

UNDP Women in Leadership Programme 2008-2012

Assisting the Government of Papua New Guinea and the PNG Women to gain Access to Parliament through Temporary Special Measures (TSMs)

The low level of women in decision making has always been a critical issue in Papua New Guinea against a backdrop of an increasing level of violence and, high rates of HIV amongst women and girls between the ages of 15-29 years, the necessity to support the Government was crucial in the steps adopted by the UNDP CO and the rest of the development partners operating in PNG. In addition, the external pressures both nationally and globally provided the needed pressure that resulted in the 2004 Pacific Islands Forum of which Papua New Guinea as a member called for action to address the low levels of women in decision-making, within the framework of the Forum's Pacific Plan and consistent with the Pacific Platform for Action on gender equality.

Subsequent dialogue by the UNDP CO in Port Moresby in 2007 resulted in the first workshop for women candidates participating in a 5 day session of awareness and introduction to the election and parliamentary processes that MPs should know about. The second workshop held after the National Elections in the same year brought together the same 101 women candidates was to basically diagnose the results of the election of why women fared poorly despite the wide publicity. The result of the diagnostic workshop revealed that almost all women campaigned without support from the Political Parties and having to face the upheaval battle of societal prejudices that women were not capable to lead and that security was also a key factor that jeopardized women's chances of ensuring the women candidates and their supporters from fully engaged in any lively debates with their male counterparts , Out of all the hindrances, the most obvious has been the nature of the electoral system. Despite the assurances that the Limited Preferential Voting (LPV) as opposed to the first past the post system was conducive for women during the 2007 National Elections, it did not live up to its expectation that it would benefit women.

But despite all the challenges, the number of women that have contested elections in the past have increased proportionality to that of the male counterparts although not substantively but enough to make an impact. The fact that only 1 woman candidate was able to make it into the National Parliament representation of 0.9% of the total number of MPs from the 2007 National Election the Government was prompted to pursue the course for the utilization of the National Constitution provisions to increase women's representation in the short term.

The voices of the women rang loud and clear during the Diagnostic Workshop in 2007, resulting in the Deputy Prime Minister, Sir Puka Temu MP announcing that the Government would push for four (4) Nominated Seats for women MPs in the 2009 National Parliament. The Government in 2008 activated the provisions in PNG's Constitution for appointed seats, and/or had the options to introduce reserved seats for women The National Executive Council of the Government of Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare made its landmark decision to invoke Sections 101 and 102 of the National Constitution

of Papua New Guinea to vote for three (3) women MPs as allowed for under this provision for any marginalized sectors of the community not adequately represented in Parliament.

The process for selection of the candidates was determined in an NEC decision that approved the appointment of the Screening Committee that would oversee the selection of the women candidates. This process is described in the attached report of the Lessons Learned Workshop highlighting some of the major obstacles preventing the endorsement of the selected women with the main reasons given by the Leader of Opposition that the process smacked of political nepotism and unconstitutional. The Technical Working Group of the Women in Leadership rebutted the reactions of the Leader with their couple of pages of responses that are also attached in the report.

So whilst the Nominated Seats has become non issue for the TWG with the Government posed to resurrect the Motion again in the last session of Parliament in November 2009, the focus now is on the preparation of the Reserved Seats by way of UNDP recruiting a team of 3 -6 legal experts who will be working closely with the TWG to prepare the legislative documents and NEC submissions over the next 4 months to ensure that the Bills are ready for Parliament by March 2010.

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