Overview
Since 2015, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has supported the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission (PNGEC) through the “Electoral Systems Strengthening Project” (ESSP) to institutionalize an inclusive and locally owned election process. This assistance, funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, helped the PNGEC to implement over two dozen reforms and innovations that allowed for the successful conduct of the 2017 national elections with a significantly reduced budget. IFES currently works with the PNGEC to assist with election evaluation following the 2017 national elections, bolster electoral capacity and operations ahead of the 2018 local government elections, and support long-term planning efforts in preparation for the 2022 national elections and beyond. IFES’ programming builds capacity and local ownership of electoral processes and supports the empowerment and inclusion of women.

Key successes
In the first two years of the program, IFES provided critical support to the PNGEC to deliver the 2017 national elections and conduct post-election evaluation activities with key achievements:

- A new Results Transmission System to improve polling team access to timely information and improve data collection and results tabulation, transmission and verification;
- A memorandum of understanding and Bougainville Referendum Commission charter between the PNGEC and Office of Bougainville Electoral Commissioner to support the upcoming Bougainville referendum, kicking off referendum preparations;
- A comprehensive voter education campaign comprising posters, the first-ever election song and video, radio spots, and a PNGEC Facebook page;
- Use of mobile enrollment teams to target youth populations;
- A National Election Implementation Plan to provide operational timelines, logistical planning, and promote internal monitoring and encourage a “systems thinking” approach to planning;
- The first External Stakeholder Dialogue to discuss the conduct of the 2017 national elections and field comments and recommendations; and
- The launch of the 2018-2022 Strategic Planning Process, which is the most inclusive strategic planning process to date.

Promoting electoral commission cooperation
The PNGEC supports preparations for the Bougainville Referendum in partnership with the Office of the Bougainville Electoral Commissioner. IFES has maximized its assistance to these efforts under ESSP through complementary programming in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville with funding from the Australian and New Zealand governments. Together these projects provide more effective and efficient guidance, which has contributed to the formation of the Bougainville Referendum Commission. IFES will continue to holistically support the electoral commissions through the conduct of the referendum.
**Stronger strategic planning and coordination**

In preparation for the 2017 national elections, IFES assisted the PNGEC Election Operations Branch and Strategic Planning Unit (SPU) to develop an integrated 2017 National Election Implementation Plan and enhance its electoral operational effectiveness through project management training. IFES provided international electoral expertise to support the PNGEC and its Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Branch to develop a new Results Transmission System, enhancing the PNGEC staff’s ability to perform more detailed data analysis, benefiting long-term operational planning through regular reporting and a “systems thinking” approach. These innovations encouraged greater collaboration between branches within the PNGEC and provided greater accountability and increased transparency. In the post-election period, IFES is supporting development of the 2018-2022 Corporate Plan to guide the PNGEC’s electoral preparations and institutional development. IFES continues to empower the SPU to take ownership of the process and engage provincial, junior, and mid-level staff.

**Increased women’s empowerment and inclusion within the PNGEC**

IFES works with the PNGEC to increase women’s participation in electoral and political processes through leadership skills and confidence-building. To mark the PNGEC’s commitment to gender inclusion, IFES assisted in organizing the first “PNG National Women’s Day” in March 2017. IFES supported the PNGEC to develop strategies and recruitment ads encouraging women to apply for staff and temporary election positions. The change in attitude toward more inclusive recruiting is evident within the PNGEC, where female staff hold three of six director-level positions and several manager positions. In the 2018-2022 Corporate Plan, gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) has been highlighted as a strategic pillar, signifying its importance to the PNGEC both inside the Commission as well as outreach to female voters and candidates. IFES continues to work with the PNGEC to mainstream inclusion efforts and equip male allies for women in the workplace. IFES will also roll out its global She Leads women’s electoral and political leadership training program in PNG.

**More effective and targeted civic education and voter awareness messaging**

In preparation for the 2017 national elections, IFES supported the PNGEC in the development of the new 2017 Voter Awareness Strategy and production of new products including posters highlighting women, youth and persons with disabilities, anti-violence and anti-corruption and peaceful elections; and the first-ever election song and music video promoting a variety of positive messages on the inclusion of women, youth participation, and genuine election processes. IFES also encouraged and supported the use of creative strategies like drama, theater, radio and television messages to better communicate with all citizens, even those who are illiterate. Notably, IFES assisted the PNGEC to utilize real people in awareness materials and media for the first time, accentuating the human connection with the election process. In the post-election period, IFES is supporting the electoral commissioner’s initiatives to increase the transparency of the PNGEC through a series of dialogues with PNGEC staff and external stakeholders. Upcoming dialogues will include GESI, voter enrollment, and the legal framework.

**Improved voter enrollment, electoral roll updates and use of ICT tools**

IFES supported the PNGEC’s improvement of voter enrollment data processing tools and procedures, the candidate nomination database system, election administration and internal data security and archiving tools. Following the 2017 national elections, IFES is supporting the development of an electoral roll update action plan to increase operational efficacy in future elections. This includes technical guidance for the development and update of the electoral roll database system and simplification of voter enrollment techniques to produce a more accurate electoral roll. IFES has also been collaborating with the PNGEC on the use of innovative approaches to update the electoral roll, supporting the development of an SMS service to verify voter registration and polling station location, and the use of mobile enrollment teams to target youth and other traditionally underrepresented voting populations.


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