

Gender Transformative Change Brief in Papua New Guinea

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Since 2012, the Australian Government-funded Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program (*Pacific Women*) has supported the Papua New Guinea's and Australia's development targets of zero tolerance of violence against women and children, increasing women's economic empowerment, and increasing women's participation in leadership and decision making. As the Papua New Guinea Development Strategic Plan 2010–2030 says, 'the nation cannot reach its potential if [gender] inequality continues to exist'. The disproportionate impacts on women and girls and the challenges resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic and response make achieving these outcomes even more important.

Pacific Women partners have worked to overcome the harmful norms and structures that reinforce inequalities between women and men with communities, district and provincial authorities and the private sector across all four regions of Papua New Guinea. Underpinned by global experience that gender transformation requires reinforcing changes at multiple levels, *Pacific Women* partners work on: challenging beliefs and attitudes that are harmful to women and girls; increasing opportunities for women to take on leadership roles; increasing women's access to and control over resources within families and communities; transforming social norms and practices; and implementing or shaping policies and laws to support women's equality and contributions to national development.

As a result of *Pacific Women* long-term commitment to partners' efforts over the past eight years, gender transformative change is happening. Families, communities and businesses are exploring gender roles and relationships, and how these impact daily life and work. By understanding this better, behaviours which have been harmful to women and girls have been identified, along with their costs, and decisions have been made to act differently. **This paper outlines replicable approaches to achieve gender transformative change in Papua New Guinea.**

Program design is explicit in its aim to reshape gender norms and power relations

Pacific Women projects have explicit objectives to reshape gender norms. Planning and design processes are guided by gender or women's empowerment frameworks, make clear the changes in gender norms they seek, describe how those changes will occur and what they are expected to look like in practice. Projects are developed in collaboration with local partners to ensure the needs and priorities of target communities or organisations are met, and include a commitment to safe and ethical practices. They set targets and adopt monitoring processes that allow regular testing of changes in gender relations and share lessons with communities and others to promote ownership of changes. The 'do no harm' principle and regular monitoring ensure that activities do not have unintended negative impacts and are adapted to improve effectiveness over time.

Work in partnership with organisations and community groups to create change

Exploring, challenging and reshaping gender and power relationships is sensitive and personal work. Conversations and activities need to be conducted in contextualised, culturally appropriate and safe ways. *Pacific Women* has achieved this by working in partnership with local people, groups, churches and organisations, and ensuring that community and/or organisational leaders have a shared understanding of project objectives, roles and responsibilities. *Pacific Women* partners ensure that their communication strategies, learning tools and ways of working support and reinforce transformative change. They invest time in building their own staff and local partners' ability to reflect on their gender knowledge, behaviour and values, and strengthen their facilitation skills so they are able to develop strategies and adapt tools to local contexts.

Draw on community strengths, customs and practices

Pacific Women partners take a strengths-based approach. Partners draw on protective aspects of local culture and positive customs and practices to strengthen gender equality outcomes and promote women's power and agency. Successful approaches recognise and respect existing leadership structures and social networks. They recognise that women do not exist in isolation from their social contexts and relationships, and that men's behaviour needs to

be understood in this context as well. They build traditional and other community leaders' knowledge of the benefits of gender equality and their skills to support gender equality in their communities. Men and boys are engaged and supported to explore issues of power and to reconsider how power can be used in and among communities more positively, as well as building the skills and confidence of women.

Clearly align activities to support government policy commitments and strengthen government systems

The Government of Papua New Guinea has introduced laws and policies to prevent gender-based violence and support women's economic empowerment, but implementation remains a challenge. Successful examples of achieving local government support and policy influence are evident when partners work with receptive government agencies to identify priority needs, to build their knowledge of the gender implications of their work, and to help them to deliver their mandates more effectively. For example, they work with provincial and district authorities to improve market management and operations; with provincial health authorities and Family Support Centre staff to improve data collection and technical skills; and with police, welfare and civil society providers of family and sexual violence services such as safe accommodation, legal protection and counselling, to strengthen coordination and referrals between providers to provide quality help for clients.

Snapshots of gender transformative changes in Papua New Guinea

Through partners' long-term engagement with communities and organisations and commitment to robust monitoring and shared learning, the following **gender transformative changes** are evident:

In the private sector:

- Businesses now understand the reputational risk and financial cost of family and sexual violence. They have adopted policies and practices and are building workplace cultures that do not accept family and sexual violence or sexual harassment, and provide practical support to employees and their families if they experience violence. They are also promoting female employees and investing in their leadership pathways.
- Coffee exporters have adapted their extension services to increase women's participation in training. Research has identified that where women participated in extension training, households earned 22 per cent higher income from coffee than households where only men participated in training.

In families:

- More women and men report they are sharing workloads, including caregiving and decision-making within their households. This includes decisions on how to spend income earned from cash crops for the benefit of the entire family. Families who participated in training said they had increased spending on family needs, permanent housing, and farm and business improvements, while spending on alcohol and gambling had reduced.

In communities:

- Communities who have participated in *Pacific Women* activities report reductions in family and sexual violence. For example, in Western Highlands, women and men reported statistically significant reductions in rates of marital rape between 2014 and 2018. In Bougainville and the Eastern Highlands, community members and police report reductions in sorcery accusation-related violence and tribal violence.
- More men, including young men and community leaders, are actively engaged in violence prevention advocacy with their peers and in the community, and now step in when they see violence against women and girls. Communities which were supported to reconsider some of their practices that were harmful to women and girls have taken actions to reduce harm. For example, community leaders ended a cultural taboo that had prevented women from delivering their babies in the local health centre.