linda reports that the training enabled her to listen to candidates' campaigns and to make her decision on the three candidates she preferred in the national election. She says her choice of leaders was based on their campaigns and she felt that, if successful, the candidates would make a change in Bougainville. She voted confidently and independently using the limited preferential vote system. Linda is happy to be using her right to vote freely.

*This Story of Change was originally published in the [Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2016 – 2017](#). All values are consistent with that reporting period. For the most up-to-date value of activities, visit our [interactive map](#).