**OUTCOME STATEMENT**

**Sub-Regional Forum on Women Political Participation Across PNG**

**28 September 2017**

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**Picture:** Group Photo- Sub Regional Forum on Women’s Political participation across PNG 26-28 September 2017, Madang- Resort Madang

Following the 2017 National Elections, there have been no women elected to the 10th Parliament of PNG, the first time this has happened since 1992. Only 7 women have ever been elected into the PNG Parliament, demonstrating the systematic challenges women face when trying to be elected. While the male Members of Parliament have a responsibility to represent the women of this nation in the National Parliament, nonetheless, the total lack of women’s voices in the highest decision-making body in the country is a problem that must urgently be dealt with. Concern has been expressed from the highest level, with the Prime Minister himself indicating on 17 August 2017 his interest in looking at options for addressing this problem, including revisiting the 2012 legislative proposal to reserve 22 seats for women. We call on the Prime Minister to urgently implement this commitment and to progress a bipartisan campaign to ensure women’s participation in the National Parliament and decision-making structures more generally.

The lack of women in Parliament has pushed the community into action, with officials and ordinary people already seeking ways to respond. In August 2017, a National Women Candidates Forum was held in Port Moresby, bringing together a small group of women candidates with a range of other stakeholders to reflect upon the recent elections and discuss the problem, as well as the broader issue of how to more effectively promote women’s political participation. A number of participants raised their concerns that the challenges faced by women vary across the provinces and recommended that further discussions be supported regarding how to most effectively support women in the provinces, in particular in advance of the upcoming 2018 LLG elections. This “Sub-Regional Forum on Women’s Political Participation Across PNG” was organised as a result. At this meeting, we women and men came together from 20 provinces and the NCD, with a range of government officials, academics, media representatives and development partners.

We participants at this Sub-Regional Women’s Forum discussed a range of topics of national and sub-national importance, including temporary special measures for women, political party reforms and electoral challenges. We also reflected on the opportunities that women have to engage in sub-national decision-making structures, and the very challenging issue of how to effect cultural change in our communities in support of women’s leadership.

We wish to thank the many officials of this country who gave their time to share their knowledge at this Sub-Regional Women’s Forum, including the Registrar of Political Parties, the Chair and staff from the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates Commission, the representative of the Speaker of the National Parliament, officials from the PNG Electoral Commission, and staff from the Office of the Ombudsman, Police Force and the National Research Institute. Their commitment to promoting women’s leadership and political participation is inspiring and presents a major opportunity for women across the country to work with committed officials to progress this important work. We also wish to thank representatives of the media who attended from the National Broadcasting Corporation, PNG-FM and PNG-TV. Their desire to help women to raise their profile across the country is deeply appreciated, and we welcome their offer to collaborate to build awareness amongst the community of the value of women’s leadership.

We, the representatives who came together from the New Guinea Islands region, had participants from New Ireland, East New Britain and West New Britain. Our region is special because we have some provinces that are defined as matrilineal societies, where our women are already culturally recognised as leaders, although they still have problems getting elected into modern institutions such as the Parliament. Even in patrilineal societies like Manus and parts of West New Britain, our women use provincial level institutions to get involved in the political arena. However, the women across our region still face difficulty in getting elected, because of issues like money politics, electoral problems and the logistical challenges because our electorates are spread over such large areas. In the last election, 7 women contested from Manus and 5 women from New Ireland, but West New Britain had no women candidate at all, the only province in the country that had no women contesting in the 2017 elections. We have great commitment in our provinces to working to get more women involved in decision-making, but we have limited resources and many of the programmes focused on women do not include our region. Funding constraints and access to assistance from government agencies and development partners is a problem among all our provinces.

We, the people who participated from the Momase Region, came together from Madang, Morobe, East Sepik and West Sepik provinces. We very much acknowledge the challenges that greatly hinder the equal and effective participation of women in politics and leadership in our country, including through elections. We know that until and unless appropriate counter-measures are devised and implemented, women will continue to be marginalised, harassed, abused and victimised by these very structures that are meant to protect and promote our basic interests as individuals and citizens of our communities. But we also know that a system is made of people, and thus we believe the power to affect positive change lies within people, within ourselves. We are passionate and committed to not only innovate strategies, but to effectively utilising the good processes and procedures that exist at all levels of administration, to improve and strengthen the basic right of equal political participation and representation in our own governance.

We, the women of Southern region, though peace-loving and in many cases quiet because we respect our men, are nonetheless, resilient women who have been very good and influential leaders in our communities, both in traditional times and in current times. Yet in the formal structures of political representation we continue to be very poorly represented. While we respect our men, we want to state boldly here that we want to be given the opportunity to lead, because you have witnessed our qualities and resilience and it is time we were given this opportunity. We acknowledge the cultural perceptions that are negative to our women that are currently practiced and we ask our men to be champions to change that. We cannot do this alone and we call on our men, young and old, we call on our national and provincial institutions who are entrusted to protect us, to support our region in addressing the special challenges we face.

The women of the Highlands region came together from Enga, Hela, to discuss our special challenges, including law, electoral and political reforms. The Highlands are a very challenging area in the country in terms of the cultural components, geographical locations, political climate and law and order. The Highlands region is predominately a patrilineal/ male-dominated society where men are the head of the family and tribe and the “big-men” culture is heavily enforced in most parts of the highlands especially, the upper highlands areas. Thus, women in the Highlands have to fight twice as hard to prove themselves to our male counterparts and voters. But we want to be seen as valuable partners who can work together with men to enhance the development of our country and the welfare of our provinces.

At the conclusion of this Sub-Regional Women’s Forum, we wish to set out our concerns, priorities and recommendations for action through this Outcomes Statement. These recommendations build on those issued after the August 2017 Women Candidates Forum, which are attached as an annex here and are endorsed by our Forum. The recommendations below are directed at a range of Government institutions, but also reflect the commitment we all have to working together over the coming years to achieve better outcomes for the women of this country. We want to utilize and strengthen exiting mechanisms to improve women’s political participation using a bottom-up approach. We commit to return to our provinces to meet with our local MPs, our Provincial and District Councils of Women, our church-based groups and our own personal community networks to share the discussions we have had and to build support for the many recommendations this Forum has discussed.

***National women’s machineries***

In order to ensure that our efforts have impact, we are keen to work more closely with the national institutions that are mandated to promote women’s rights and women’s leadership, namely the Office for the Development of Women (ODW) and the National Council of Women (NCW). We commit to sharing this Statement with our colleagues in ODW and NCW and we look forward to working with them in future. We also commit to strengthening our own provincial networks and working closely with Provincial Women’s Council’s in order to promote women’s political participation. To ensure these bodies can effectively carry this work forward, we recommend that:

1. A Ministry for Women should be immediately established with a mandate and budget to promote and implement gender equality and women’s rights across the country. It is important to have an official champion for gender equality within Government. It should be adequately resourced to more effectively lead the national effort to promote women’s political participation and gender equality;
2. The Minister responsible for the women’s portfolio should immediately organise an NCW Convention or Annual General Meeting to bring together the 22 Provincial Council Women Presidents and 4 Regional Vice-Presidents to revisit the election for a new National President and new National Executive. In order to ensure the election is done in accordance with the Act, we call on Provincial Councils of Women who have not paid their dues to immediately do this and be ready to vote at any future meetings. We want to reactivate the NCW and move its work forward, including in relation to the promoting women’s political participation. To this end, consideration should be given to:
   1. Establishing an NCW Secretariat sitting within the ODW (and/or the Ministry of Women, once it is established) with access to sufficient resource to carry out its mandate;
   2. Undertaking awareness, education, advocacy and training on the *National Council of Women Act 2013* to build commitment to the NCW and PWCs across the country;
   3. Breaking down the budget that is provided to the NCW to directly provide a budget to each Provincial Council of Women (PCW) so that they have sufficient certainty about their funding to undertake provincial activities;
   4. Learning from the pilot project that is already underway in Madang, each PWC should establish Social Sectoral Grouping to undertake ward profiling that can be used to develop social and economic opportunities to empower youth and women;
   5. Having ODW commission a study into why no women contested in West New Britain during the last 2017 elections, to inform the broader work on how to support women candidates during the 2018 LLG elections and the 2022 National Elections;
   6. Developing activities through the NCW and PCWs that will identify potential women leaders to be mentored and supported through the 2018 LLG elections and 2022 National Election;
3. ODW should immediately commence the process of formulating a PNG Gender Policy to fill the gap left by the last policy which expired in 2015. The Policy must include provisions for enhancing women’s political participation. The Policy should also clarify how support will be coordinated for activities to support women’s leadership, in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to ensure that PNG women themselves are driving this agenda and are at the centre of this work;
4. Specific women’s candidate training should be undertaken, in a coordinated manner, through a partnership with the key institutions involved in this work, namely, ODW, the PNGEC and the IPPCC. Training should cover campaigning tactics and approaches, but also training on government systems, current laws (including the OLIPPAC and OLPLLG), on the process and procedures of budget and planning and on national policies and key issues (eg. health, education, infrastructure);

***National policies and institutions***

Keeping in our minds the upcoming 2018 LLG elections and the 2022 National Elections, but also recognising that there are opportunities to be found every day to progress efforts to promote women’s leadership, the participants at this Sub-Regional Women’s Forum recommend the following:

1. The National Parliament should immediately move a motion to co-opt one women member onto every parliamentary committee for the 2017-2022 term of Parliament, in order to ensure a voice for women in our highest decision-making forum. The motion can clarify the selection process, rights and duties of the co-opted person. If required, Parliament’s Rules of Procedure should be amended to permit such co-option. This should be done before the APEC Meeting so that PNG can show the region that we are working to address the zero representation of women in parliament;
2. The Government and Parliament should immediately renew their efforts to implement temporary special measures to support women’s political participation, by revisiting the Bill tabled during the 2012 parliamentary session to give effect to s.101(1)(d) of the Constitution in order to implement 22 seats for women, to come into effect from the 2022 election;

In support of these efforts, we also commit to return to our home provinces to work with our local MPs, our Provincial National Council of Women and our community networks to build support for the reserved seats legislation and to raise awareness in the general community for this initiative.

1. The Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates Commission (IPPCC) should be given every support necessary to implement its mandate in order to support women’s political participation. To ensure that political parties in PNG perform their role in our democracy properly, we recommend that:
   1. The Parliament immediately moving to enact proposed amendments to the *Organic Law on Political Parties and Candidates* to entrench a political party quota for women and to increase financial incentives to nominate women candidates. We recommend that Parliament consider amending the current amendment Bill to (i) increase the proposed political party quota from 20% to 40% and (ii) increase the fine for not endorsing enough women from K5,000 to K100,000;
   2. The IPPCC is given sufficient powers and resources to compel political parties to comply with the law, for example, by implementing party constitutions that require establishment of a women’s wing and by deregistering political parties that do not meet the minimum requirements to operate as a political party;
   3. The IPPCC should develop an awareness-raising programme on the profiles of political parties to enable women to choose on the basis of more information;
   4. IPPCC should hold a “post-mortem” of how political parties operated during the 2017 National Elections and all subsequent elections, to learn lessons and identify areas requiring ongoing reform or capacity-development;
   5. The Government should provide specific funding to the IPPCC to work with political parties and with women candidates to build their commitment and capacities over the next five years. In particular they the IPPCC should explore practical ways to support the women with logistics and campaign costs during campaigning, including for example, by managing a fund to support printing of posters and other such campaign materials;
2. The Electoral Commission should immediately take action to address the numerous electoral problems that were apparent during the 2017 elections and should immediately work to build a stronger PNGEC capable of conducting clean, fair and transparent elections in future by the time of the 2018 LLG elections. More specifically:
   1. The PNGEC should implement a rolling programme of training to all stakeholders on civic and electoral matters. It should better use the media for this, including social media to reach out to young people. It should also develop/revise key election messages, focusing on electoral procedures (ie. enrolment, nominations, polling, and counting);
   2. The PNGEC should immediately undertake and publish a full review of the management of the 2017 National Elections, including examining various allegations of fraud in relation to ballot papers, ballot boxes, voting processes, counting processes and declarations;
   3. The PNGEC should organise a briefing for Members of Parliament to explain the critical challenges encountered during the 2017 National Elections, set out their action plan to address these challenges and justify the budget needed to ensure clean, fair and transparent elections;
   4. The PNGEC should immediately begin updating the common electoral roll, including by utilising provincial structures to ensure the roll is accurate. The roll should be updated every 6 months. The PNGEC has decentralised responsibility for the roll to their Provincial Offices, but these offices should now utilise LLG structures more effectively to maintain the roll by resourcing Village Ward Recorders to be permanent Enrolment Officers. Provincial Electoral Offices should be equipped to update and maintain electronic rolls and to print and publish the final electoral roll in provinces. The electoral roll should be formatted in Wards, by surname alphabetically. The roll should also be advertised at least one year before each national election;
   5. The PNGEC should commission a study into whether and how biometric or electronic registration and voting could be implemented;
   6. The PNGEC should commission a review of the appointment process for Election Managers Returning Officers, Assistant Returning Officers and other critical electoral staff, to ensure that their recruitment and management process is merit-based and free of corruption. Consideration could be given to swapping electoral staff across provinces during elections to protect the electoral process from wantokism and other undue influence. Preference should also be given to recruiting women into critical positions such as Election Managers, ROs and AROs;
   7. The PNGEC should issue guidance to all its staff and to candidates and political parties regarding their rights and duties during voting and counting processes. For example, it should be explicitly clarified that candidates have a right to know the serial numbers of all ballots per ballot box in order to be able to cross-check the integrity of the voting process;
   8. The PNGEC should issue clear guidelines to candidates on what they can and cannot do during their campaign, including guidance requiring candidates to include their policies on their posters, whether they are standing as independent or endorse by a political party;
   9. The PNGEC should give training to all scrutineers to be clear on their role, know their rights, know how to ask the right questions during the counting process and know what course of actions to take;
   10. Laws or regulations should be amended to increase the campaign period for national elections from 12 to 16 weeks to enable effective campaigning across NGI provinces, where candidates have to campaign across sea and land and difficult geographical terrain;
   11. The PNGEC should revise polling procedures to push for the implementation of separate polling lines/booths for women across the country. This reform should be properly resourced to ensure that women are protected when voting and have the freedom to cast their own vote;
   12. The Ombudsman Commission should be mandated to not only act as election observers but also to have their officers work to mediate and resolve electoral issues on the ground;
   13. The PNGEC should work with the ODW, NCW, IPPCC and other partners to conduct regular training for women on electoral processes, including nominating for election, campaigning rules, the voting system and LPV, right down to the ward level.
3. The PNG Police Force should develop proper implement a specific Election Security Plan well in advance of the campaigning and voting periods, including specific activities to deal with gun control issues. The PNG Police Force must also be given powers during the campaigning and voting period to arrest offenders on the spot for election-related offences;
4. The National Boundaries Commission should be tasked to immediately begin a review of electoral and ward boundaries across the country to ensure that they are fairly designed to ensure “one person, one vote”, Specifically, the electoral boundaries of West New Britain should be reviewed to split the current 3 electorates into 6 electorates to increase the space for women to participate in the general election;
5. The Government and supportive stakeholders should develop a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to voter and civic education in order to educate our citizens about the value of women’s leadership, taking into account the complex cultural challenges women must address. Building the commitment of voters to electing women as their leaders is critical to ensuring women’s electoral success in the long-term. Specifically:
   1. We should explore options for undertaking training in schools through a curriculum on gender equality, as well as in our villages;
   2. We should harness the media (radio and TV) who can reach out to all parts of our country to build people’s awareness of how women can be good leaders. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC East Sepik and Morobe) have committed at this meeting to put forward a recommendation to have permanent time slot on the radio to share information about activities/issues centered around civic, law and order and electoral matters;

***Regional and provincial policies and institutions***

1. The Ministry for Provincial Affairs and Local Level Government should work with all Governors to ensure that s.10(3)(e) of the *Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Government* is being implemented in accordance with the law, specifically, that Presidents of Provincial National Councils of Women are appointed as Provincial Assembly women’s representatives;
2. The Government should provide specific support to the NCW, PCWs, the PNGEC, the IPPCC and key government and non-government bodies to support women candidates to run in the upcoming 2018 Local Level Government elections, including;
   1. The PNGEC should roll out a programme of training in advance of the 2018 LLG elections, for women candidates but also open to all, to ensure that candidates understand the nomination and campaigning processes, know their rights, know how to ask the right questions during the voting and counting process and know what course of actions to take to address problems;
   2. The NCW working with PCWs should immediately organise 4 regional forums to bring together potential women candidates to discuss the process of nominating and participating in the 2018 LLG elections. The Highlands and Southern regions specifically recommended that their regions be supported with 4 Provincial Forums underpinned by 2 candidate training activities bringing together women from the Upper Highlands and Lower Highlands;
3. Undertake research and analysis in relation to:
   1. Whether and how women are already engaged in decision-making bodies at sub-national level, including those appointed to Provincial Assemblies in accordance with the *Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Government*, LLGs and DDAs;
   2. How the DSIP, PSIP and DDA structures are working, in particular, in order to assess (i) how women are being engaged in decision-making, including as representatives on these bodies and (ii) how these funds are being used to promote gender equality and women’s rights;
4. The Ministry for Provincial Affairs and Local Level Government should work with interested stakeholders to explore options for building the capacity of women in sub-national decision-making bodies, including provincial and local level governments, as well as District Development Authorities.