

CASE STUDY 9

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP SUPPORT PROGRAM: POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN THE PACIFIC

Country: Pacific Region

Focus: Women's political representation

Organisation(s): Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) and State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program (SSGM) at the Australian National University; Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development

Timeframe: 2016-2017



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KEY POINTS

- Program design benefits from comprehensive review of evidence
- Approaches to gender must be tailored to local norms and frameworks
- A long term and context specific approach is crucial to success

OVERVIEW

This case study outlines the lessons learned from research into the conditions for improving the electoral chances of Pacific women, and shows how subsequent programming has drawn on the findings. In June 2016, the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) and State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program (SSGM) at the Australian National University hosted a three-day workshop for campaign activists, female candidates, former and current sitting members of legislatures, development partners, NGOs, policymakers and academics.¹ The purpose was to review and respond to available evidence on how, in the Pacific context, women can be “positioned to run successful campaigns, and how development partners might enhance the effectiveness of support provided to women candidates by drawing on and responding to this evidence base.”²

In January 2017, SSGM began the five-year PNG Women in Leadership Support Program (WLSP).³ This program draws both from some of the findings emerging from the June 2016 workshop, and SSGM/ANU's broader research in this area over many years. The program aims improve women's political participation by enhancing their competitiveness in elections. For example, by working throughout the electoral cycle, and “supporting selected candidates to develop practical and politically feasible campaign strategies that respond to local political realities”.⁴ This includes “political mapping and political economy analysis as well as coalition building and the role of male champions”.⁵

GENDER AWARE WAYS OF WORKING

Neither SSGM's research nor the development of WLSP limit their conception of gender to female beneficiaries in the form of political

POLITICALLY INFORMED

Being politically informed is a way of working that recognises that development outcomes are determined by the dynamics of power and politics. It is not about formal governance reforms, such as elections or civil service reforms. It involves analysing stakeholder interests and incentives to understand what is politically feasible.

representatives. Both instead focus on “norms, barriers and roles, because these are also crucial to thinking about this issue.”⁶ For example, findings from the workshop have underscored the gendered risks and expectations encountered by female political candidates. Women in this position are sometimes expected to become “gender ambassadors or exceptionally clean campaigners.”⁷ These expectations are problematic because they fail to address “the political reality of what women have to deal with from opponents”⁸ Similarly, newly-elected female representatives often face gendered expectations about the substantive outcomes they deliver in their first term. However, “a long-term approach means focusing on getting re-elected. Women also have to play that game”.⁹

Furthermore, SSGM’s research highlights the culture- and country-specific nature of gender norms. For example, “the idea of gender is different from country to country in the Pacific [...] In Samoa, for example, you have a culturally and constitutionally recognised third gender, but you still have social norms that restrict behaviour, and these are potentially stricter for a third gender person than a woman.”¹⁰

This context-specific approach to gender is reflected in the framing of discussions around women’s political representation: “I find, in the Pacific, the word gender is actually really

GENDER AWARE

Being gender aware is a way of working that analyses how women and men, girls and boys, experience an issue differently and/or unequally, and the power relations that sustain these inequalities. A robust analysis also looks at how gender intersects with other forms of diversity, such as race, religion, ethnicity, class and disability, and non-binary gender identities or diverse sexual preferences.

unhelpful. It gets people on edge a bit. If you frame things as gender equality it can be seen as foreign and neo colonial.” Similarly, with the exception of the Samoan context, it is rarely possible to avoid framing gender as a binary. This is because “it is usually most helpful and effective to work through the frameworks that already exist and people are comfortable talking about.”¹¹

POLITICALLY INFORMED WAYS OF WORKING

Two key points arise from SSGM’s research regarding the how development programs can and should think and work politically in this context. Firstly, securing detailed understanding of relationships in the local context, and secondly, taking long-term, sustainable approaches rather than operating in the context of a single election campaign.

Regarding local context, the research shows that in the Pacific, successful female candidates typically emerge in rural areas, and demonstrate an ability to “consolidate local support and build coalitions with influential local powerbrokers.”¹² However, “a lot of previous work on women in politics in the Pacific focuses on urban areas”¹³ and emphasises “capacity building, resource supplementation, awareness raising, advocacy, and institutional reform”¹⁴ rather than coalition

building. Drawing these findings, WLSF instead “recognises that women who perform well typically have deep connections to their electorates and tend to be located in provinces and districts which are not ordinarily reached by development programs.”¹⁵

WLSF also draws on research findings which show the importance of taking longer-term approaches to improving women’s political representation. Much existing programming has been project-based: “ramping up just before an election and then going away afterwards [...] but we know that’s not how people get elected. You need to be working on it for five or ten years beforehand.”¹⁶ This length of time is necessary for programs to identify and invest in potentially viable candidates early on,¹⁷ support those women to develop innovative financing approaches,¹⁸ and equip them with the skills to run strategic election campaigns.¹⁹ WLSF aims to put this into practice over the course of five years.

CONVERGENCE OR TENSION?

This case highlights that while a gender lens and politically informed approach are complementary and constructive, this is bounded by the need to be flexible regarding local context: “You have careful and sensitive about what gender means in the context that you’re working in. If you use gender as a framework you then have to be quite strategic. You could say that a politically informed way of working on gender is being realistic that gender doesn’t mean the same thing for everyone.”²⁰

In addition, strategic framing of gender informed by understanding of local context can enhance program’s effectiveness. “For example, in Bougainville, you have locally driven initiatives like legislation for 50 per cent women in local government. That’s something that has been developed based on local ideas about the complementarity between men and women, and therefore that joint decision making is effective and

1. <http://ssgm.bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/publications/4901/improving-womens-electoral-chances-through-evidence-based>
2. ibid
3. <http://ssgm.bellschool.anu.edu.au/our-projects/png-women-leadership-support-program>
4. ibid
5. ibid
6. Key informant interview, 13.03.2017
7. Key informant interview, 13.03.2017
8. Key informant interview, 13.03.2017
9. Key informant interview, 13.03.2017
10. Key informant interview, 13.03.2017
11. Key informant interview, 13.03.2017
12. <http://ssgm.bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/publications/4901/improving-womens-electoral-chances-through-evidence-based>
13. Key informant interview, 13.03.2017
14. <http://ssgm.bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/publications/4901/improving-womens-electoral-chances-through-evidence-based>
15. <http://ssgm.bellschool.anu.edu.au/our-projects/png-women-leadership-support-program>
16. Key informant interview, 13.03.2017
17. <http://ssgm.bellschool.anu.edu.au/experts-publications/publications/4901/improving-womens-electoral-chances-through-evidence-based>
18. ibid
19. ibid
20. Key informant interview, 13.03.2017
21. Key informant interview, 13.03.2017
22. Key informant interview, 13.03.2017

This case study was written by **Orlanda Siow** of UCL as part of the Gender and Politics in Practice (GAPP) research project. It is one of 14 short case studies focusing on development programs that aim to be both politically informed and gender aware. See *From Silos to Synergy* for a synthesis of the lessons that emerge. Explore all GAPP publications at dlprog.org/gapp.

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appropriate. This has been achieved drawing on the local contexts and finding things that are beneficial."²¹

EFFECTIVENESS: CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

SSGM's research identifies long term vision and associated funding as the most crucial factor for the success of programs aiming to increase women's political representation within the region: "otherwise people focus on the election as an isolated event rather than the culmination of a lot of long term work by a lot of people. The critical juncture is directly *after* an election rather than directly before."²² WLSP has therefore been developed with an initial timeline of five years to gradually build politically viable candidacies.

METHODS

A rapid review of select program documentation, combined with confidential interviews with at least two key informants per case where possible. These include project staff, independent reviewers, donors and other stakeholders. Identifying and listening to local and/or female informants has been prioritised. In this case it was only possible to interview a single informant. This took place on 13.03.2017.

SELECTED RESOURCES:

Barbara, J. & Baker, K. (2016). *Improving the Electoral Chances of Pacific Women through an Evidence-Based Approach*. Synthesis report. Canberra: CDI/SSGM, ANU.

Haley, N. and K. Zubrinich (2015b). *Improving women's political representation in the Pacific: The emerging evidence*. SSGM In Brief 2015/31. Canberra: ANU.

Haley, N. and K. Zubrinich (2016). Women's political and administrative leadership in the Pacific. Canberra: SSGM

McLeod, A. 2015. *Women's Leadership in the Pacific*. State of the Art Paper No. 4. Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program.

True, J., S. Niner, S. Parashar and N. George (2012). *Women's political participation in Asia and the Pacific*. SSRIC Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum.

Zubrinich, K. (2016). *What women (candidates) want*. SSGM In Brief 2016/8. Canberra: ANU

Cover photos:

DFAT, A women's committee on manono Island: Sally Sitou



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