



## The Centre for Democratic Institutions

### Women's Participation in Governance Workshop Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea

CDI supported a 'Women's Participation in Governance' workshop in the Simbu Province in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. This workshop was conducted from 17 to 19 September 2003 by a local non-government organisation, Meri Kerap, and the Asia Pacific Bureau for Adult Education (ASPBAE). The focus of the workshop was on women and governance, in particular their inclusion in elections and electoral processes and aimed to develop strategies for promoting women's involvement. Ms. Sarah Garap, Coordinator of Meri Kerap, Ms. Diane Ulke and Ms. Anna Golang of Meri Kerap facilitated the workshop. The workshop was attended by thirty participants from the Simbu Province and saw the broad representation of most of the key women's organisations in the province.

During the workshop, video footage was taken by Ms. Robyn Slarke, a video producer from Perth who has worked for many years with women, particularly during election campaigns, in the Highlands. The video footage will contribute towards a documentary to be used as educational material for women candidates in the Highlands running for elections.

#### Background

*'The National Constitution / Mama Loa contains the principles and rights which unfortunately most of our people in both the rural and urban areas have no knowledge about. On the other hand, many churches and NGO's are doing good development work. Critical in all of this was and is **democracy**. Our people need to contribute critically to the process of governance in the country, however, that can only be done meaningfully with adequate knowledge of the political system and the principles of democracy.'*

- Lady Carol Kidu, Minister for Social Development

In the Highlands, the status of women is low. Traditional roles of women continue to restrict them to the family domain and men hold the positions of power. In the political sphere, women face restrictions during elections and electoral processes. In the Highlands, it is rare for a woman to be elected to government. Many withdraw their candidacy before polling day due to the pressure and threats received from male candidates.

The governance workshop in the Simbu Province was established following a 'Women and Governance' workshop in April 2003 in Goroka, Highlands. This workshop involved a critical assessment of the 2002 National Elections based on personal testimonies of the region's women political candidates. The assessment identified the need for governance training focusing on women at the provincial level and so a workshop was developed in the Simbu Province.

## **Workshop Aims**

The governance workshop in the Simbu Province aimed to:

- provide an opportunity for women in Simbu to discuss their experiences and constraints relating to the inclusion of women in governance, drawing on first hand experiences of women candidate;
- discuss key issues relating to elections and the electoral processes;
- to develop strategies for increasing women's participation in governance in Simbu province;
- to facilitate networking and exchange among Simbu civil society organisations to ensure efficient follow up work on educating for active citizenship and good governance.

## **Program Outline and Discussions Topics**

The workshop went through a number of cycles consisting of presentations, small group discussions and reporting back to the larger group. The workshop also included speeches delivered by members of the Provincial Council, non-government practitioners and women candidates running for election. Topics discussed included democracy and governance, the status of women in the Simbu Province, human rights and constitutional rights, power relations in the Province, women's empowerment in decision making processes and the preferential voting system. Each evening videos were shown encouraging women to think critically about societal structures in the Highlands. Presentations were conducted in the local language, Tokpisin.

Ms. Sarah Garup, Director of Meri Kirap, shared her personal experience as a candidate of the national elections. She outlined the challenges and discriminations faced leading up to polling day and the repercussions as a woman in a male dominated sphere. Mr Kunda, the Acting Provincial Advisor for the Simbu Provincial Government, agreed that women were marginalised in the political sphere. He spoke about the situation of women in the Highlands noting that men's perceptions of women hindered their ability to engage in political processes. Mr Kunda stressed the need for greater commitment at the provincial level to allow women to occupy position of power. He called for improved education on gender equality and civic education on the preferential voting system.

Bernie Lovegrove, Program Manager of ASPBAE, gave a presentation on the role of civil society in governance. He explained the concept of civil society and its role in strengthening social capital and holding governments accountable. A local drama group, Baua Baua Theatre Troupe, gave a theatrical presentation entitled 'Position Vacant' showing the difficulties women face in gaining employment regardless of their qualifications and experience. Mr. Stephen Gari facilitated a session entitled 'The Status of Women Since Independence' where participants were divided into four groups and given a questionnaire. Discussions from these groups focused on a number of issues including the role of women in society, traditional and cultural perceptions of women and barriers to change.

A session was conducted on democracy, rights, the Constitution and governance. Participants raised concerns about the lack of 'watchdogs' on decision-makers, who are increasingly people in positions of power without the authority to judge or execute laws. As a result, there is often little respect for politicians at the community level. Participants stressed the need for political leaders to develop a greater understanding of the National Constitution and the rights of both citizens and government under the Constitution.

Dr Micheal Unage gave a presentation entitled the 'Paradox of Power'. In his presentation, Dr Unage referred to a traditional legend which sees women as the powerful agents in society. He looked at traditional power structures in PNG and explained different styles of political leadership using examples in a local context. Bernie Lovegrove then conducted a session on power and leadership, which aimed to develop strategies for increasing women's influence and the number of women in positions of leadership. Small discussion groups were held, each planning a strategy and setting goals to achieve this outcome.

During the workshop, participants were divided into six groups to identify a key issue of concern for women candidates and formulate a one-year District Plan to deal with this issue. One group focused on the Simbu Province, the other five groups each focused on a particular district within the Simbu Province: the Gumini District, Kerowagi District, Kundiawa/Gembogl District, Salt Nomane Karimu District and the Sinasina District. The Action Plans comprised a key issue, a goal, an objective and strategies for reaching the set goal. In the Simbu Province, the key issue identified was to develop women's and men's leadership skills. The five key issues at the district level were:

- Gaining the support of men and women for greater women's involvement in decision-making processes;
- Gender awareness in school curriculum;
- Education about the preferential voting system;
- Women making achievements in the political, business and other fields;
- Increasing the networking and communication between civil society organisations and the government in an attempt to promote fair elections and avoid warlord elections;

### **Conclusions from Group Discussions**

As well as focusing on strategies for increasing women's influence and participation in the political sphere, participants used this workshop as an opportunity to identify priorities for the government such as improvements to health, transportation, communication and education in the province. Participants agreed that training was needed for policy makers in the province and that women would benefit from leadership skills training that adopted a rights-based approach.

Discussions held during this session produced a number of conclusions from participants. Many agreed that while the situation of women in urban areas seems to have improved in recent years, women in the Highlands are still oppressed. Instances of violence against women and children are extremely high and often men have little respect for their wives. There is little documented information about the status of women in PNG and in developing strategies for improving the situation of women, participants identified the need for research in this area. Participants were also committed to improving the communication and networking between local civil society organisations and the workshop enabled these relations to develop and strengthen.

Tradition is strong in the Highlands and men are reluctant to take on responsibilities traditionally assigned to women, such as carrying food. As such, they are also reluctant to allow women to take on positions of leadership which are traditionally assigned to men. Participants discussed strategies for empowering men to see the value of supporting women in these roles. Participants agreed that men need to be involved in gender-sensitisation processes, education and awareness raising to promote women's empowerment and participation in political processes. More generally, participants agreed that education on the preferential voting system was needed in the province as well as strategies for dealing with warlord elections.

The family unit is an important part of Pacific culture and the discussion groups stressed the importance of educating the whole family to improve the status of women. Many agreed that school curriculum should include democracy and development. Changing attitudes and traditional cultural norms to be more favourable for women is a long term process and so children, especially male children, need to be included in the education process.

### **Participant Evaluation**

Participants commented positively on the workshop and that it targeted their needs and met their expectations. Participants were also happy with the design and delivery of the workshop. Discussions held during the workshop have motivated participants to strive to bring about change and improve the situation of women in the Simbu Province. It is hoped that similar workshops will be held in other provinces in the future.

### **Future Initiatives**

From this workshop, Meri Kirap, ASPBAE and a local women's group, Kup Women for Peace (KWP), discussed ways for ASPBAE and Meri Kirap to support the work of KWP. KWP is a local organisation from the district of Kup in the Simbu Province that aims to develop the capacity of local people through developing educational materials. It is intended that these educational materials, will also contribute towards confronting the law and order problems in the Province.

The video footage taken by Ms. Robyn Slarke during the workshop, combined with interviews with women candidates such as Ms. Sarah Garup, will contribute towards a documentary to be used as educational material for women candidates in the Highlands running for elections. This video will be made available soon.

### **List of Participants**

<b>NAME</b>		<b>DISTRICT/ POSITION</b>
1.	Ms Sandy John	Candidate Ward Council Election 2002, Yongomugl Local Level Govt. Sina Sina Yongomugl District
2.	Ms Mama Kagl	Prominent women's leader, a one time Provincial Government Assembly Member
3	Ms Maria Kalap	Community School Teacher, Karimui District
4	Mr Dakan Siberai	Elected woman Ward Councillor, 2002 National Elections, Karimui District
5	Ms Tresi Kuraia	-
6	Ms Bari Saki	-
7	Ms Margaret Allan	Kundiawa
8	Ms Margaret Kagl,	Woman candidate, 2002 National Parliament Election, Kundiawa Gembogl Open
9	Ms Vero Gevi	Executive Member of Simbu Provincial Council of Women

10	Ms. Mary John	Elected Ward Councillor 2002, Kundiawa Urban LLG
11	Ms Saina John	-
12	Ms Opa Kua	-
13	Mr Peter Lakingu	-
14	Ms Sally Aina	Member MERI KIRAP
15	Ms Sandy Wena	-
16	Ms Mary Brasty	Women's Organizer, Women's Resource Centre / currently working full time with the Seventh Day Adventist Church
17	Ms Cecelia Gonapa	President, Sina Sina Yongomugl District Women's Council
18	Ms Monica Paulus	MERI KIRAP Goroka office
19	Mr Peter Nilkare	-
20	Mr Robert Kaupa	Gumine District
21	Ms Elly Daikin	-
22	Ms Angela Bare	-
23	Ms Agnes Sil (Tumun)	Secretary, Kup Women for Peace
24	Ms Mariana Auro	Member, Kup Women for Peace
25	Ms Jerry Kai	Member, Kup Women for Peace
26	Mr Peter Tumun	Member, Kup Women for Peace
27	Ms Jacinta Bal	Sina Sina Yongomugl District
28	Ms Mary Kini	Coordinator, Kup Women for Peace
29	Ms Molly Daure	ASPBAE Melanesia Project Officer
30	Ms Sarah Garap	MERI KIRAP Coordinator