

**Concept note: Women Political Empowerment**  
**National Consultation on Increasing Women's Participation in Local Level Government –**  
**With focus on 2013 Local Level Elections**

**Overview:**

Gender inequality in PNG is widespread, and achievements to date have been poor.<sup>1</sup> PNG ranks 123 out of 156 countries on the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and 145 out of 177 countries on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). PNG is 119 in a ranking of 121 countries for women's political participation." Under the *Constitution*, every Papua New Guinean has the right, and shall be given a reasonable opportunity, to take part in the conduct of public affairs, either directly or through freely chosen representatives and to vote and to hold public office and to exercise public functions.

Past years have seen some progress through government's commitments and actions to advance gender equality and women's rights. Agencies such as UNDP, UNW and CDI have been significant players in supporting interventions to promote women's political empowerment on various fronts, and this has been in partnership with the three women machineries i.e. Office for the Development of Women (ODW); Department for Community Development Gender Unit; and National Council of Women (NCW).

The recently concluded 2012 general elections in PNG saw a shift with three women elected to Parliament. This achievement has been attributed to a number of factors some of which include:

1. The long-time campaign and advocacy agenda for women political representation, through affirmative action and Temporary Special Measures (resulting in the drafting and tabling of the Equality and Participation Bill - 22 Reserve Seats for women). The Bill passed through 2 readings, but during the third reading meant to operationalize it, several MPs voted against the Bill.
2. With the Bill not endorsed through the last reading, the government in partnership with development partners embarked on supporting women to run for open seats. UNDP and a number of other partners supported initiatives such as: Practice Parliament; Women media campaigns and visibility; Campaign Material Support etc. All these initiatives further raised awareness on the importance of women participation and representation in political spheres and drew attention that women are capable to run for public offices.

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<sup>1</sup> ADB, *Report-Technical Assistance to Papua New Guinea for preparing the Gender and Population Project* at [http://www.adb.org/Documents/TARs/PNG/r14\\_02.pdf](http://www.adb.org/Documents/TARs/PNG/r14_02.pdf) accessed 11 Feb 2009

3. Commitment from the government and some political parties on the issue of women empowerment. For instance, on a number of occasions, the Prime Minister came up openly in the media to support women participation and political representation. Further, women who were elected to parliament were supported by political parties, underpinning the important role of Political Parties in advancing women's political participation.
4. And the hard work undertaken by these three women in terms of campaigning and mobilisation of communities as they won on their own merit.

### **Local Level Government Elections:**

There are only 6 months remaining for the 2013 Local Level elections, and the fact that three women are in PNG Parliament (approximately 2.6% of PNG women representation in Parliament) is not enough for a population where over 3 Million are women. There is increasing momentum for support to women at the local level to run for elections either as presidents or members of local councils. This momentum has partly been created as a result of outcomes/support to the recently concluded 2012 general elections, which included:

- Increased awareness of the potential capacity of intending women candidates to represent their electorates at national level and local level. For instance, feedback received from communities that were listening to the live broadcasting of the practice parliament debate showed how these communities were thrilled by the level of knowledge and capability of women in debating national development priorities
- Improved visibility of women's potential in political decision making processes "awakened" political parties on the increased value women can add to these parties. The days that followed these initiatives saw a number of Political Parties nominating women candidates to run for elections (*a 35% increase compared to the last 2007 elections*)
- Increased interest for political parties to mainstream gender as a means of promoting women leadership within parties.
- More visibility for women candidates was secured through daily media coverage of women candidates profiles, as well as the established PACWIP website ([www.pacwip.org/](http://www.pacwip.org/)) and a Facebook page(<http://www.facebook.com/PacWIP>) which further disseminated information on women candidates to online voters who are mainly youth.

**The National Consultation:** Women participation in Local Level elections remains a significant stepping stone in promoting women political participation at the national

level. The Office for the Development of Women in partnership with UNDP, CDI and other development partners are keen to support women at LLG level in preparations for the upcoming June 2013 LLG elections. A number of bilateral discussions amongst development partners and ODW have been held to map out specific support that could be extended to women in the next 6 months. However, to have a coherent approach for support at this level, ODW with support from UNDP and CDI will be conducting a national consultation on LLG elections. The national consultation will bring together Women Networks and Machineries; Political Parties; PNG Electoral Commission; Media/Communications agencies; and development partners.

**Aim:** The consultation will be aimed at developing a joint strategy and action plan for increasing women's participation in local government, in lead up to national representation.

**This will be delivered through two main streams:**

1. Increase electoral success (with focus on the upcoming 2012 local level government elections)
2. Promote and support the implementation of the Organic Law *and nominate either one (for Urban) or two (for Rural) women to be part of the legislative arm of the LLG (Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-Level Governments – Clause 29 (c) and (d)).*

**Methodology:**

The two-day national consultation will be comprised of five (5) key clusters/groups to design strategic interventions in areas of:

**Women participation in Electoral Processes;** Elections are a vital tool in the democratization process, as they are a platform through which people can have a say in the way the country is governed and a mechanism to hold politicians accountable. Unfortunately, women are consistently left out in the electoral process at all levels. Since women have different needs and issues of concern from the rest of the population, it is important that they take part in the electoral process so as to make their voices heard. The electoral process often seems intimidating and complicated for PNG women as a result of lack of sufficient knowledge on how the electoral process works.

The primary focus for this cluster/group will be on the role of Electoral commission in promoting women participation in the electoral processes. I will explore barriers to women voters as well as candidates in electoral processes.

*This group will discuss the key institutional challenges in addressing women's needs in the electoral process- given the fact that many people in PNG still largely consider politics as the business of men and so women have to work twice as hard to get votes than their male counterparts. In addition, discussions in this group will explore the Electoral Commission in furthering women participation in the upcoming local level elections; and lead up to 2017. To be facilitated by UNDP*

1. **Political Parties:** In the recent Focus Group Discussions conducted by the University of Papua New Guinea, political parties were highlighted as strong players in women political empowerment at various levels. Most of the proactive roles played by political parties in advancing women participation include: Women candidates to Nominations / selection and financing of campaigns and internal quotas for women's participation and candidature; Setting targets for female participation in party conventions; Establishing women's wings and sections within parties; Ensuring that gender is included in all of the party's policies; Ensuring women are allocated safe seats; Working with civil society organizations to oversee the implementation of quotas; Expanding and training the pool of women candidates; Sharing experiences with other parties across countries and regions; Providing training to women candidates in such skills as fundraising, message development, media relations and communicating with voters; etc. As example, the recently concluded elections saw women supported by political parties being elected to the National Parliament, underpinning the significance of political parties in women empowerment, and political breakthrough.

*The focus of this discussion will be on the current level of party engagement at the Local level government level; and whether they are currently endorsing candidates or provide funding or support at this level of government. The session will explore possible strategies for political parties to promote women participation in the upcoming 2013 LLG elections. To be chaired by IPPCC, Facilitated by CDI*

2. **Women networks and Machineries:** During the past few years, there has been three main women machineries advancing women empowerment at various levels; These include: The Office for the Development of Women (ODW); National Council of

Women (NCW) and the Gender Unit of the Department for Community Development. NCW has a number of networks throughout PNG and these are used as channels for information dissemination and support to women advancement at various levels. Women networks play an important role in terms of promoting strong, well-coordinated, interrelated and interdependent networks, with a highly experienced leadership in addressing women's concerns. Networks also play a fundamental role in providing and promoting a reflective space for re-energizing the women's movement, leadership capacity development, as well as nurturing inter-generational interaction and inter-relation for continuity at all levels.

*Given the importance of women networks and organizations at local level, this group will map out challenges and opportunities for supporting women at LLG level, including in areas of coaching/training and promoting women candidates. **To be chaired by ODW, Facilitated by UNDP***

- 3. Communication/Media:** This remains paramount to and influential in terms of public opinion and attitudes. There exists a number of radio stations, paper print media, etc. which could be catalytic in advancing women political empowerment at national and local levels. As highlighted, Media played a crucial role in the recently concluded elections through visibility for women candidates secured in daily print media coverage, radio talk shows; TV clips, etc. This was further supported by initiatives by Development Partners to link women candidate's profiles to the established PACWIP website ([www.pacwip.org/](http://www.pacwip.org/)) and a Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/PacWIP>) which further disseminated information on women candidates to online voters who are mainly youth.

*This group will be composed of both previous and intending women candidates and media, to discuss possible ways for women to effectively communicate their development manifestos. Also, this group will deliberate and report on the role of media in promoting women candidates at LLG level.*

***To be chaired by National Media House... TBC , Follow up by UNDP***

- 4. Other recommendations:** There have been a number of activities and assessments that were conducted in the past few years. These include reports from Election Observer missions; Diagnostic from elections; FGDs from NDI; etc. These reports provide a wide range of preliminary findings and recommendations to advancing women participation in the electoral processes at all levels.

*A group will be set up to consolidate these findings and link them to the key entry points that would have been identified in the previous groups. **Facilitated by UNDP***

**Expected outcome:** A joint strategy (with inputs/contributions from stakeholders such as Electoral Commission, Political parties, Women networks, media, etc) and action plan for supporting women candidates in 2013 Local Level elections; and in lead-up 2017 general elections

**Discussions guide:** a questionnaire will be developed to guide discussions for each of the group. Questions will be adapted to reflect the key actions to be advanced by respective groups in promoting women political empowerment.