

A scenic photograph of a tropical river in South Fly, Western Province, Papua New Guinea. The river flows through a lush landscape with numerous tall palm trees and dense green foliage. A small wooden boat is visible on the water, and a blue-roofed structure is partially visible on the bank. The sky is bright blue with scattered white clouds.

**LEADERSHIP
BEYOND STATE
LIMITS II:**
WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP
IN SOUTH FLY,
WESTERN PROVINCE
(PAPUA NEW GUINEA)

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The **Developmental Leadership Program** (DLP) is an international research collaboration supported by the Australian Government.

DLP investigates the crucial role that leaders, networks and coalitions play in achieving development outcomes.

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Cover photo:
South Fly, courtesy of the research team



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ACRONYMS

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research	HIC	Health Islands Concept (World Vision)
ADRA	Adventist Development Relief Agency	IAI	Innovative Agro Industry
AGM	Annual General Meeting	JSS4D	Justice Services and Stability for Development Program
AHC	Australian High Commission	KTF	Kokoda Track Foundation
APSP	Australia PNG Subnational Program	LLG	Local Level Government
ARP	Analytical Review Paper	LPV	Limited Preferential Voting
CDD	Community Driven Development	NDOE	National Department of Education
CMCA	Community Mine Continuation Agreement	NFA	National Fisheries Authority
CMIC	Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council	NGO	Non-Government Organisation
CPT	Community Project Team (RSDP)	OTDF	Ok Tedi Development Foundation
DA	District Administrator	OTML	Ok Tedi Mining Limited
DDA	District Development Authorities	PEA	Provincial Education Adviser
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	PNG	Papua New Guinea
DLP	Developmental Leadership Program	PNGDF	PNG Defense Force
DMVA	Daru Market Vendors Association	RRRC	Reef and Rainforest Research Centre
DPLGA	Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs	RSDP	Rural Service Delivery Program
ECPNG	Evangelical Church of PNG	SIP	Service Improvement Program
FFT	Family Farms Teams (ACIAR)	SFRP	South Fly Resilience Plan
FRPG	Fly River Provincial Government	SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
GBV	Gender Based Violence	SLIP	School Learning Improvement Plan
		SSG	Special Support Grant
		TIM	Traditional Inhabitants Meeting

TFF	Tuition Free Funds	WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
UDDT	Urine Diverting Dry Toilet	WDCs	Ward Development Committees
UQ	The University of Queensland	WP	Western Province
VPC	Village Planning Committee (CMCA)		

INTRODUCTION

Arriving in many remote villages in South Fly District, the near absence of services or public expenditure is striking. It is easy to assume that these villages are ungoverned, beyond the limits of the PNG state. Yet local forms of leadership thrive, as they coalesce around external opportunities, whether via aid projects, market value chains, neighbouring states, mining or limited PNG government funding. The research explores the formal and informal governance system and how leadership supports development in remote villages that are disconnected from the state.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Women leaders have the potential to challenge or at least create an alternative to male-dominated patronage systems, to strengthen the subnational governance and finance system.
 - Women leaders and their organizations are strong candidates to manage community development projects, including building of women's resource centres, open-air community markets, SME development, and tackling GBV.
 - Grow the reach of women's networks to women in rural areas, through mentoring and training by women leaders in urban areas, and sub-district market development.
- Consider women's networks as a 'coalition for change' and a bottom-up approach to running more candidates for elections and advocacy for reforms to subnational governance.
 - Compliance under existing PNG government legislation around WDC quotas for women could be a condition of funding for village projects
 - Gender-responsive programming should continue to be mainstreamed across all aid activities, with a focus on men and women working together to challenge gendered norms.
 - Ongoing work to monitor and analyse informal women's networks in South Fly should continue, with the aim of and help to ensure efforts to understand and support them, and to do no harm to them.

NOTE

This paper is a companion to part 1, ['The political economy of subnational leadership and governance in South Fly District, Western Province, PNG'](#) and to part 3, [the accompanying case studies](#). As such, pages 6-15 repeat pages 6-15 in part 1. The reader who has already read part 1 may want to skip straight to [page 16](#). You can also check out the shorter executive summary of the 3 papers [here](#).

THE PROJECT

The research addressed the following questions:

1. How does formal and informal leadership interact, with a particular focus on women's leadership?
2. How do these types of leadership orientate around external funding opportunities?
3. How can village leaders and coalitions form transparent, effective and legitimate institutions, that contest and reform existing sub-national structures?
4. How can funding enter informal governance spaces, and strengthen rather than undermine informal leadership and governance structures?
5. What are the extent, scale, capabilities and aspirations of informal women's networks in South Fly, and their potential to facilitate development and reform?

This research has been published into three parts:

- [Part I](#) focuses on the political economy of subnational leadership
- Part II, this paper, focuses on women's leadership and informal networks
- [Part III](#) is the set of case studies that underpins both papers.

The first two parts follow the same structure: introduction, a brief description of the method and background, followed by findings and implications for practice. Taken together, the research identifies 10 implications for how developmental leadership can be supported in the South Fly context.

METHOD

The significance of the research can be measured by its location and scale. The research took place in the PNG-Australia borderland, at the periphery of the PNG state, which is an area of historical neglect and rising geopolitical and strategic concern to both the PNG and Australian governments. These concerns have led to an increasing Australian aid program presence.

In terms of its scale, the research focused at the local level – on communities, informal networks, village committees, Ward and Local Level Government (LLG) – building on other research that has focused more on national, provincial and district levels.² In particular, we have drawn on David Craig's pioneering 2021 work for the World Bank on the 'Political Economy and Institutional Context of Sub-National Public Financial Management and Service Delivery in PNG' which takes a similar political economy lens and makes similar observations about incentives, fund flows and institutional structures.³

Two changes occurred during the research:

- Considerable adaptation to the research design occurred due to COVID-19, leading to increased reliance on the local research officer, Baia Warapa, and research assistant, Geua Gorio. The research team also became adept at using a combination of Zoom, WhatsApp, and direct calling, to allow for the participation of the Australian-based Principal Investigator in interviews.
- In early 2022, the scope of the research questions changed. Emerging findings revealed the pervasiveness of male-dominated patronage politics across all levels of the subnational governance

² For example, Howes et al., 2014.

³ Craig, 2021.

system. It seemed unrealistic to expect local leaders and structures to contest and reform this system, through their application of 'good governance' principles of transparency and legitimacy, as embodied in RQ3. RQ5 was introduced, in response to findings identifying the emerging potential of informal women's networks.

This research is based on 53 interviews, 21(40%) with women. Participants were chosen based on their established standing as leaders, according to the authors of the paper and other informants' knowledge. Most interviews (60%) were conducted in Daru, as many local level leaders either travel frequently to, or reside intermittently, there. Remaining interviews took place in seven different villages along the South Fly coastline: Mari, Bula, Berr, Buzi, Tais, Sigabaduru and Mabudawan. The leaders interviewed were drawn from all five of the Local Level Governments of South Fly District: Forecoast Kiwai, Fly Kiwai, Morehead, Oriomo Bituri and Daru Urban.

All interviews went through a free and prior informed consent process. Researchers partially transcribed qualitative data using otter.ai software, and then coded manually against 33 themes. All interviewees were numbered to protect their anonymity. In this paper, quotes are marked with the interviewee number and a time stamp of the recording. For example (32, 45:23) refers to interviewee number 32 at the recording timestamp of 45 mins 23 secs.

The research team also worked with the Council of Women, World Vision and the PNG Department for Community Development to enter key characteristics and position holders of informal women's networks in Daru into a nascent database.

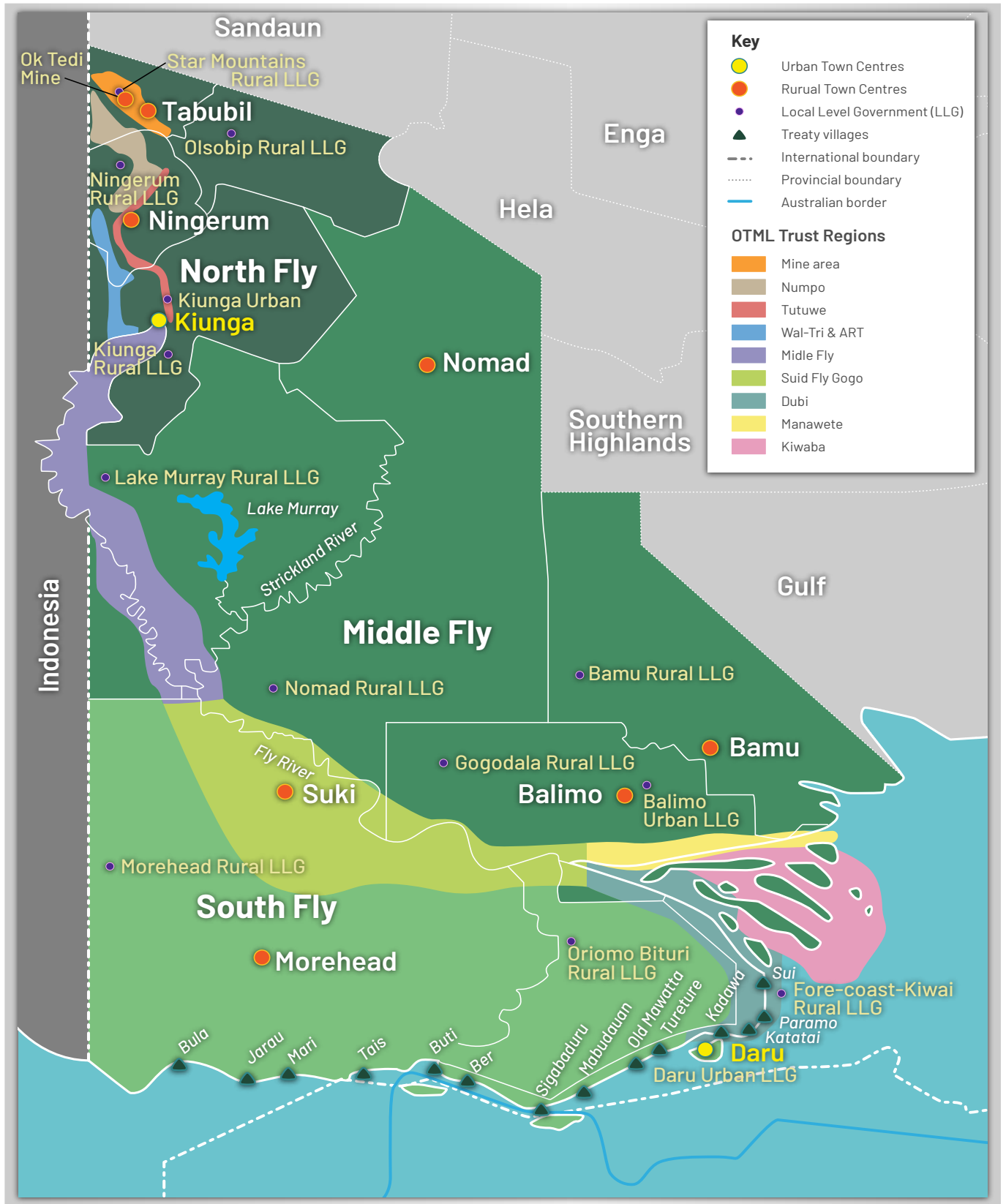


Figure 1: Map of South Fly Borderland and Western Province. Source: Australian High Commission in Port Moresby, PNG.

BACKGROUND

THE BORDERLAND GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

South Fly District is a unique development context, located on two sides by the Australian and Indonesian borders. It can be seen as a triangle, defined by three powerful external influences: The Torres Strait Islands of Australia; Merauke Regency of Indonesia; and the Fly River Corridor with the mining benefits and environmental impacts flowing from the Ok Tedi mine at the northern part of Western Province. Consistent with border studies⁴, it is best understood as a borderland, a unique socioeconomic geography, requiring a focus “on people within border zones as opposed to the boundaries themselves”.⁵

Positioned at the physical limit of the PNG state, leaders in South Fly District are exasperated with the shortcoming of the PNG government, and its lack of services and funding. They instead find themselves beholden to complex and powerful external influences, which largely define their political fortunes.

The PNG border with Australia introduces a range of Australian public finances and security influences, which is unique compared to other international borders globally. Cross border disparities exist in most borderlands globally, but the extent of relative disadvantage is particularly high in South Fly. South Fly District receives very little in the way

of public expenditure or service delivery from the PNG government. They typically rely on seasonal water tanks, unsanitary pit latrines or open defecation, have no electricity, health clinics are unstaffed, and students travel long distances to school. Houses are made of bush materials, with no mosquito screens.

Although they remain disadvantaged relative to the general Australian population, the Torres Strait Islander people enjoy markedly better living conditions in comparison to the people in South Fly. Yet perversely, in South Fly the cost of basic commodities, including fuel, is comparable to those of the Torres Strait, due to the high cost of transportation and macroeconomic effects of the PNG resource driven economy. While most borderlands internationally enjoy the economic benefits of cross border trade, including labour mobility, Australian authorities strictly limit this to traditional bartering.

Australian Government management of the Torres Strait Treaty extends special privileges to a select number of villages. The Torres Strait Treaty governs the border, limiting rights to enter Australia to 14 Treaty Villages on the PNG side. These villages effectively form a special non-contiguous zone, formalised in 2019 with the creation of Forecoast Local Level Government (LLG). The local leaders of these Treaty Villages, Ward Councillors, have more influence over the Australian border

4 Paasi, 2005.

5 Grundy-Warr and Scholfield, 2005.

than district, provincial and even national leaders, and have direct access to Australian government political leaders and senior public servants. In the past, they have also enjoyed special funding from both the PNG government and the Australian aid program. In addition to selling their own produce, Treaty Villages act as middlemen for trade from non-Treaty villages (primarily in arts and crafts). They also purchase food and fuel in Australia and sell it back into PNG.

PNG's border with Indonesia is dominated by unregulated private market trade, and an absence of PNG public finances or services.

At the most peripheral from the PNG state, a lack of PNG government funds and services disadvantages villages along the Indonesian border. People look instead to Indonesia for opportunities. In the absence of border posts or other government services on the PNG side, all trade is unregulated and therefore technically illegal, but village leaders draw the distinction between trusted traders and illegal poachers ([see 'Case studies' paper, 'Indonesian traders'](#)). Village leaders have cultivated informal and trusted relationships with Indonesian traders, some of whom have built their own houses, married locally, and contributed financially to community projects, including church upgrades. The traders supply much needed fuel and commodities, including fishing nets and motor bikes, at much cheaper prices. With their constituency so focused on fishing and economic opportunities in Indonesia, it can be difficult for village leaders to maintain authority over the trade, and poachers find ways to trade directly with individual fisherman.

Cross-border dynamics in South Fly give rise to hybrid identities and institutions.

Borderlands endure geographical and institutional distance from central powers, where transnational interactions can drive hybridisation of cultural identities and institutions that challenge traditional political allegiances.⁶ For example, the Ranger Program, which is best understood as a hybrid borderland organisation responding to three different Australian Government policy fields: Indigenous affairs, border security, and international aid.

The Ranger Program adapted an Indigenous land and sea management program found in the Torres Strait and other remote Indigenous communities to South Fly. It pioneered a participatory building and training program, overcoming considerable logistical challenges.

It brought much overdue improvements and cash employment, initially to the 14 Treaty Villages, but now extended to 40 Wards. Since it began operating in the Treaty Villages in 2014, the Ranger Program has adapted and changed over its life, in keeping with the relative influence of these policy fields. Rangers have been – at various times – project implementers, community facilitators, biosecurity monitors, COVID-19 communicators, data collectors, emergency food aid deliverers and implementers of livelihoods projects.

South Fly District is a unique context in PNG, due to its history and proximity with Australia, as well as growing external political influences from Indonesia and Asia. One indicator of this uniqueness is that the lingua franca for the region is English, with little if any Tok Pisin spoken. There is extensive literature on patronage politics in PNG, although considerable regional variation occurs across

6 Deleixhea, Dembinskab and Iglesiasc, 2019, p.641.

the country.⁷ As Ketan observed, “national ministers and MPs have supported candidates with millions of Kina in attempting to build patron–client relations with LLG councillors, and cement their dominance”.⁸ Patronage politics in South Fly District do not appear to be this severe, possibly due to the lack of cultural basis for Highland–style ‘big men’.⁹ While many of our findings resonate with research conducted elsewhere in PNG, generalisation of findings to other regions would require careful contextualisation.

SUBNATIONAL GOVERNANCE CHARACTERISTICS

Local government in PNG sits alongside district, provincial and national spheres of government, under a federal constitutional monarchy. Local level government (LLG) is also enshrined into the constitution and governed by two pieces of legislation from the 1990s: the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments 1995 and the Local-level Governments Administration Act 1997.

The Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs (DPLGA) within the Ministry of Inter-Government Relations has statutory responsibility for all matters relating to local government. The South Fly District Open Member is elected during the national general election, to sit on the national parliament.¹⁰ The smallest jurisdiction within a LLG is a Ward, composed of one or more villages. Ward Councillors are elected at the LLG election, which typically runs one year after the general election. Elected Ward Councillors then in turn elect the LLG President. The Ward Councillor is

the chairperson for the Ward Development Committee, alongside five associate members. At least two are supposed to be female, although this provision is seldom adhered to.

Village communities have both formal and informal institutions that collectively define their self-governance. While Ward Development Committees (WDCs) are formally legislated as the administrative interface for government service delivery and aid assistance, they represent only one part of the local governance system. Other organisations also have mandates and responsibilities to government departments and aid organisations, including school boards, village courts, and a broad range of special purpose committees, including WASH, health and agriculture (17, 16:25).

In addition, there are a range of informal organisations that typically operate under the radar of external service delivery and development assistance, including traditional clans, church fellowship groups, women’s groups (including midwifery), fisher/farmer groups, market vendors, sporting and youth groups. In Daru, there is an even broader range of informal women’s networks operating ([see Paper II](#)). Few of these groups have a physical presence, and they generally lack formal positions, elections or a bank account. The relationship between these more culturally-based and informal organisations and the WDC varies between location.

7 There is extensive literature on patronage politics in PNG including its regional variations. See Allen and Hasnain, 2010.

8 Ketan 2013, p.6.

9 Burton et al., 2011.

10 Of the 118 Members of Parliament elected in 2022 nationally, only two are women.

Where a WDC has limited capability, the loci for decision making can sit elsewhere. Each of these local organisations – either individually or in combination – constitute valid sites for working with local governance. It is the plurality of leadership and organisations that collectively define the politics and contestation that shape local governance.

Problems of corruption and misappropriation cut across political and administrative lines.

Western Province has struggled with successive convictions of past governors, and suspensions of Fly River Provincial governments. The most serious case saw both the then Provincial Administrator and Governor [simultaneously convicted in 2016](#). Incoming Governors and Open Members have removed opposing staff and promoted their supporters (08, 1:02:37; 05, 46:20).

When one District Administrator tried to prevent financial misconduct, he was first threatened with a police charge, and then subsequently lost his position (15, 11:44). Bribery payments up to 10% of the contract value can distort contracting processes, by manipulating selection boards, inflating cost estimates (05, 36:59), or not completing projects (01, 1:01:14). One Ward councillor expressed his frustration, alleging the creation of fake projects allows money to be diverted elsewhere, including then buying off people sent to do investigations:

“I really don’t know why people are not speaking up against it. It’s really obvious. ... We are going in a loop right now. The practice is now already become part of the system, you cannot take it out. [It is beyond] the effort [of any one man]. It has to be an overhaul of the system (08, 56:21).”

Reflecting back to the early 2010s during a particularly low period in Western Province governance, a former government officer recalled instances of candidates for elections

receiving support from benefactors, whom they were then beholden to if elected (05, 56:45). He also described the influence of patronage networks over the administration system, from the national capital in Waigani:

“Western Province, we are seen as very rich. And yet we make ourselves poor, because of [corrupt] practices. ... They are an organised group: there’s elements within the district administration, [and] elements within the provincial and district treasury, who are in touch with each other, so when a claim comes in, it goes in straight away. It is Waigani, coming to provincial headquarters, coming to district headquarters and right down to LLG (05, 36:59). ...In Western Province when you try to do the correct thing, you will have the greatest opposition (05, 23:19).”

Social accountability persists in village communities and sits alongside mutual and horizontal forms of local accountability that merge customary, formal, and informal institutions.

It does not neatly align with development agencies’ common perception that citizens can be empowered to hold governments to account. Monetary and individualised leadership, with links to pervasive patronage networks, strongly influence public finance allocations in South Fly. Based on interviews and authors’ personal observations, checks and balances still operate within the sociocultural realm, which can compel elected Ward Councillors to act for the community good.

‘Bossman’ leadership styles dominate patronage politics in PNG and are characterised by “tiers of competitive patron-client relationships with exclusively-defined client bases at each level, which often involves patrons and clients in gathering and distributing financial resources”. But there is also an emerging ‘trupela lida’ (true leader) style, whereby “authority is more dependent on

human and social capital than financial capital, and client bases are less exclusive".¹¹

In South Fly, many decision-making processes continue to be based on reaching consensus, and on a principle of equitable distribution across the community. For visiting development workers, public meetings remain common practice before any consultation or other business begins with households or individuals. Both 'bossman' and 'trupela' styles of leadership operate together, and most leaders deploy both styles at different times. As described by a former government administrator:

"People are still respecting cultural leadership in the communities, but what's happening now is leadership is more monetary based. Our culture is such that you take care of everybody ... whatever decision you make it impacts on the lives of people, so you make sure it is to the benefit of not just one person, but for the benefit of the entire community. Our young are ... coming back from schools and they are seeing things done differently. ... Traditional leadership is still strong [but the] monetary based leadership is now beginning to creep in and it's gradually getting to our LLG members, because they're thinking the same as our political leaders at [higher] levels (05, 27:21)."

An emerging political strategy is to take a community development approach, connecting with aid organisations working in the district. A different style of politics is emerging in South Fly with leaders who are more focused on social development and financial redistribution to a more inclusive support base than patronage politics. One Ward Councillor who the authors met was actively pursuing this agenda – working with an international NGO to implement projects in many villages across South Fly District, beyond his own. He made this his platform when he ran as a candidate for Open Member in the 2022 general election, and while unsuccessful, polled well.

11 Craig, 2021, p.ii.

FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES	F	M
1. Education (primary or higher)	50-100%	50-100%
2. Church related activities	50-100%	18-32%
3. Employment	50-100%	18-32%
4. Formal organisations	18-32%	50-100%
5. Informal village committees / position holders	0-14%	50-100%
6. Informal women's networks	18-32%	0-14%
7. Community and/or youth development support	18-32%	18-32%
8. Cultural or family background or standing	18-32%	18-32%
9. Sporting activity including coaching	18-32%	0-14%
10. Speaking confidently	0-14%	0-14%
11. Family support, especially partners	0-14%	0-14%
12. SME activity	0-14%	0-14%
13. Women health including midwifery	0-14%	0-14%
LEGEND	50-100% Strongly indicated	18-32% Sometimes indicated
	0-14% Occasionally indicated	

Table 1: Most valued formative experiences among leaders

INDIVIDUAL LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

All leaders who participated in the study were asked to describe their personal story of how they became leaders. The table above summarises the experiences these leaders most valued, with F meaning women leaders and M meaning men.

Women and men have many similar formative experiences in their leadership careers.

Education to at least primary school level was highly valued overall, and by all men spoken to (see Table 1). Church related activities and employment were also strongly valued, but more so by women than men. The 'cultural/family background of leaders' was equally--valued by women and men, as were their activities in supporting 'community or youth development'. Sporting activity, including coaching, was valued higher by women. Ability

to speak confidently, family support and SME activity were valued by both, but not strongly.

Informal networks are particularly important for women leaders.

Experience of formal organisations and positions (e.g. LLGs, village courts, village recorder) was valued higher by men, which is unsurprising given that women are generally excluded. This also applied to informal village committees and community organisations (e.g. church, agricultural committees), which are also male dominated. Informal organisations open to women are largely limited to small women's group and networks. This aligns with [experiences from elsewhere in the Indo-Pacific](#), where informal networks and organisations tend to continue privileging men unless women build their own. Often established privately, behind the scenes with little public visibility, informal networks can help women to gain access to spaces otherwise closed to them.¹²

12 Nazneen et al., 2019.

THE COUNCIL OF WOMEN

The Council of Women is the peak formal organisation for mobilising women’s leadership and action in South Fly District. While the government funding it receives is limited, the Council of Women has a legislated role under the National Council of Women Incorporation Act 1979. In comparison to the nominal reps on the DDA, LLGs and WDCs, the Council of Women operates an aggregated model of women electing their president and officer bearers at AGMs, who then represent them at higher levels. The current President of the Western Province Council of Women holds three other leadership positions: South Fly District; Oriomo Bituri LLG; and a cluster of wards that combine into the Lower Pahatori Sub-Council.¹³ :

“The organizational structure of Council of Women is like an octopus. When I want to pass information over to a very remote LLG, ... I know who my woman leaders are in their LLG’s. So whatever information comes, I deliver it straight out to the locations where they are from, they take it down to the sub council areas, and then the sub council areas executives, [they] then [take it] to the wards. So that’s how we operate. [The intent is] so nobody, no women, no one is left behind.”

Despite its lack of resources, the Council of Women has considerable reach and fulfills an important advocacy and awareness raising role. It has developed an embryonic network across South Fly District and Western Province more broadly. The structure provides for six representatives from each of the 28 sub-council clusters of Wards, giving a base of 168 positions. The six positions are Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Vice-Secretary, Treasurer and Vice-Treasurer. The structure is, however, nascent and not all female leaders in the rural villages the authors visited could correctly recount the names of their current representatives. Government agencies use the network for awareness raising and training, as described by an officer with the Department of Community Development:

“In our programs, we normally look at basic awareness, which is fundamental. We do a lot of basic awareness in rural areas [through] the network, and we strengthen the network in that way. [With] youth, women, sports, churches, we use the network to advocate on specific issues ... and capacity building trainings ... that are for women (48, 6:41).”

13 Under discussion was whether a position should be vacated once an office holder is elected to a higher level, allowing someone lower down to fill the position.

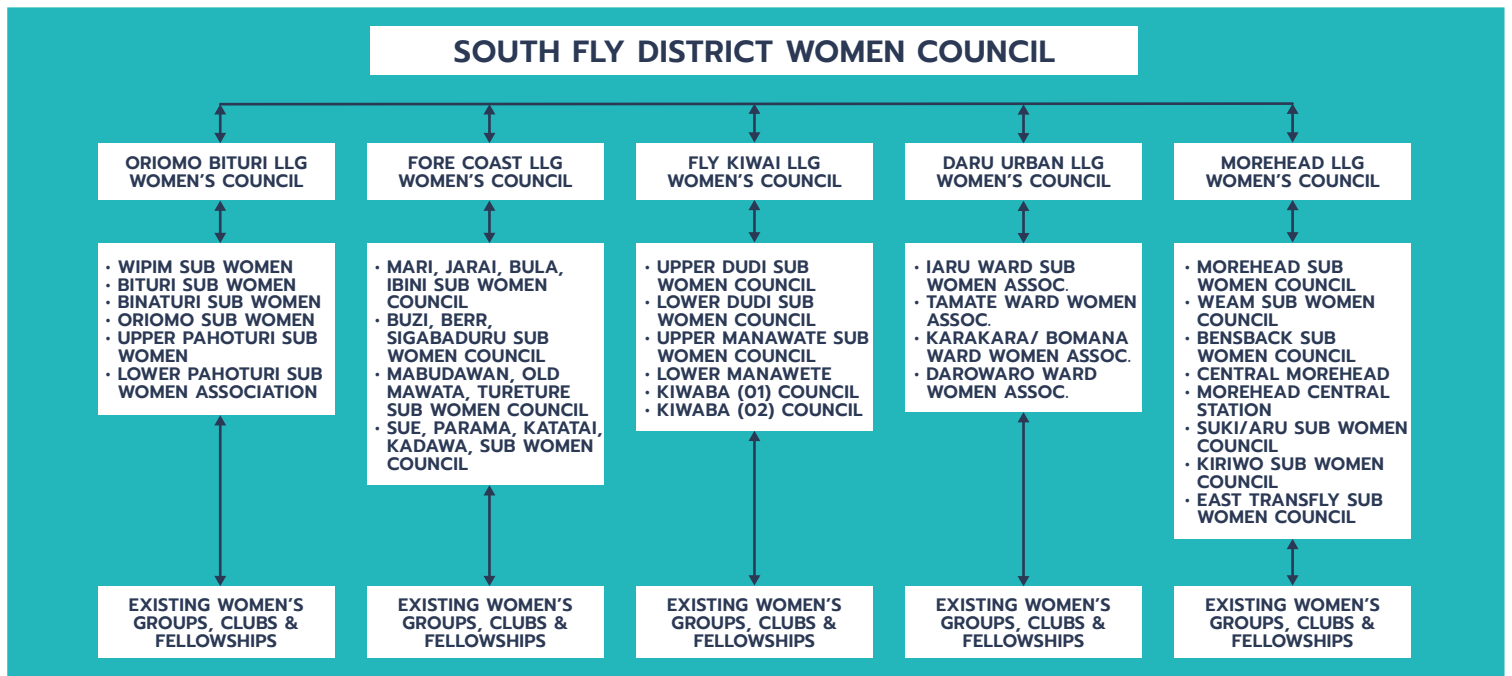


Figure 2: Council of Women Structure in South Fly District

Despite its statutory status, the Council of Women is effectively a local NGO, with strong internal processes and little funding or project activity. In comparison to the male dominated general or LLG elections, women candidates do not run a campaign in the lead up to their election, instead they are nominated and elected at AGMs by the women in attendance (04, 37:35). The Council of Women access small departmental budgets earmarked for women, including via the DDA, and the Department for Community Development and the Department of Fisheries & Agriculture. The Daru based Community Development Officer from the Department for Community Development closely supports and, at times, facilitates their meetings and organises training.

The Council also receives support from aid agencies, such as World Vision and UN Women, but only for small projects which are mostly limited to Daru. This includes COVID-19 awareness, some training programs, and sewing of facemasks and reusable pads. In rural areas, the current focus is to raise awareness of the legislated role that the Council of Women fulfils, establishing and maintaining their structure of representatives and supporter base (41, 15:33; 47, 22:15).

The Council of Women is positioning itself as the umbrella organisation for a much larger number of informal women's groups, clubs, networks and enterprises. In Daru Urban, the Council of Women are trying to increase the number of informal groups and networks who are affiliated with them (see Section 3.3). Women can only join as a group of 10 and pay an annual fee of K10 per woman (K100 combined), which the Council of Women relies on for its operating costs. Some groups were reluctant to pay, because of the cost and the lack of services received in return (52, 42:49). One senior women leader repeated the case for why women's groups should join:

“... we've been telling them, you need to affiliate, you need to pay registration, because whatever big things have been planned by the government, you'll be acknowledged and you'll get a piece of the cake” (43, 45:26).”

Women Resource Centres create a political space for women in leadership. This is clear in Daru, where the Resource Centre has effectively become the administrative and political office of the Council of Women, and two senior women leaders now live there as their residence. The meeting room is available for rent to other organisations, raising its profile within the district centre. Significantly, the Centre was also the nominated women polling booth at the July 2022 national election. The nominated women's rep on the DDA supported the two women who occupy the building, to ensure the security of the building:

"I made it my business to bring in two women leaders in there. Because I do not want [other] people to own the building. The money comes from the DDA, [which] means that the money is for the people. So, I took [it that] the Council of Woman presidents are the right people to take over this building ... so that we can find ways to help ourselves within South Fly (06, 10:19)."

But the occupation of the Resource Centre has also drawn criticism from other women leaders, who are challenging the authority of the two women to live there and control its access. There are complaints that the two women control access, when it should be more open for women's programs and their needs (25, 24:39), for training, workshops, sharing experiences and as a place for rural women who are visiting Daru (49, 16:51).

Separation of women from men in polling booths has been a positive development to prevent husbands from influencing how their wives vote. For the 2022 general election, the PNG Electoral Commission introduced a reform to help overcome undue influence on how women choose to vote. At the Women's Resource Centre in Daru, separate lines and booths for women and men were set-up (43, 21:48). Voting was orderly and reported to be successful, leading to a greater number of women voting than men (48, 38:32).

The Council of Women is trying to support local candidates to run for elections. Since 1997, the Council of Women has long had a program of increasing the number of women elected to politics, through an affiliated network called Women in Politics (WIP).¹⁴ A formerly nominated female representative on the DDA described her political strategy of raising the profile of future women candidates:

"Many times, we (Council of Women) are not really recognized by government departments as they see us as a non-government organisation. So that is why I made it my business to bring these two ladies (Council of Women Presidents for Daru Urban and South Fly District) closer [to promote them], so that the government can recognize [them]. The rest [of the] Council of Women reps are not yet [well] known (06, 11:41 & 14:25). Those two women in the Resource Centre are [now] fully recognised by organizations that are coming in, and they are encouraging them to go for election (06, 32:26, 34:36)."

14 Sepoe, 2002.

In the lead up to the 2022 general election, senior figures in the Council of Women were manoeuvring to run, but decided against it, reportedly due – at least in part – to internal disagreement on the best candidate. The two women who ran unsuccessfully were not from Daru, and were outside the local Council of Women network. Even if unsuccessful, there was recognition of the importance of women “at least running the race”, growing their confidence to contest against the men (48, 28:50). There is strong preference for a local candidate, as described by one local Daru leader:

“We really wanted to put our women out there. A woman who is of our kind, [who] will do something about it. Who has been going through with us, all the pain that we are going through (52. 31:56).”

WOMEN IN POLITICS

A prerequisite to building solidarity among women is for them to recognise their status in their family and community, and develop awareness of their rights to rise above entrenched disempowerment. One local NGO worker passionately argued that solidarity will not be achieved until women stand up for their rights: “we can no more salute men, because the more we salute and the more we bow down to men, you will not build this solidarity” (53, 53:55). Similarly, in the words of a prior President of Daru Council of Women:

“Men look at us as women, they think that they can they look over us, that’s when we try to be a bit aggressive, telling them that no, we have our constitution and laws and we come under the Woman’s Council. We have equal rights to what the man has. We encourage our young students who are still in school, if we have a [male] pilot or a doctor, a woman can also be equal. We try to, push them up ... so they feel acceptable, according to our rights (04, 1:00:03).”

Building solidarity was tied to raising awareness about what women themselves bring, so they respect themselves and have the confidence to elect the best women to lead them. As relayed by a Daru based officer of the Department of Community Development:

“We need to do a lot of advocacy and awareness for women to realize their status in the community, especially in relation to childbirth, in relation to who’s

going to school. ... We need to educate our women [so they realise what they contribute] to health, education, their workload, in the family in the community. How many hours do they walk to get to the nearest health service, or to fetch water? How many hours do they go to the garden? Is it safe for them in relation to gender-based violence? ... [So when it comes to choosing their leaders they can] then decide if this woman, is she really going to stand, is she going to represent the rights that women have on a daily base? Awareness and advocacy are very important to ensure that solidarity is maintained amongst the women (48, 40:44).”

As their careers develop and their networks grow, women leaders tend to be less engaged in patronage systems and place greater emphasis on honesty and transparency. One senior female ranger emphasised her need to report back what she had learnt while attending meetings outside of her community (33, 22:27). Another based in a remote village spoke of women’s honesty compared to men:

“I want my women to be like men, to be together, because sometimes men are only interested in men... I want to support the woman who will be running for the election because ... we see the men sometimes they play tricks. I want the women leader ... because women are honest so they can [represent] the women and the women’s work (21, 16:25).”

A former woman Ward Councillor – the only one to hold such position – spoke about her approach to transparency and integrity among her followers

“I’ve been honest, transparent, ... There’s a lot of corruption that happens in Daru here, in every little organization. But, you know, if you’re a strong leader, and you cast them off this way, people say, oh no, this is the best leader, let’s call her, let’s follow her. Because she’s straight down the line here (43, 9:58).”

She also described how she stood up against the male pacts and deals that dominated decision-making in the LLG:

“When I was a [Ward Councillor] in the political arena, because I was the only female among the males, the males rubbed a lot of things onto me, but I stood my ground. I never got involved in their corruption. They tried to use me a few times, but I said no to it. ... So, they cut me out of that deal. I was doing what [my supporters] gave me to do, to develop my Ward; I was just concentrating on that. [When I needed to say] I’ve run out [of money], I need something here now, they’d say, you do this for us, we’ll top it up for you. And I said, No. If it’s a straightforward good deal I’d agree on it. It’s a corrupt deal, I’d say no I don’t.

So sometimes when it comes to distribution of funds to the Wards, I get a small cut, and they got a bigger cut, I said why? [They replied] ‘no because you’re a woman’ ... I said ‘no, that’s not the case, I have many counterparts, who are under me who can help me’. So that was one of the hardships that I was facing. And sometimes they go ahead and do things without my knowledge. [They left me out] when doing a distribution or talking about things. And when I hear about it,

I go and tell them, this is not right. And then they say, ‘oh, because you were not here, and you won’t go along with us’ (43, 13:57 & 15:15).”

As women have not yet had majority control over public finance allocation in South Fly, the question of whether they reject, modify or sustain patronage politics remains hypothetical. Women don’t yet have the numbers to form pacts themselves, but some look to the day when they will do so. Some women in senior positions recognised the need to engage in similar deal making if they were to become politically effective in male dominated structures:

“We have 10 members [in the DDA] today and 9 are men. I am one. ...I don’t have a support in there. If there is another woman ... everything will go well, that’s what I believe. Today I am encouraging women to become political leaders. Because that will be a bridge built for us as women (06, 32:26).”

INFORMAL WOMEN’S NETWORKS IN DARU

Most existing capacity lies with informal women’s networks: it does not yet sit within formal structures like WDCs, LLGs, DDAs, or even the Council of Women. Outside of the formal Council of Women structure, the authors identified 33 other informal groups in Daru. Half of these (49%) were faith or church based, with women gathering according to the different denominations and local churches where they worshipped. The next most significant organising function was microenterprise development, which accounted for a quarter (24%) of informal women’s group (e.g. floriculture, garden vegetables, catering), often with government and NGO supported training. The remaining groups have developed organically, and range in scope, based on employment (e.g. police barracks women’s group), advocacy or occasionally social protection (e.g. widows’ groups).

Women’s leadership careers often begin with support from their church, through training and experience of sitting on church committees. A senior Council of Women leader reflected on her career, which began at her local church, then at a higher level in the Uniting Church where she benefited from training, before becoming a nominated women’s LLG representative, to then being the President of the LLG Council of Women, before rising to district and provincial levels with the Council of Women:

“It’s not an easy walk. They are challenges that you will go through, working together with the menfolk, and you [are the only] woman representative in there. ... There is gender bias, when it’s time for decision making, even in the churches ... But [I had to find] courage, to cope with what men are addressing. The most important and foremost thing was that it is very important that women’s voice must be heard in every decision-making body. ... by going through little leadership training, that churches brought in, also empowered [and] made me to speak up more, while sitting among men ... I will also have my say in there too, to see that [decision made] will suit the women folk that I represent in there (11, 9:21).”

FOCUS OF INFORMAL WOMEN NETWORKS

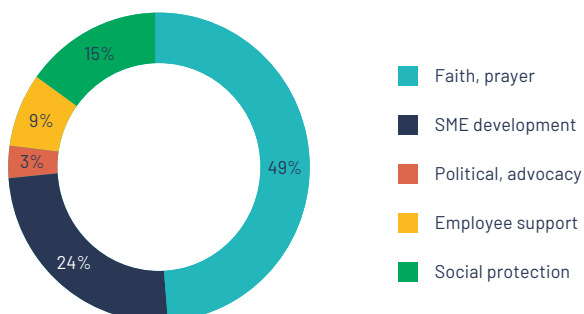


Figure 2: Council of Women Structure in South Fly District

The strength of the informal women’s groups is their reach as networks, not organizational capacity. They are typically small, different networks are disconnected from each other, highly dynamic, not immediately visible, and often not taken seriously or

considered special, even by the women members themselves. When interviewed, many women leaders were surprised by the questioning, thinking that their network or group was nothing out of the ordinary, a natural common-day part of their culture. The networks tend to operate quietly in the background behind male-dominated public decision-making processes. Some go by colloquial names, such as the Green Sisters in Bamu Corner in Daru, who specialise in green vegetables for the market.

The groups collapse and re-form according to changing interests and membership, and women moving to new groups (48, 14:24). Those that are SME based tend to fracture once they start to make money, as individuals can make more money going solo (42, 32:26 & 38:03; 53, 36:55). While the reach of any one network can be small, their combined reach is reported to be significant and is increasing, as described by a key worker with an international NGO: “we have a lot of mushrooms coming up” (44-2, 27:48).

Women’s groups do not form around all social issues or identities. Women’s groups do not appear to form along language or tribal lines, which underscores their importance for attempts at building trans-local alliances. Although the settlements in Daru are defined along tribal lines (e.g. Bamu Corner), or village of origin (e.g. Parama Corner), women’s groups generally exist at smaller scale, beyond the scenes of male-dominated structures. Nor do they tend to form along social protection lines, such as survivors of gender-based violence (45, 15:15 & 20:10). There is a widows’ group in Daru but it is not as active as it once was (48, 19:44).

The career of women’s leaders is built on these informal networks, helping to establish their support base. For example: the elected President of the Vendor Markets Association began first as the leader of the Green Sisters market group, growing green vegetables (46, 34:14); and the Chairperson of Tamate sub-council, Daru Urban Council of Women, accredit her success to her community work with the Girl Guides and sports:

“I was voted in because women saw that I was actively involved with them ... through sports and with the young women as girls’ guides, in my leadership there, I contributed a lot to the young women. ... the mothers at the community level thought that if they put me into the Ward ... I could bring [some of my plans] back to the Ward and impart it to them, and because I’m educated, and I can ... access other funding or whatever for them. That is why they elected me as their president (47, 6:34).”

Training and technical skills, in financial literacy, savings and management skills are considered critical to the success of women’s groups. The Council of Women, with support from World Vision under the DFAT Water for Women Program, has successfully supported nascent groups to become affiliates and then provided training and set-up women saver groups (26, 20:10). World Vision has run large training workshops in a village, with women representatives travelling long distances mostly on foot or canoe from across the LLG (48, 51:26).

With its limited funds, the Department for Community Development also prioritised funding for training, including the Floriculture Group (25, 6:18). The Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA) PNG and traveling church circuits were active in small business management training, including proposal writing and bookkeeping (44, 43:36). Training was critical for small businesses, along with

support and connectivity via the Council of Women, as many start-ups by women were vulnerable to collapse and exploitation. A central theme of the training run by different agencies was enterprise development. Even when progressing development projects, like in COVID-19 (reusable masks), menstrual hygiene (reusable pads), or soap manufacture, the approach has been to set women entrepreneurs up as small businesses, selling the goods they produce.¹⁵

FUNDING WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

When women leaders have discretionary powers over tied funding allocation, they can perform well, even in the absence of representative structures. Women leaders tend to be less engaged in patronage systems and shy away from male-dominated pacts and deals towards more public goods and transparency. Despite being nominated by the Open Member, successive women's representatives on the DDA have exerted influence, largely as a function of receiving a dedicated budget allocation, which they have directed to the construction and operation of the Daru Women's Resource Centre.

Women leaders, in communities who could access the OK Tedi Development Fund, allocated funding to community development projects, including education, health, training and infrastructure, for the collective rather than individual benefit ([see 'Case studies' paper](#)). This aligns with other regional experiences, including Warlpiri women leaders' allocation of mining royalties in

Central Australia.¹⁶ This suggests that a higher proportion of decentralised finances should be allocated to women's group for distribution, with supportive project management systems.

Women need targeted support with proposal writing, procurement and project management, and support with construction, to be able to implement projects. Women in one village went to the trouble of collecting the bush material needed to build themselves a resource centre, but the men didn't see it as a priority to help them with the technical building skills needed. Past efforts to implement community projects in South Fly, through both the LLG System and World Bank's RSDP project, have disproportionately favoured men, including training and on-the-job experience of project management. Not all women groups would need the same skills, so some specialisation and shared services options could be explored. For example, a gendered approach to a women's fund could give distribution decision-making and project management to women, but draw on the construction skills that tends to sit with men.

A lack of institutional support hinders women leaders' efforts around gender-based violence (GBV). Women leaders in Daru were concerned that survivors tend to suffer with GBV matters privately and remain "silent in their homes" (04, 44:10), or "they just keep quiet to themselves in that church" (47, 29:11, 31:24).¹⁷ Women and families can be reluctant to shelter survivors, due to the threat of violent partners turning on them. GBV requires an institutional safety net across

15 The Family Farms Teams approach in PNG has demonstrated how well women have disseminated leanings, and the inclusion of men as peer educators enhanced the receptiveness of male participants. (Pamphilon and Mikhailovich, 2019).

16 Roche and Ensor, 2014.

17 The Demographic and Household Survey (2016-2018) showed that 44% of Western women have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence. Almost a quarter of men (23%) and a surprisingly higher number of women (34%) of women thought that wife beating is justified if the children are neglected (NSO, 2019).

the combined effort of three different PNG government agencies; police, courthouse and health. District Courts' protection orders can have a positive effect, but they rely on a police presence and courthouse which is limited to Daru. Even there, policing can be inadequate and leave women exposed. Gender programming approaches to GBV that find entry points through religious beliefs and cultural practices which value women's contributions to the clan, family and to community and church are important influences on transforming norms and services around GBV.¹⁸

Community Resource Centres have multiple use benefits. Women interviewed in rural villages, as well as Daru, expressed their aspirations for resource centres to fill a range of uses, including as a safehouse from GBV, training activities, a canteen, sewing, cooking, and arts and crafts (52, 37:31). Among the proposals received by the RSDP from women's group, the most popular request (41%) was for resource/training centres.¹⁹ One prominent Daru based woman argued the case:

"They need a home, where they can meet together, share their ideas. Right now, they don't have any place, maybe they meet at the church ground once in a while, under somebody's house who can provide that ... The most important thing is to have a building for the women within the community (47-1, 34:11)."

Markets are natural meeting places for women, and key sites for women's leadership to develop. Daru Market is a focal point for interaction with informal women's group, and their SMEs selling their produce (43, 40:28).

For the remainder of South Fly District, the high costs of transportation limit travel, but district (Daru) and sub-district (e.g. Mabuduan) markets allow women to sell goods to pay for their travel fares. As found elsewhere in PNG, women are most engaged in short value chains within the district, compared to male dominated processing and export further downstream (e.g. exotic fish products like fish maw).²⁰

Markets are highly gendered places, as demonstrated in the politics embroiling the Daru Market Vendors Association (DMVA) and its struggles with the male-dominated Daru Urban LLG for legal and financial control of the Market.²¹ There is an opportunity to expand the influence of the DMVA to manage the nascent sub-district market at Mabudawan and more broadly to the women's movement occurring across South Fly (48, 56:22). The DMVA could increase the number of its representatives from rural villages, given that a high proportion of vendors come from rural areas. Women leaders are already actively talking about how to affiliate village groups to the DMVA (46, 19:38 & 22:55).

An aspect of training could focus on empowerment, including the confidence to speak up at meetings. Many women leaders described the need for this type of training. Women in PNG lack the cultural authority and experience to speak up in public, which affects their confidence to speak out more broadly including in meetings.

Often cultural protocols require the men in the family to be the public spokesperson, although this varies according to the context and matter for discussion, and women may still hold considerable influence in the

18 Dogimab, 2009; Pacific Women, 2021

19 World Bank, 2021.

20 World Bank, 2021.

21 Craig and Porter, 2017.

background over what their men say (13-2, 0:42). As an international NGO worker in Daru describes: “the leadership training that ... we give provides an opportunity [for the women] to start believing in themselves” (45, 8:29). An officer with the Department of Community Development described this as a necessary precursor to political organisation, especially in rural areas:

“When we go out to rural communities, we advocate on women’s organizations, how they can group together, ... build [their] confidence to speak within their own organizations, so they’re able to then represent the women maybe in the elections. If they need to stand ... as members, they can take up the challenge. We empower them through leadership trainings, confidence building, public speaking, report writing (48, 9:12).”

The considerable potential in funding informal women’s groups comes with a high risk of politicising and harming them. While funding for projects is needed, different modalities should be explored and may include women’s resource centres, land access, microenterprise development, local employment, proposal writing and coalition building. An obvious area of support is funding the Council of Women so they can reduce or waiver the affiliation fee for informal networks. Another potential entry point is to highlight the importance of the nominated women’s representative’s role on the WDC; instead of establishing an alternative structure for women (as progressed by CMCA), there is an opportunity to direct funds to a WDC sub-committee, chaired by the nominated WDC women’s rep (13, 19:57).

GROWING WOMEN’S NETWORKS

Informal women’s networks are important forums through which to reach the broader female population who remain largely disengaged from local governance. Although these networks are informal and often not taken seriously, they have considerable reach within the female population of Daru. A Daru based facilitator reflected on her work with ADRA to support women’s livelihood activities:

“... we are creating an opportunity where can push this sleeping group of women who are not into any organization, any church organizing or any women activities around here. You will see most of the women are just sitting down and wondering. So how can we get this group of women to join? (53, 39:44).”

There is potential to partner with these networks for aid programming, including market and SME development, social protection and GBV. But risks must also be properly managed.

The Council of Women needs continued and increased support to grow its advocacy role, including affiliated informal women’s groups and networks. While this network is still quite nascent, case studies elsewhere in PNG demonstrate the effectiveness of women’s coalitions to challenge embedded gender norms through a mixture of backstage politics and advocacy.²² A range of aid agencies have already been active in running gender programs in the District, including World Vision, UN Women, and UNICEF, as well as different churches. Of these, World Vision and UN Women have been most active in supporting the Council of Women. While the Council of Women has run small programs in the past, including COVID awareness, they

22 Fletcher et al., 2016.

are seeking more assistance, and for NGOs to work through them more actively (45, 37:16), especially to reach rural villages (47-1, 22:15). A former President of Daru Council of Women expressed this aspiration:

“We find it hard... [We don’t] have funds that we can get to buy, or run to help the woman. I mean, most times when we have funds, then we carry out whatever we’re supposed to do (04, 56:49).”

A link should be formalised between the Council of Women and the CMCA Women’s Associations. The Council of Women has an established structure of representatives in all five LLGs of South Fly District, including Fly Kiwai LLG in the mouth of the Fly River, where their sub-council structure aligns to the Kiwaba, Manawete and Dudi Ok Tedi Trust Areas. With their structure aggregating up to the district, province and national levels, they fill an important advocacy role, but they are hamstrung by a lack of funding.

The CMCA also has an aggregated organisational structure of women’s association, but its reach is limited to the mine-affected area. In comparison to the Council of Women sub-councils, the CMCA Women’s Associations are well resourced for project development under the Women and Children’s Fund, which gives them more influence and so they tend to overshadow the Council of Women (47-2, 17:40).

There is an opportunity for the Council of Women in South Fly to learn from the CMCA approach, which is widely held as exemplary across PNG. An equal or better connection to Council of Women would assist OTDF’s objective of promoting women’s leadership careers, including into politics.

Daru Urban is the centre for women’s leadership in South Fly District, with only patchy coverage across the other four rural LLGs. Women in rural areas are strongly in need of assistance, but the sheer logistical difficulties and high transportation costs are a major barrier. The limited resources of the Council of Women, its funding partners (e.g. UN Women) and NGOs who are based in Daru (e.g. World Vision) tend to benefit the women in Daru more (11, 45:01 & 47:52). Village women in rural villages complained how support for women’s development was limited to women in Daru. The Women’s DDA representative lamented that her K50,000 budget allocation was barely sufficient for Daru Urban, to the detriment of the other four rural LLGs in South Fly District (06, 15:29), who are arguably in more need.

Women in rural areas suffer inordinately due to a lack of government services and extension work. Government agencies have staff tasked to undertake extension work, including services targeted to women, but a lack of transportation and resourcing hinders what is possible (17, 16:25). As observed elsewhere, extension work and training in rural livelihoods have tended to focus on the needs of men, while women are constrained from full participation due to their relatively poor literacy levels.²³

Most extension workers are male and lack gender training, so women’s agricultural knowledge and experience can be overlooked. Outreach services are particularly lacking with maternal child health care, especially at childbirth. In the absence of functional aid posts and sub-health centres, village midwives manage as best they can, but there can be emergencies and loss of life, often in transit (16, 40:10; 24, 55:37).

23 Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1997.

DFAT's JSS4D program provides an example of how aid assistance can strength government-led extension work. In bringing a gender focus to their work with village courts, including female magistrates and GBV, they assist women extension workers who have received gender training with support for transportation costs so multiple agencies can travel together.

Women in rural areas lack confidence and they face more resistance from their husbands in filling leadership roles. Women hold few positions within WDCs, school boards or village courts. According to a senior female public servant with extensive experience of working with the village courts, there are 24 village courts with 264 court officials across South Fly, but only 15 of them are women:

"... the women magistrates [keep] telling me that they're not performing because of their husbands ... there should be new [female] magistrates selected. Women don't really speak out in the rural area - it's the men that do (42, 15:10)."

Despite JSS4D's efforts to increase the number of female magistrates based on evidence of improved effectiveness, this imbalance persists. Male magistrates are largely biased or blind towards women's issues, leading to poor sentencing and frequent appeals.

In comparison, involvement of women magistrates reduces the number and duration of court cases, with fewer appeals to the District Court (42, 20:27, 32:04). The reasons for this are many, but not all are discriminatory. As observed elsewhere in PNG,²⁴ there are aspects of culture in South Fly District that value and protect women and their safety:

"... most of [the women] get scared ... because you have to walk to village to village to present your cases. They are not safe because the men slip half way before they reach [their destination], that's why their partners are always concerned [for them] (42, 18:24)."

Daru women can be role models, counselling and mentoring rural women and their husbands. World Vision is increasingly using Daru women as role models and taking them to villages (44, 48:52). The approach is most effective in villages where the women have an existing connection and speak the same language. World Vision is increasingly also bringing women from rural areas into Daru, for training, with the assistance of Daru women as training facilitators and mentors.

Rural women can be identified for their potential leadership, targeted for training and mentored by Daru-based leaders. This could be a mixture of workshops and training and one-on-one mentoring. Rural women could be paired with an urban counterpart via mobile phone communication (42; 56:01). Retired female public servants who have returned to their home villages can also be important role models, with the support of the local Daru chapter of Melanesian Institute of Office Professionals.

As their confidence grows, the identified women would have the local language and relationships to form women's group and networks, which could then be affiliated with the Council of Women. It would be important to reach agreement with husbands early on, so they understand how the women are going to benefit the community.

24 Dogimab, 2009.

This is already occurring in South Fly. One Daru-based leader described how she counselled a relation in a rural village who was facing violent repercussions from her husband whenever she spoke up publicly at community meetings. She intervened with both the husband and wife, advising them of women's rights, the protections of women under the law, and how Christian scripture supports equality for women, without questioning the husband's position as head of the family:

"She's picked up now. The other day, she was here. I asked is your husband happy now? Yeah, he is really happy now and he is not stopping me.... she said there's three other [women] in the same situation. And she shared the problem with those three others. And she said four of us are now having our regular meetings. ... So when you go out somewhere, you start from the bottom from A to Z, and don't stop half way, because they won't pick it up. So that's how they are improving here (43, 1:04:43)."

The 2023 LLG elections provided an important opportunity for women candidates.

There is a clear precedent of a female Ward Councillor being elected in Daru, which is the only example in South Fly. Others have run and come very close, and in one case, they came second (53, 9:47). Respondents indicated that there was already a groundswell developing in anticipation of the 2023 election, with women mobilising to contest in Daru Urban LLG (49, 31:50). One woman working for a local NGO based in Daru described the opportunity for women in politics:

"That's the reason [why] we are working around the clock [with the] Council of Women. They are the ones to be at the forefront. To do a lot of ... advocacy and lobbying and all that (44, 17:41)."

Most of the aid support in PNG for women in politics is focused on national general elections, but findings highlight an alternative, more bottom-up entry point via LLG elections, whereby women can gain the confidence, networks and influence towards being elected as a Member of Parliament.

NOMINATED WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES

Nominated women's representatives generally hold little power with local government and little legitimacy among the electorate. Under the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments 1998, there are legislated positions for female members at all levels of sub-national government, nominated or approved by the respective (always male) Open Member for the DDA, LLG President/Mayor for LLGs, or the Ward Councillors for WDCs. For rural LLGs, there should be at least two.

In the past, Daru Urban LLG had a process of calling for applications that the full Council screened and nominated, before the Mayor appointed the women representative (43, 25:23). A similar process was followed for Oriomo Bituri LLG, with the candidate writing a letter of interest to the Department of Community Development, for consideration by the incoming LLG President to decide (52, 6:22).

Although some female nominees were strong candidates with a history of leadership roles in serving women and tackling women's issues, others were chosen based on their relationship to the Open Member or the LLG President/Mayor. A prominent women leader in Daru, described the problem:

"The leader, they choose the woman that they want to be on that board, so they can control them. The nominated woman, she supports just a certain group of women that she's interested in, who is in close contact with her. It's not [all

of the] women within the district that they support. Even as a provincial level, whoever is the governor he appoints his own woman, and whichever region she comes from she helps, she doesn't move on to the other. Instead of them choosing the nominated women, they should allow the woman to be nominated from the Council of Women there, to represent them (47, 24:38)."

The appointment of women nominees can provide a stepping stone into politics. Across all levels of government in South Fly District since independence, there has only ever been a single instance of a woman winning a Ward Councillor election. After serving a term as the nominated women's representative for Daru Urban, this woman ran for and was elected Ward Councillor for Tamati Ward in Daru Urban. Her time as a nominated representative helped her to realise what she could achieve, which she summed up as being "like a push start for me":

"[When] I served as the nominated [Daru Urban] rep, it was different because I had limits [and] less powers in discussion making or meetings. ... [I realised] to run the race of being elected [Ward Councillor] was a better option. [Then after being elected] I could talk without limits ... with more rights and power ... to be breaking boundaries. [It was] empowering, to speak for the people's right who put me there (43, 0:40)."

The link between the nominated women’s reps in LLG and the Council of Women should be formalised. Instead of calling for applications or allowing the President or Mayor to nominate his preferred candidate, the Council of Women could nominate the LLG women’s representative. There is a legal precedent for this; the Local Level Governments Administration Act 1997 (cl.6) sets out that the Provincial Council of Women will nominate the women representative(s) after consultation with the local Council of Women, and other women and women’s group in the LLG. One international NGO worker in Daru spoke well to this opportunity:

“[By being nominated, a woman can] gain the confidence after someone of course identified her. But if that opportunity was provided through the Council of Women structures, then their leadership skills are nurtured and tested. They [may] even aspire for [leadership] without anyone nominating them (45, 8:29).”

GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING

Gender norms subscribing women in leadership roles are changing. Women in South Fly, as in the rest of PNG, have considerable unpaid work burdens (domestic work, care responsibilities, and traditional and cultural obligations). They also play a central role in the informal economy and networks, including food security and livelihoods subsistence gardening and fishing, despite having limited access to land, water, machinery, seeds, and fertiliser.²⁵ Despite this, men often retain control of household income.

Micro-enterprises with short value chains are especially important for women's income and their informal networks. Women manage the Daru Market Vendors Association, and more than a quarter of the 30 informal women's groups in Daru are small or medium enterprises. In other longer value chains, however, they receive very little value (e.g. women traditionally collect mud crabs, but men derive most value from processing, transport and sales for export).

Women are central to income generation in PNG society, active in the informal economy, food security sector and disproportionately burdened by domestic work, care responsibilities and cultural obligations. For aid investments to impact on women and household welfare, they need to identify existing gender roles, and

increase women's influence in household decision making and spending. The Pacific Women program learning shows that "for economic empowerment to meaningfully improve women's lives and progress gender equality, it is critical to address gendered power dynamics, including agency, voice, violence, financial control, women's time and care responsibilities, and opportunities for collectives and mutual support building".²⁶

A growing number of organisations where women and men hold equal influence could be partners in gender responsive programming. Engaging both men and women is a known prerequisite for successful gender programming.²⁷ Established under the Youth Development Authority Act 2014, there are youth councils at LLG and district levels in South Fly. The youth councils contain a comparatively large number of women, including married couples (48, 27:22). The Department for Community Development has supported the South Fly Disabled People's Organisation, which has an equal number of male and female representatives.

25 Bourke and Harwood, 2009.

26 Pacific Women, 2022.

27 Pacific Women 2022; Pacific Women, 2021.

Aid programming is also actively working to establish new gender balanced organisations. The Ranger Program has demonstrated the importance of local employment of women at a village level, with female Rangers breaking gender stereotypes by learning and applying carpentry, plumbing and mechanics skills. World Vision has established 13 community WASH committees in South Fly which have equal representation of men and women. These initiatives and organisations represent important forums where gender relations could be realigned for broader uptake, especially among youth.

Family-based programming can be effective in promoting gender equality. Women bring much value to the informal economy and through unpaid work, which enables more formal economic activities. The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) has begun to expand their successful Family Farms Teams (FFT) project to South Fly, which works with both men and women in family units, by targeting men to enable more equal relationships at the household level.²⁸ [It takes an experiential learning approach](#) across four areas: understanding women's contribution; running the family farm as a business (so involving women in household finances); improved nutrition; and men and women sharing the family decision making.

This program aligns with learning from DFAT's Pacific Women program whereby increased men's awareness of gender equality led to increased likelihood of women being able to make changes in their household dynamic, including ending GBV, improved sexual and reproductive health, and transforming unequal divisions of care.

28 Pamphilon and Mikhailovich, 2016.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Women leaders have the potential to challenge or at least create an alternative to male-dominated patronage systems, to strengthen the subnational governance and finance system.

As their career develops and their networks grow, women leaders tend to not engage in patronage politics, and place greater emphasis on transparency. When given the opportunity to allocate discretionary finances, they perform well, prioritising community development projects, SME, and resource centres.

Women's influence is increasing, but there has only ever been one female Ward Councillor elected to Daru Urban LLG in the history of the district. While women are building solidarity through the Council of Women, they are still well short of having the numbers to form pacts and to challenge male dominated structures. As they have not yet had majority control over public finance allocation in South Fly, the question of how they will reject, modify or sustain patronage politics remains known, but it can be assumed that they will be disruptive.

Efforts should be accompanied by funding to women leaders and their organisations to select and manage projects, including building of women's resource centres, market development and management, SME development, and tackling GBV. This should proceed according to a 'do no harm' principle, with careful monitoring of progress and risks.

Drawing on the success of the women leaders in Daru, and the nascent Council of Women structure across the District, there is an opportunity to use a combination of mentoring, training, and sub-district market development to reach women in rural areas, and so grow the reach of women's networks to a district wide level. A partnership should also be formalised between the Council of Women and the Community Mine Continuation Agreement (CMCA) Women's Association, as their combined networks would take the network from district to a provincial level. The locus of capability for women's leadership in South Fly District is clearly Daru Urban. Women in rural areas, in comparison, face more resistance from their husbands to fill leadership roles, and are more vulnerable to gender-based violence.

There is a clear opportunity for Daru women to be active as role models, counselling and mentoring rural women and their husbands. Daru Market is a focus for women leaders and interaction across South Fly District, which could be expanded to sub-district market development. Progress also clearly requires changes in the attitudes and behaviour of men.

Aid agencies should consider women's networks as a 'coalition for change' and a bottom-up approach to running more candidates for elections and advocacy for reforms. They should also find ways to support women candidates for nominated committee roles and LLG elections, towards building their political career, as a steppingstone towards National General Elections. A total of 33 networks were identified in Daru, half of which were church based, and a quarter were microenterprises. The groups are typically small, disconnected, highly dynamic, not immediately visible, and sit in the background of everyday culture and male-dominated decision making. Women's groups do not appear to form along language or tribal lines, which underscores their importance for attempts at building trans-local alliances.

While their capability may be limited in an informal sense, they collectively have considerable reach across the female population. The political careers of women's leaders are built on these informal networks, helping to establish their support base. In addition to building a representative structure across South Fly District, the Council of Women is actively working to affiliate these informal women's groups. This nascent and growing network can be considered as a 'coalition for change', but there are risks of aid support harming the network, requiring a monitored and sequenced approach.

When WDCs apply for funding of village projects, aid agency support could be conditional on their compliance under existing PNG government legislations for the WDC to have at least two female members, who are nominated by the Council of Women. Nominated women's representatives hold little power with the LLG system, but their appointment can provide women leaders with important inside knowledge on how the system works, including the confidential deals and excesses of patronage politics. They can provide a steppingstone for women's political careers and formalise connections with women's organisations including the Council of Women. The fact that many Ward Members do not even bother to satisfy legislated position for women representatives on their WDC is a matter of concern, which funding agencies could seek to influence.

Gender-responsive programming approaches should be mainstreamed across all development activities, with a focus on men and women working together to challenge gendered norms, allowing more male and female champions of gender equality to emerge. Consistent with research by Pacific Women and ACIAR, when men and women work together around household subsistence and income-generating agriculture, gendered norms can be challenged.

For example, economic development programs that allow men to demonstrate that they are generating more income for their families and communities, can allow women to demonstrate more leadership at the village level. Other opportunities for gender-responsive programming include extension work, building work, management of community open-air markets, and market value chain development.

A research institution should continue to populate the database on the characteristics and membership of informal women's networks, with additional analysis on underlying customs, people with disabilities, youth, and the role of the church. This should also establish a baseline, to monitor the network's development, and to ensure that it is not harmed by efforts to support it.

An important outcome of this research is the establishment of a preliminary Excel database that has started to map the women's networks, by key characteristics and position holders. World Vision and the Department for Community Development are well placed to maintain the database, but further research is needed to look closer at the existing

protective customs and practices underlying the informal networks that could be leveraged for future gender-responsive programming. More attention is needed to highlight people with disabilities and the engagement of young people, especially [given the 'youth bulge' occurring in PNG](#). Given that almost half of the women networks are faith based, additional research could explore the role of the church plays in shaping gender norms, values and ideas. There could also be value in undertaking social network analysis to better understand the relationships and interactions, and to determine the degree that women sit in multiple networks and how much individual groups are networked with each other.

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