



Papua New Guinea

Toward Greater Gender Equality in Ward Development Planning

This brief document outlines how CARE International in Papua New Guinea (CARE PNG) through its Integrated Community Development Project has been working towards greater gender equality in Ward Development Planning as part of building a more equitable and enabling environment for rural service delivery. This approach centres on CARE’s Women’s Empowerment Framework.

What are the policies?

The Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local Level Governments (1995) mandates that planning for service delivery should be bottom-up. This means that development priorities must be identified at the Ward level, through a participatory Ward Development Planning (WDP) process facilitated by the lowest levels of government, the Ward Development Committees (WDCs). The Organic Law further stipulates that every WDC must have at least two female representatives for it to be constitutional. According to the Department of Community Development’s Integrated Community Development Policy (2007), gender equality is recognised as a key to strengthening whole communities and promoting fairness and justice in distribution of resources and services. Further, the National Policy for Women and Gender Equality (2011-2015) reiterates this point through its overall objective “to facilitate the development and implementation of gender equality and women’s advancement programmes which will be founded on the principles of equality of all persons, particularly women and men, as enshrined in the Constitution.” Under the National Policy, political participation is a priority action area. However, gender equality remains an elusive goal.

What are the implementation issues?

Despite the existence of policies and legislation to bolster women's participation in decision-making, the culture of political institutions continues to be unresponsive towards the participation and needs of women. Women continue to suffer disproportionately from poverty due to gender inequality that results in women's lower literacy levels, lack of skills, poor reproductive health, and lack of access to capital. While rural women are particularly affected by weak service delivery that often does not meet their needs, their participation in setting the development agenda is almost non-existent. Due to the prevalent belief that men are natural leaders, women face numerous barriers to participation in decision-making processes at all levels. In many places, women are not being elected onto WDCs and women continue to struggle to be heard; reaching the minimum two female representatives on a WDC as stipulated in the Organic Law has not been widely attained. A major barrier to women's participation is heavy workloads as many rural women in PNG work long hours for the wellbeing of their households leaving them with limited time for other activities. Caring for children, the elderly and the ill; collecting water and firewood; planting food gardens; and maintaining households and preparing food are considered to be women's responsibilities. Additional barriers to women's participation are lack of access to knowledge and capital; lack of control in household decision-making including over their own time and labour; practices such as early marriage that limit girls' education; high levels of gender-based violence; and discriminatory customary and statutory laws and practices that favour men's over women's access to land and other productive resources.

What is the approach?

In 2009, CARE PNG launched the Integrated Community Development Project (ICDP), which seeks to make lasting and measurable impacts on the lives of remote, rural communities through close working partnerships with government, communities, and local organisations. By facilitating WDP capacity and awareness-raising, brokering linkages between government and communities, and modelling ways to support and deliver a range of services and community development activities as identified in Ward plans, the ICDP is working to strengthen communities and build a more enabling environment for rural service delivery.

A key component of the ICDP is developing the capacity of District and LLG officers, as well as WDCs, to be able to facilitate the WDP process. CARE PNG's approach to improving women's meaningful participation in WDP has been to integrate the CARE Women's Empowerment Framework (WEF) into all aspects of the WDP training in order to make bottom-up planning more inclusive and representative of communities. The WEF starts with the understanding that it takes much more than simply including women in projects to make progress toward gender equality. CARE defines women's empowerment as the combined effect of changes in a woman's own knowledge, skills and ability (Agency); the power relationships through which she negotiates her path (Relations); and the surrounding environment of norms, institutions and policies that shapes her choices in life (Structures). Progress across all three dimensions of empowerment is needed to achieve sustainable results. Some of the ways in which CARE PNG has integrated the WEF into WDP capacity building are given below.

- **Building agency** – CARE PNG conducts broad community awareness on government policies and processes (such as WDP and the Organic Law) to raise the understanding that both men and women have the equal right to participate in decision-making. For training activities, CARE PNG ensures that women are able to attend, as these are rare opportunities for women to gain new knowledge and skills about how they can affect changes in their own lives. Also, CARE PNG ensures that its teams of trainers and field officers are mixed with both men and women facilitators. Female participants have commented that by watching and listening to the female facilitators, they were inspired to speak up during trainings. Such role modelling is key to enhancing abilities by sparking ideas about one's own potential and aspirations. It also helps to change the predominant thinking that only men can speak with authority and knowledge, and be leaders.

- **Strengthening supportive relations:** As PNG's societies are largely patriarchal, the majority of training participants and WDC members are men. The best strategy is to work with them to understand gender equity and diversity, and the benefits of inclusive planning to address the different but equally important needs of various groups in communities. CARE PNG understands that working towards women's empowerment does not mean excluding men, but instead encouraging men and women to work together for the improvement of their communities. For this reason, CARE PNG revised the national WDP manual, with approval from the Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs, to make it more relevant for low-literacy audiences and for diverse groups. Participatory rural appraisal tools are drawn on throughout the planning to promote the meaningful involvement of men, women, youth, elderly, people with disabilities, people living with HIV and AIDS, and others. The training insists that these tools are essential for gathering the information and feedback needed in order to complete the Ward plans, thus making the process inherently participatory. The training also involves learning about change as a non-threatening process, as well as about power dynamics and the obligations of those in power (such as WDCs, LLG managers, and District staff) to draw out all voices in the community. CARE PNG has found that speaking to men about the importance and benefits of gender-sensitive, inclusive planning is a key step towards greater gender equality. These men are husbands, fathers, grandfathers, sons, uncles, and brothers with the power to help change the situations of girls and women.
- **Reinforcing enabling structures:** During awareness and follow up visits, CARE PNG and partners continually reinforce the stipulation in the Organic Law that every WDC must have at least two female representatives for it to be constitutional. Other key government policies are also socialised, such as those on violence against women and child protection.

What is emerging?

- **Skills to deal with real situations** – At the pilot-testing workshops for the newly revised WDP manual and training, participants comprised of local NGO partners, and LLG and District officers had considerable positive feedback. In their evaluations, they stated that the understanding of gender, diversity, and power dynamics gained had better equipped them for the real situations they would face when out in communities. They expressed feeling more ready and able to facilitate an inclusive planning process. Also, it was felt that learning about WDP without learning about these other dimensions “wasn't real”, and that this new inclusive approach “makes it real” and “more alive.”
- **Increasing awareness, dialogue and action to address gender issues** – While still at preliminary stages, Government and local partners are slowly coming to see the importance of women's more equitable participation in decision-making for more effective service delivery. In Obura Wonenara District in Eastern Highlands Province, where CARE PNG has spent the most time working on building an enabling environment for service delivery as per the Organic Law, women now make up 36% of the WDC members. Further, women's participation in WDCs and in bottom-up planning is on the rise on all areas of ICDP focus.
- **Increased government funding for Women's Councils and gender training** – In 2013, LLGs and the District of Obura Wonenara allocated considerable funding to support Women's Councils throughout the district. Moreover, Ward Plans coming out of Lamari LLG, an area plagued by domestic violence and sexual assault cases, identified gender training as a top development priority. In response, the Lamari LLG plan allocated funding for gender training in support of these wards.