Overview
The Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB) is concurrently preparing for a referendum tentatively slated for June 15, 2019, the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) elections in 2020, and a variety of local elections. During this critical period, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) is supporting the Office of the Bougainville Election Commission (OBEC) and the Bougainville Referendum Commission (BRC) to build local ownership of credible, inclusive electoral processes. IFES also supports the Department of Peace Agreement Implementation (DPAI) to facilitate awareness activities and ensure a peaceful and sustainable post-referendum environment. Lastly, IFES engages with the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission (PNGEC) regarding their role with the BRC. In addition to the government, IFES works with civil society organizations (CSOs) to promote women’s participation in electoral processes and support an effective domestic observation program.

Key successes
Since 2015, IFES’ support to the OBEC, BRC, DPAI, PNGEC and civil society has resulted in the following key achievements:

- Establishment of BRC and its charter;
- First-ever DPAI strategic plan, setting a high bar for other departments;
- Successful conduct of the first non-urban community government (CG) elections directed by OBEC in 43 non-urban wards in April 2017;
- Three post-election lessons learned workshops across Bougainville hosted by OBEC, which brought together 75 participants to discuss the successes and challenges faced in implementing the 2017 non-urban CG Elections;
- New gender-focused strategies and approaches at OBEC;
- Launch of OBEC’s voter roll improvement process;
- Appointment of three women members of Parliament to referendum commissions and to observe the Joint Supervisory Board; and
- First domestic Bougainvillean election observation, which fielded 62 election observers for the 2015 ABG election.

Roll out of DPAI’s strategic plan before Parliament
“Let me now say that this year has been a successful year for me and my department, that we are ending this year on a strong note despite challenges we face as a new creation ... On behalf of the Ministry Office and the department, I wish to announce to you that the Department of Peace Agreement Implementation has published its department strategic plan and I take this opportunity to thank IFES for the technical support.”
– Honorable Albert Punghau, Minister of the Department of Peace Agreement Implementation, before the Bougainville Parliament in December 2017 referendum
Strengthening institutional capacity of OBEC and DPAI staff

IFES supports OBEC to strengthen processes around election operations and management, strategic and operational planning, and enhancing staff office and project management skills. This support has contributed to OBEC’s increased ability to administer elections, demonstrated by the successful implementation of the first-ever 2017 non-urban CG Elections. The CG elections replaced the previous Council of Elders system in which representatives were appointed rather than democratically elected, and ensured one male and one female representative per ward. Additionally, OBEC provided valuable logistical support during the 2017 PNG national elections through a memorandum of understanding with the PNGEC facilitated by IFES. IFES works with DPAI to support their work preparing Bougainville for a free and inclusive referendum process. Contributing to institutional development, IFES facilitated strategic planning workshops to prepare DPAI to develop their first-ever strategic plan. Additionally, IFES conducted a three-day skills training enhancement workshop to build new and existing skills on project management, gender equity and social cohesion, strategic communication, and financial management, among others.

Preparing for the Bougainville Referendum

The signing of the Bougainville Referendum Charter on August 30, 2017 officially triggered electoral preparations for the conduct of the referendum, which is currently scheduled for June 2019. IFES will continue to assist the PNGEC and OBEC with technical support to ensure a credible, peaceful referendum process. Specifically, IFES is helping DPAI to plan for multiple scenarios for the post-referendum transition period to maintain peace and stability regardless of the outcome. Additionally, with referendum authorities, IFES is supporting the BRC to conduct a detailed analysis of the technical options for the creation of a credible referendum voter roll.

Promoting women’s involvement in electoral processes

To promote the inclusion of women in electoral processes, IFES is working with OBEC and local CSOs to determine best practices for increasing participation rates of women and gender equality in election processes. In partnership with OBEC, IFES organized a gender and election workshop for DPAI, CSOs, parliamentarians, candidates and government officials to share insights and recommendations from IFES’ gender assessment and identify specific steps forward to mainstream gender in electoral operations plans. IFES will continue to work with OBEC to design a gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) policy and to identify an internal GESI focal point to further women’s involvement in electoral processes.

Improving the accuracy of the electoral roll

IFES is working with the OBEC IT department to empower them to ensure local ownership and capacity to update and manage electoral roll data. As a result, OBEC has created uniformed procedures for data entry and processes for improved roll maintenance. IFES continues to assist OBEC in modifying their data entry software by editing user input validations that will prevent data entry mistakes. Furthermore, IFES is helping OBEC as they create stricter user policies and draft security best practices to establish a secure, auditable and traceable information system for future election activities.


The “Bougainville Electoral Support Program” is supported by the Australian and New Zealand Governments in partnership with the Autonomous Bougainville Government and the Government of Papua New Guinea.