CHALLENGES AND CRITICAL FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN IN THE 2017 NATIONAL ELECTIONS: CASE OF LAE AND HUON GULF

Mary Fairio
Sarah Kaut Nasengom
Cathy Keimelo

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DISCUSSION PAPER

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Acknowledgements

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Author’s Contributions

Conceptualisation and methodology of the study was designed by Mary Fairio with assistaince from her program leaders; all authors contributed to data collection and analysis; and Mary Fairio wrote the original draft, revised and finalised the manuscript.
# Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLRC</td>
<td>Constitutional and Law Reform Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FODE</td>
<td>Flexible Open and Distance Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLG</td>
<td>Local-level Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCW</td>
<td>National Council of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODW</td>
<td>Office of the Development of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLIPPAC</td>
<td>Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OLPGLLG</td>
<td>Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIPNG</td>
<td>Transparency International Papua New Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE party</td>
<td>Triumph Heritage Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Political leadership at the national level continues to be a challenge for women in Papua New Guinea. With the current gender gap in the Parliament, we asked two critical questions:

- why are women not being elected into Parliament?
- What were the main challenges the female candidates faced during the 2017 National Elections?

This study was undertaken to enable a better understanding of the barriers to political participation for women. The study documented female candidates’ experiences during the campaigning period in Lae and in the Huon Gulf Open electorates of Morobe Province. Findings from the study show that despite female candidates’ good campaign strategies, they were faced with major challenges such as gendered stereotype sentiments, cultural perceptions, and money politics, which affect their campaign, and election outcome. The study suggests that approaches to support female candidates to increase their chances of winning should be holistic, inclusive and sustainable; to this end, this report offers several recommendations.
The meaningful participation of women in politics is a global challenge. When women’s representation is increased women are empowered, parliament’s legitimacy is enhanced, and representative institutions can make substantive development contributions and decisions (Spark et al., 2019). In addition, women’s political participation advances gender equality and impacts on policy issues and proposed solutions (Pepera, 2018), and their involvement in politics contribute towards democracy, representation, and participation (Baker, 2015; Fairio, 2014; Sepoe, 2002).

Gender inequality is a key challenge to the advancement of women in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the country’s development (Brower, 2014). Women in PNG are recognised as equal citizens in theory, but it is quite the contrary in practice. Every election outcome since independence (1977–2017) has consistently shown low numbers of women in leadership — between zero and three percent of the total members in parliament (Fairio & Rodrigues, 2017) — and this impacts decision making and policy making.

The objectives of this study were to understand why there is low political representation of women and to address the lack of women’s participation in the political process in PNG. The findings from this research will further inform policies and programs that advocate for increased women in leadership at the national level.

Key research questions include:

- why are women not being elected into Parliament?
- what were the main challenges the female candidates faced during the 2017 National Election?

This paper focuses on the experiences of three female candidates who contested in the 2017 National Election for the urban Lae and rural Huon Gulf Open electorates. It documents their experiences in relation to the campaign, challenges faced during campaign, perceptions about factors that tend to influence election outcomes, and offers some recommendations to improve the participation of women in leadership at the national level.

The study was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 was conducted during the campaign and polling in order to understand female candidates’ experiences. Phase 2 was conducted after the elections and declaration of results. This paper is based on data collected in Phase 1. Data collected from Phase 2 will serve as the basis for future papers.

The paper is in five parts. Part one provides an overview of women in politics. Part two sets out the legal and policy framework. Part three outlines the methods of the study. Part four presents the data and discusses the results. Part five offers recommendations.
Equality between men and women in terms of treatment and opportunity is now recognised as a fundamental value, and is recognised by international law (Kansal, 2013). This mainly relates to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that 187 countries of the 193 United Nations (UN) member states have ratified to address discrimination of all forms against women (The Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2018). Women's rights have been recognised at different times in various countries, but the rate of women's participation in politics has remained consistently low. For example, up until 1990s, the UK and USA struggled to break the five percent barrier. Five percent barrier refers to the period before 1990's when the number of women MPs in the UK and the US did not increase past five percent of the total number of members in the national legislature (Maguire, 2018). Today, 32.0 percent of MPs in the UK are women (208/650 MPs) and 23.6 percent of members in the USA are women (102/433 members) (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019a). Globally, however, 127 countries have less than 10 percent of women in their parliament (UNWomen, 2019). Only the parliaments of Rwanda, Cuba and Bolivia currently have over 50 percent women (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019a). Among these three countries, Rwanda had women comprising over 50 percent out of 80 members in its parliament in the last three elections: 61.3 percent (2018), 64 percent (2013), and 56.3 percent (2008).

One contributing factor for this is because these countries have a quota system for women. For example, Rwanda, after the civil war, included a quota measure for women to occupy more than 30 percent of political seats (Elliott, 2019). Currently, 49 countries have adopted the quota system (Thornton, 2019). But, this is only 25 percent of 195 countries in the world. Growth of women's representation occurs at different paces for each country and in some cases have not progressed at all. UNWomen data (2019) showed that 19 countries had women head of states in 2015 and this slightly dropped to 17 countries in 2017.

There are various explanations for the low levels or lack of female representation in parliament across the globe. Domingo et al.'s (2015) comprehensive review identified that discriminatory social structures and norms (informal systems such as culture) both contribute to and constrain women's participation. Benstead (2016) emphasised that patriarchy systems and gender roles are primary hindrances to women's leadership in both private and public life and to their impacts on social, political and economic spheres. In addition, in his earlier paper, Benstead et al. (2015) argued that the psychology of stereotyping and biases such as gender and religion can contribute to the way people vote. Domingo et al. (2015) further argued that informal systems should work alongside the formal systems, but many times override the formal ones; thus, it is a challenge to make both work in favour of women. Gendered laws, for example, may not necessarily work for women because culture can be an obstacle. This is because laws often clash with national cultures, values, customs, and traditions that are not consistent with them (True et al., 2012).

Moreover, formal political institutions should shape opportunities for women, such as the electoral and party systems (Shepherd-Robinson & Lovenduski, 2002) and even gendered institutions and networks, such as the quota systems, can work both ways (Baker, 2015; Phillips, 1991). However, “the choices people make are shaped by not only institutions but also by their culture over time” (Fairio, 2014, p. 21). For example, political parties have their rules that only endorse certain female candidates. One reason for this is related to party members' preference of male over female candidates because of the embedded culture to select local, professional, middle-aged, middle class men that fit their description of what an MP should look like (Shepherd-Robinson & Lovenduski, 2002). Thus, it is important to understand the cultural context apart from the attitudes and behaviours of people in a society (Nagy, 2004).

It is evident that both the formal and informal systems are still highly gendered and that contributes to women having limited access (Domingo et al., 2015). Therefore, it is also important to note that some factors that contribute to inequality across the globe may be similar; but, there are numerous country-specific factors (Fairio, 2014). There is still a long way for most countries to achieve equal and fair representation in the parliament.
**Pacific Island region women in the parliament**

Currently, the Pacific Island region has the lowest rates of female representation in parliament compared to other regions (Pacific Women in Politics, 2019). This is despite the slight increase of 2.5 percent in the last five years (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019b). Zetlin (2014) outlines three reasons for the low female representation in the Pacific Island region: cultural beliefs, women's socioeconomic status, and obstacles for women in the electoral and parliamentary institutions that allow the minimum representation of women.

Many Pacific Island countries still hold onto their traditional cultures that discriminate against women taking up leadership positions, particularly in government (Baker, 2017; Haley & Zubrinich, 2016). For example, in Samoa, only chiefs are allowed to be elected into Parliament (Meleisea et al., 2015), and Vanuatu and PNG are strong patrilineal societies with the dominant perception of leadership as a man's role (Korare, 2002). These cultural perceptions influence voters' political choices.

In addition, Spark et al. (2019) highlighted a mix of contributing factors that discourage and disadvantage women from participating in politics because of their traditional roles and responsibilities: lack of sufficient financial resources, institutional barrier including electoral system and weak party systems that favour male candidates; and cultural and religious attitudes. However, more research is needed to understand how some women overcome these barriers to get elected.

Currently, only 8.2 percent of seats in parliament (46 out of 560 seats) across the 15 countries in the Pacific Island region are held by women. This excludes Australia and New Zealand (Pacific Women in Politics, 2019). Table 1 shows the number of women in parliament in the Pacific Island region.

**Table 1: Percentage of women in parliament in the Pacific Island region (2019)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage of women in parliament</th>
<th>Number of women in parliament</th>
<th>Total seats in parliament</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niue</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall Islands</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palau*</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokelau</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federated State of Micronesia</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data adopted from Inter-Parliamentary Union (2019) and Pacific Women in Politics (2019).

*Palau has two houses of Congress: the House of Delegates with 16 members and the House of Senate with 13 members.
PNG is one of three countries in the Pacific Island region that does not have any woman in parliament. The national election held in 2017 marks the third time in the political history of PNG that no woman was elected (the two other elections were held in years 1987 and 1992).

Legal and policy framework

- The PNG Constitution (Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea, 2015) promotes equality and participation for all persons despite gender (Section 55), and the right to vote and to stand for public office (Section 50).
- The National Goals and Directive Principles also highlight the role of women, particularly integral human development (Goal one) and equality and participation (Goal two). However, proposals to increase women's participation in parliament have not been successful, mainly because majority of the male-dominated MPs have not supported the proposals.
- PNG ratified the UN CEDAW in 1995, which means the PNG Government has an obligation of compliance, which is necessary to eliminate discrimination against women. As CEDAW is law without sanctions (Merry, 2006), there are countries that do not report within the required timeframe of every five years. Unfortunately, PNG has reported only once in 2010 (that combined the first (2000), second (2005) and third (2010) reporting phases), the report highlighted the lack of women's representation at the national level (United Nations, 2010).

Attempted legislation

- In 2011, the proposed amendment for 22 reserved seats for women led to the Constitutional Amendment No. 32 Equity and Participation Law (Palmieri, 2016). The amendment came into effect because there was a need for equality and participation for women to be equal players in society in general and in parliament particularly. In addition, this law gave effect to the second Goal of the National Goals and Directive Principles. An Organic Law should influence this amendment. To date, the enabling legislation is yet to be crafted.
- In 2017, the proposed amendment to the Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPPAC) to include 20 percent of female candidates in a registered political party was tabled in Parliament for endorsement and implementation in the 2017 elections (Fairio & Rodrigues, 2017). Again, this proposal did not gain sufficient support from the MPs. This and any other proposal will not be passed unless there is political will and numbers to support it.
- In 2018, the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission (CLRC) was directed to review the Organic Law on National and Local-level Government Elections (National Gazette No. G163; Government of Papua New Guinea, 2018). The fourth reference specifically covers women and special interest representation in parliament. This time, the government has taken ownership of the gender gap in parliament, and the review provides an opportunity for thorough consideration for inclusion of women in parliament. A gap in the review process may be the lack of political support to pass the relevant amendments in Parliament after the 18-month review period. Therefore, lobbying, raising awareness, and providing education to MPs is an important component to getting the necessary political support to pass the amendment.
- To date, there is limited legislation to promote women’s political participation. One existing law is the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments 1995 (OLPGLLG) that allows a female representative to be part of the provincial assembly (Section 10e) and two women to be appointed at the local level (Section 29d).

Attempts to empower women

- In 2009, the Office for the Development of Women (ODW) under the Department for Community Development and Religion was created to coordinate efforts in women leadership. The main function
of the ODW is to address women's issues relating to policy, strategic formulation, coordination and conduct research, and monitor implementation of international commitments and report (Waiko & Kajoi, 2016). The ODW has not been effective due to administrative issues and lack of Government support (Constitutional and Law Reform Commission Report, 2015). Therefore, the coordination of women in leadership programs is lacking and often leads to uncoordinated efforts by different sectors working in this space.

- Another mechanism is the National Council of Women (NCW) established in 1979 to represent women's voices in PNG, particularly from civil society. Despite its existence since 1979, less recognition has been given to the organisation in terms of political support and necessary funding to implement programs. The women's movement and the network under the NCW provide avenues for stronger support from women voters, mentoring and representing the women of PNG at all levels (National Council of Women Act, 2013). However, internal politics among the NCW leadership needs to be addressed to advance the agenda of increasing women's representation and the empowerment of women in all other spheres.

Female candidates in the PNG 2017 National Election

In the 2017 National Election, not a single woman was voted into Parliament out of a total of 3,340 candidates (comprised of 3,173 men and 167 women). The trend of women being elected has ranged between zero and three despite the increasing number of female candidates since independence. In fact, there was a 20 percent increase of female candidates in the 2017 national election from the previous election (2012). However, party endorsement remains a challenge. Only 36 percent of all female candidates (60 women) were endorsed by political parties.

Approximately six percent (10 women) out of the 167 women candidates finished in the top five positions. Rufina Peter, who contested the Central Regional seat, was eliminated at the third spot with 33,221 votes. Despite this, there is a big margin in the number of votes for the successful male candidates compared to the female candidates who have finished in the top five spots. This shows that voters are not voting for female candidates. For example, Jean Eparo Parkop finished second place with 6,610 votes while current Oro Governor Gary Juffa finished first with 13,110 votes. See Table 2 for the list of the female candidates who finished in the top ten (Electoral Commission, 2017).
Table 2: List of top 10 female candidates in the 2017 national election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female candidate</th>
<th>Electorate</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Valid votes</th>
<th>Percentage of votes (%)</th>
<th>Party affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rufina Peter</td>
<td>Central Provincial</td>
<td>Central</td>
<td>16,222</td>
<td>147,312</td>
<td>11.01</td>
<td>TPNGP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dulciana Somare</td>
<td>East Sepik Provincial</td>
<td>East Sepik</td>
<td>12,130</td>
<td>221,276</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>PANGU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah P. Gore</td>
<td>Sohe Open</td>
<td>Oro (Northern)</td>
<td>5,258</td>
<td>38,510</td>
<td>13.65</td>
<td>PNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna B. Skate</td>
<td>Moresby South Open</td>
<td>National Capital District</td>
<td>4,444</td>
<td>39,290</td>
<td>11.31</td>
<td>PPP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Eparo Parkop</td>
<td>Northern Provincial</td>
<td>Oro (Northern)</td>
<td>6,610</td>
<td>80,217</td>
<td>8.24</td>
<td>SDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy A. Ondokoi</td>
<td>North Wahgi Open</td>
<td>Jiwaka</td>
<td>3,618</td>
<td>54,449</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>IND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferao Orimyo</td>
<td>Henganofi Open</td>
<td>Eastern Highlands</td>
<td>3,324</td>
<td>44,653</td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td>THE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubie Wanariu Kerepa</td>
<td>Kavieng Open</td>
<td>New Ireland</td>
<td>1,806</td>
<td>24,107</td>
<td>7.49</td>
<td>IND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mofa Nina Giheno</td>
<td>Henganofi Open</td>
<td>Eastern Highlands</td>
<td>2,877</td>
<td>44,653</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>IND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kessy B. Sawong</td>
<td>Rai Coast Open</td>
<td>Madang</td>
<td>2,809</td>
<td>41,516</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>PNGNP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In addition to the massive margin of votes, 97 percent of the female candidates scored less than one percent of the total votes for the electorate they were contesting (Electoral Commission, 2017). The election results demonstrate that female candidates are not gaining sufficient votes; voters are not voting women.

The 2017 common roll recorded 5,062,298 voters, of whom 48.4 percent were female and 51.6 percent were male (Electoral Commission, 2017). Despite the slight difference between the number of men and women in voting population, there is lack of women’s direct political participation in terms of contesting. West New Britain was the only province that did not have any female candidate, while Manus Province had the highest number of female candidates with 10 percent women out of 60 candidates. Regionally, Southern Region had the highest number of female candidates (see Table 3). Overall, only 5.0 percent of the total candidates were women, which was a 1.0 percent increase from the 2012 elections; it has been below 4.0 percent in previous elections.
Table 3: Number of female candidates by region, 2017 National Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Male candidates</th>
<th>Female candidates</th>
<th>Percentage of female candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Region</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>7.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlands Region</td>
<td>1,269</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Momase</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Guinea Islands</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,169</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>5.3 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While there have been attempts to write and enact laws that encourage the participation of women in national politics since independence, the reality is that equal participation has not been realised. The current gender gap in the parliament demonstrates that PNG has a long way to achieve equality in leadership at the national level. The underrepresentation of women remains a challenge for democratic process. As a democratic country, we have a responsibility to do checks and balances on our performance and equality in political participation is one critical area.
This section provides a brief background to women in leadership in the study areas. Lae is the second largest city in PNG, after Port Moresby. It is also PNG’s industrial hub because it is accessible by road connecting the Highlands highway and by sea connecting the New Guinea Islands. Lae District has two LLGs (Aihii Rural and Lae Urban) and 25 wards (Webster et al, 2010). According to the last census (2011), the Lae District has a total population of 148,934, which comprises 77,446 males and 71,488 females and a total of 68,114 eligible voters (National Statistical Office, 2011). These numbers will have increased since the last census because of births and migration into the city.

Women in Lae participated politically in the past national elections, but none won until the 2012 National Elections. Loujaya Kouza contested under the Indigenous People’s party and was one of three female MPs who won in the 2012 Elections. The 2012 election was not her first; she also contested in the 2007 National Elections where she came fifth out of 25 candidates. She also contested the 2008 LLG Elections (International Women’s Development Agency, 2012).

Loujaya Kouza became the first woman to win the Lae Open seat in the 2012 elections against a strong incumbent MP, Bart Philemon, who is also her uncle. She was appointed Minister for Community Development, Religion and Family Affairs despite being a first time Member of Parliament (MP). In the 2017 National Election, she contested again for the same seat but was not elected. She is one of the candidates included in our study and this paper discusses some of the findings why she was not elected in the 2017 National Election. Only two women contested against 47 men for the Lae Open seat. The other female candidate is Sharon Mathias, a first-time candidate. Sharon Mathias is the second candidate in our study.

The Huon Gulf District shares a common border with Lae District. With its headquarters in Salamaua, the district has three LLGs (Morobe Rural, Salamaua Rural and Wampar Rural) and 64 wards (Webster et al, 2010). According to the last census (2011), the District’s total population is 77,564, which comprises 40,333 males and 37,231 females with 32,554 eligible voters (National Statistical Office, 2011). Huon Gulf’s population is half the population of Lae, and the people are scattered across rural areas. Lae, on the other hand, is densely populated with an urban base. The following map (Map 1) shows the proximity, geography and electoral boundaries of the two districts.

Background of electorates
Women have contested the Huon Gulf Open seat in previous elections, but none had won national elections. However, under the former decentralised provincial government system, Enny Moaitz, born in 1940 and from Huon Gulf District, was the Premier of Morobe Province from 1988 to 1989 (Sepoe, 1996). She was a well known provincial politician in her own right (Sepoe, 1996). Enny Moaitz became PNG’s first and only woman Premier and was also a member of the provincial assembly, the Tutumang. She contested the national election in 1992 and came fourth place out of 19 candidates in the Huon Gulf Open, and second best performer among the 16 female candidates in PNG (Sepoe, 1996).

In the 2017 National Election, the Electoral Commissom recorded one woman who contested against 27 male candidates for the Huon Gulf Open seat (Louis, 2017). Miong Kila previously contested in the 2012 national election, but did not win. She contested again in the 2017 national election and she is the third female candidate that our team observed in the election study.
Purposeful sampling was used to select the electorates for this study. The first stage was to select a province with a female MP at the time of the study. There were only three provinces that fitted this criteria: Eastern Highlands, Oro and Morobe. In the second stage, three criteria were used to select female candidates: 1) an MP during the time of study, 2) a first-time candidate, and 3) an unsuccessful candidate from previous elections.

However, none of the electorates in these three provinces had women nominees matching all three study criteria. The electorate that came closest was Lae with two female candidates who fitted the first two criteria. Huon Gulf had a candidate who fitted the third criteria. Therefore, Lae and Huon Gulf electorates were selected for the study. Huon Gulf electorate was chosen also because of its close proximity to Lae, which also presented an opportunity for comparison between rural and urban areas.

At the start of the campaign period, the research team liaised with the female candidates and obtained their consent to participate in the study.

This is a qualitative study that was conducted during the campaign and polling period. Phase 1 of the study was done over two weeks during the last week of the campaign period (19–23 June 2017) and the first week of polling (26–30 June 2017). Two PNG National Research Institute (PNG NRI) female researchers and two local males were recruited as research assistants. The research assistants were engaged to conduct interviews with the supporters of the female candidates and the general voters.

Research questions focused on the experiences of the female candidates, their campaign strategies, supporters’ views of the female candidates, voters’ perceptions about female candidates and the likely reasons for choosing their candidate. Draft questions were circulated to four researchers and edited using their feedback. The questionnaires were given to the researchers to provide feedback. Their responses were used to edit the questionnaires.

Interviews were conducted using three semi-structured questionnaires. The first questionnaire was used to interview the three female candidates, the second questionnaire was used to collect data from supporters of the female candidates, and the third questionnaire was used to interview the general voters.

**Questionnaire one**

Key questions for the female candidates include:

- What factors made you want to run for the 2017 National Elections?
- Were you endorsed by a political party, and were there any support received?
- What are the policies of the party, or as independent candidate?
- Do you have a campaign strategy?
- What critical factors may influence your election outcome?
- What were the main challenges candidates faced during the election period, and specifically female candidates, and for yourself?

**Questionnaire two**

Key questions in the supporters’ questionnaire include:

- How well do you know your candidates?
- Do you know your candidates’ policies, and what are the three key policies?
- Were you involved in your candidate’s campaign?
- What is your view on the campaign so far?
- What are some factors that can contribute to your candidates’ win?
• What were some challenges for your candidate?

Questionnaire three

Key questions in the general voters’ questionnaire include:

• Who are your three preferred candidates for the electorate?
• How well do you know your candidates?
• Do you know your candidates’ policies, and if so, what are the three key policies?
• Does your candidate have a campaign strategy, and what is the campaign strategy?
• What are the critical factors that can contribute to a candidate winning the election?
• What are the factors that can contribute to a female candidate’s win?
• What do you think were some challenges that the candidates faced in this election, and also challenges for female candidates?

As well as conducting interviews, research assistants used note books to document additional information from interviews and observation. Two audio recorders were also used to record interviews especially with the female candidates and a digital camera to take pictures at the various campaign locations.

General voters were selected through purposive sampling, to include different age groups and both men and women were interviewed. The team mostly identified public places where it was easier to select people from a group. Public places included markets, shops, bus stops, playgrounds where campaigns were held, and main streets. Approximately 320 people were approached, of whom 267 agreed to be interviewed and an estimated 53 people declined to be interviewed.

When conducting interviews, we approached people, by greeting them, who were by themselves or were with one other person. We introduced ourselves and explained the purpose of the study. We next asked if they consented to participate in an interview. If the person consented, we started by explaining that their information would be kept confidential for the purpose of the study, and we recorded their personal information on the first page of the questionnaire. If they wished to remain anonymous, we did not record their name. If a person we approached declined to participate, we thanked him or her and moved on to interview another person. People agreed to be interviewed more in campaign locations and public places such as markets. In addition, some people who agreed to be interviewed also referred us to people they knew within the same location (snowball sampling).

Table 4 provides the category of respondents (female candidate, supporter, or voter) by gender. We targeted equal numbers of men and women of different voting age groups. However, more men were interviewed than women, especially in the rural Huon Gulf electorate. This is because there were more men in these public places and they willingly participated, whereas women were reluctant to participate or busy with their market goods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of respondents</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female candidates</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporters</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voters</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>182</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first week of Phase 1, the research team accompanied each female candidate to their campaign houses, observed their campaign, and interviewed their supporters. We observed nine campaign events.

We used an Excel spreadsheet to enter and analyse the collected data. One aspect that shaped the selection of the
analysis approach was the research questions. The research questions were semi-structured, and the questionnaires included three target groups of respondents in two contrasting settings — rural and urban. Given this, we used a mixed methods approach to analyse the data we had collected. These methods include content analysis, narrative analysis, and quantitative measurement techniques.

Content analysis was used to derive categories or variables from the data collected through interviews and observations of behaviours. The collected data was then summarised and tabulated. Narrative analysis was also applied that involves reformulation of stories presented by the key informants (female candidates) case by case along with different experiences. For example, electoral experiences for each female candidate was different. Therefore, primary data collected from conversations and interview with the female candidates were also included in the analysis.

Furthermore, the analysis included the quantitative measurement techniques. This is where the analysis gives us more understanding into the meanings of the responses by quantifying them. For example, summarised responses were quantified to illustrate common perception towards women voters and candidates. We created graphs to show the relationship among variables and to visualise the data.
Observation of campaigns

It was interesting to observe the differences and similarities across the campaign locations: there were differences in the number of people by gender, ethnicity and background, and these factors determine their support for a candidate. For instance, voters reported they supported a candidate because they are related or had attended the same college. The common similarities observed at the campaign locations were: presence of more men than women, involvement of children in the campaign (accompanied by their parents or involved in dances), and more people present when food was distributed.

As shown in Table 4, the number of women interviewed was low mainly because the majority of supporters at the campaign locations were men. Many women, in both urban and rural areas, were reluctant to be interviewed and preferred group interview or referred to their husbands or male relatives to speak for them. Table 5 shows the number of respondents in Lae and in Huon Gulf.

Table 5: Number of respondents (supporters and voters) from Huon Gulf and Lae and their age distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Lae respondents (n = 165)</th>
<th>Huon Gulf respondents (n = 102)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (n = 116)</td>
<td>Female (n = 49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–30</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41–50</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51–60</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61–70</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71–80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Female candidates’ experience of electoral campaign

Experiences of female candidates include their background (age, education, occupation), affiliations, and electoral experiences. Table 6 gives an overview of the female candidates’ background, including electoral experiences (number of years the candidate contested, and the number of years in politics), affiliation, and reasons for contesting. Based on their background, they linked their policies, created networks and pulled resources together.

Two of the three female candidates who participated in this study have an education background (Loujaya Kouza and Sharon Mathias), and the third has a business background (Miong Kila). In addition, all are affiliated with organisations and groups that provided a support base for them.
Table 6: Details of female candidates’ background at the time of interview (June 2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Sitting MP (2012–2017)</th>
<th>First-time candidate</th>
<th>Unsuccessful candidate from previous election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate</strong></td>
<td>Loujaya Kouza (Lae Open)</td>
<td>Sharon Mathias (Lae Open)</td>
<td>Miong Kila (Huon Gulf Open)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>51 years old</td>
<td>48 years old</td>
<td>52 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>Master's degree in Communication for Development</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree in Education</td>
<td>Completed Business Studies at the Lae Technical College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>MP (journalist/teacher)</td>
<td>Teacher and Director of FODE</td>
<td>Trainer (human resources)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for contesting</td>
<td>Exposure since 2012 election. Also stood for 2008 LLG elections.</td>
<td>Saw no impact project and funding for Lae. She lives at 4 Mile in the miles area of Lae, and saw no development in that area, so she contested in the 2017 election.</td>
<td>She wanted to see a better, transparent government. She also saw lack of service delivery and wanted to improve it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliations</td>
<td>Butibum and Western Province origin, Church (Body of Christ), Ginigoada.</td>
<td>Church (Seventh Day Adventist), 4 Mile settlement community, Eastern Highlands and East Sepik origin. FODE Director.</td>
<td>National and Provincial Council of Women, Church, Gabsongkeg women’s group, from Gabsongkeg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral experiences</td>
<td>Contested 2007 national election (fifth place) and 2008 LLG elections. Contested 2012 election under the Indigenous People’s Party and won the Lae Open Seat. MP for one term (2012–2017).</td>
<td>First time candidate.</td>
<td>Contested in the 2012 national election as independent candidate and was unsuccessful. This was her second time to contest the national elections.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The three female candidates reported three key factors that contribute to an effective campaign: finance, campaign strategies and political party affiliation. These factors are also critical for male candidates.

However, female candidates should have better strategies to win elections. Apart from having the common campaign strategies such as a campaign committee, ‘haus sel’, identity card, poster and banner, Sharon Mathias’ campaign strategy included 200 printed fun run T-shirts with her picture and campaign message, organised a forum for all the candidates to share their policies, and had a locally composed song aired few times on her campaign vehicle around Lae city. Here, campaign messages are important.

Miong Kila, on the other hand, used the limited preferential voting system to gain support from male candidates by exchanging voters’ preferences. For example, if her voter gives her preference number one, then the voter’s preference number two will be given to the male candidate, and the same for his voters. The female candidate must campaign better to gain more votes to win.

**Challenges faced by female candidates**

Female candidates and their supporters were interviewed about the main challenges faced by female candidates during the campaign period. The responses reflect similar views from the candidates and their supporters. Figures 1a and 1b capture these responses in the Lae and Huon Gulf districts respectively. Aside from common challenges of logistical support and money politics, issues more specific to female candidates were gender stereotype sentiments, criticisms of female MPs, lack of family support, and intimidation.

**Figure 1a: Lae voters’ perspective on challenges faced by female candidates**

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The text continues on the next page...
Cultural perceptions and traditional gender roles

Figures 1a and 1b clearly portray voters’ negative perception of female candidates. Of the 165 respondents in Lae, 63 voters (38%) identified stereotype sentiments as barriers for female candidates. These 63 voters comprised of 19 voters who criticised the female candidates; 14 voters who shared stereotype sentiments, 11 voters who mentioned male candidates going against female candidates, 10 voters who viewed women as not capable of holding leadership positions, and nine voters who had negative perceptions and comments against women candidates.

In contrast, in the Huon Gulf District, 13 of the 102 respondents viewed gender stereotypes as a challenge faced by women and five of the 102 respondents viewed intimidation by men as a security issue for female candidates during election.

Common challenges

Figures 1a and 1b show that 24 of the 165 (14.5%) respondents in Lae and 41 of the 102 (40.2%) respondents in the Huon Gulf indicated that logistics is the main challenge for the female candidates. This is also true for male candidates but more so for the female candidates. The women must secure far more resources, given that many have to campaign far better than men to win. For example, the female candidate who contested in the rural electorate in this study estimated her campaign costs approximated K200,000. Yet, she could not cover all three LLGs in the electorate due to challenges such as mountainous geographical terrain and numerous rivers that border the LLGs in her electorate.

In addition, money politics hinder the women. In Lae, seven of the 165 respondents (4.0%) mentioned that women's primary challenge was money politics (see Figure 1a). This was also in line with the female candidates’ interviews. Female candidates described their campaigns as ‘clean’ compared to campaigns run by male candidates. Some respondents mentioned that they had seen voters receive K50 or K100 from supporters of some candidates. Other challenges for female candidates include having a good campaign strategy, security, and popularity.
**Critical factors for female candidates**

Another important area to understand the challenges of female candidates is by looking at the critical factors that influence female candidates’ election outcome. Figures 2a and 2b illustrate the perceptions of voters on the critical factors. The voters’ results were similar to that of the female candidates. The most common critical factors highlighted in Lae are support, policies, *han mak*, and working with women. *Han mak* is a Tok Pisin term (literally translated as hand mark) often used to refer to someone leaving a mark or making a difference in the community. *Han mak* is a tangible impact in the community. These include infrastructure and services that people directly benefit from (roads, bridges and so on). *Han mak* is the main reason that people in Lae vote for a candidate, and this is also a major challenge for female candidates.

Critical factors mentioned by respondents in the Huon Gulf include support from women, support from the community, display of leadership qualities (such as confidence), and *han mak*.

**Figure 2a: Lae voters’ views on critical factors that can contribute to female candidates’ outcome**

![Bar chart showing critical factors for female candidates in Lae](image-url)
Figure 2b: Huon Gulf voters’ views on critical factors that can contribute to female candidates’ outcome

![Bar chart showing voter views on critical factors contributing to female candidates' outcome.](chart.png)

**Support for campaign**

Figure 2a shows that 36 of the 165 respondents (21.8%) in Lae believed that support is a key factor that can influence a female candidate’s election outcome. Support in terms of finance, logistics, campaign committee, and supporters in general is also important.

However, despite 21 of the 102 respondents in the Huon Gulf being unsure of challenges faced by female candidates, 16 of the 102 respondents (15.7%) mentioned that more specific support from women voters is important (Figure 2b). Huon Gulf data shows an interesting result because the majority of respondents are male. This illustrates their perception that only women can support female candidates.

**Voting for the candidate more than the policies**

Most of the factors contributing to preference for a candidate relate more to the person than their proposed policies. Figures 3a and 3b highlight voters’ knowledge of their preferred candidates. A candidate will most likely get more votes if they are related to the voter, support the community, and have *han mak*, rather than on the basis of their policies.

Figure 3a shows that 24 of the 165 respondents (14.5%) in Lae, and in Huon Gulf, 34 of the 102 respondents (33.3%) supported a candidate because the voter is related to the candidate (Figure 3b). The voter and candidate relatedness can be as kin, from the same district or province, or related by marriage. This indicates that more voters vote for a candidate not because of the policies the person stands for but other factors.

In addition, 40 of the 49 respondents (81.6%) candidates who contested the Lae Open Seat are not originally from Lae. Here, relations extend beyond blood lines where supporters and voters are bound to be people from the same province and friendships forged by candidates in the city over time.
Community relations

The other common factor that influences voters’ preference for a candidate is when the candidate has a good relationship with the community. This entails actively engaging and maintaining ongoing presence in the
community: helping youths, women and families especially in their times of need. As Figure 3a shows, 16 respondents (9.7%) indicated supporting youth, nine respondents (5.5%) indicated supporting women, and a further nine respondents (5.5%) mentioned charity work in the community as things they know about their candidates.

For Huon Gulf electorate, Figure 3b shows only 10 of the 102 respondents (9.8%) mentioned that they know their candidate from support work in the community.

**Han mak**

Figures 4a and 4b clearly show that *han mak* is the most common reason given for voting for a candidate: 59 of the 165 respondents (35.8%) in the Lae District and 33 of the 102 respondents (32.4%) in the Huon Gulf district indicated this. This shows that people want to see tangible services and prefer to vote for a candidate who has *han mak* in their community.

**Figure 4a: Lae voters’ reasons for voting for a candidate**

![Graph showing reasons for voting in Lae](image)

**Figure 4b: Huon Gulf voters’ reasons for voting for a candidate**

![Graph showing reasons for voting in Huon Gulf](image)

Other factors that voters in Lae and in Huon Gulf electorates both vote for include policies, political party, related/family, leadership qualities and capability to make changes in the community.
Discussion of key findings

This section discusses the main findings of the study. The discussion is presented under two broad headings of challenges facing female candidates contesting in elections and the main factors that determine who voters choose to vote for.

Challenges faced by female candidates

Female candidates face gendered challenges that hinder them from contesting and winning elections. These challenges are cultural and gender stereotype sentiments and lack of support during campaign.

Gender stereotype sentiments

A stereotype that all women are the same is biased and unfair because women are diverse individuals with different abilities and interests — intersectionality is a fact of life for women as well as men. People tend to look at the personal life of women more than their role as MPs. Many respondents made reference to Loujaya Kouza’s divorce (former member for Lae District) as a reason for not voting for her again or for another woman. When women are few in Parliament, they tend to be closely watched and expected to have a flawless personal life. This finding supports Baker’s (2015, p. 13) argument that “criticisms of the behaviour of female MP’s is often articulated in terms of their status as role models of the women”. It is tough for women both inside and outside Parliament when performance of the three female MPs (2012–2017) was used as a benchmark to measure the capability of other female candidates.

Cultural perceptions and traditional gender roles

Gender roles in PNG are still defined by perceptions of ‘traditional culture’ in many areas. Leadership is one area often described as ‘men’s business’ and women in leadership are often seen as stepping outside of traditional cultural practices. This is mainly because of the gender roles that are expected to be performed by men and women. Sepoe (2002) emphasised that “women’s struggle for power is not geared towards obtaining possessive or extractive power, but rather ‘power to empower’. This type of power is inextricably linked to female gender roles in society” (Sepoe, 2002, p.28). Gender roles are learned and can be changed, as seen in other areas. For example, women are able to take up leadership roles in the public or the private sector.

The general traditional attitude about gender roles pose a hindrance for women to fully and actively participate in national politics, where voters are caught between leaders viewed as ‘bigmen’ (mostly in the rural areas), and women increasingly being viewed as capable of becoming leaders in urban settings (Fairio, 2014). Interviews with female candidates portray the ‘shift in the traditional thinking’ that female candidates are now seen as potential leaders and not as women per se. This may be because of the support that female candidates receive from their campaign committee and those who attend the campaign houses, most of whom are men.

Voter views also demonstrated the embedded traditional perception of women as inferior and that only men can hold leadership positions or become an MP. This is an underlying issue in societies that are defined as patrilineal, where men are expected to perform leadership roles. These cultural undertones are reflected by the evidence of views from Lae and Huon Gulf, which are ethnically diverse electorates with cultural influences from all over PNG.

For example, most of the women interviewed were from rural areas and vote in line with the choices of the ‘haus line’. In these areas, men are the head of the family in a patrilineal society. Women do not exercise the right to vote for a candidate of their choice, whether the candidate be male or female. This confirms Haley and Zubrinich’s (2013) argument that men and women experience and participate in elections differently and women do not fully and meaningfully participate in elections.
Lack of campaign support

Female candidates need a lot of support, which ranges from finance, moral, and more votes — mainly because of the cultural perspective and traditional gender roles that disadvantage them. Support can come from family members, communities, their political party and from general supporters who vote for the candidate. Even relatives of the husband play a significant role in the support base. For example, a male relative of the divorced husband of Loujaya Kouza was her campaign coordinator in the 4–Mile area. He mentioned that, despite the divorce between his relative and Loujaya, he supported Loujaya because he believed that she would implement projects in his community.

This shows a change in perception that divorced women are not capable of becoming involved in politics. Also, a man's support demonstrates the changing gender relations where men are willing to support women in their campaign and see women as leaders. Or the man's support may be temporary in order to gain immediate benefits.

Support is needed at different stages of the election process. Initially, the immediate family and clan or community agrees that the woman can stand for election. Her aunts, sisters, and mothers from the community prepare food for the campaign houses. Men who support female candidates campaign in other areas. There are general supporters who come to the campaign houses and help the female candidate and largely make up her base votes.

However, lack of financial support for logistics was the main challenge for all three female candidates. Sharon Mathias, an independent candidate for Lae Open seat, reported that lack of finance had limited her campaign to only a few areas. Loujaya Kouza and Miong Kila also alluded to finance as their main challenge. All three women used their personal funds to campaign.

Further, money politics and political party affiliation are two key challenges that affect both male and female candidates; however, voters feel that these challenges impact women more when combined with gendered challenges that further disadvantage them. As Haley and Zubrinich (2013) noted, it is not a level political playing field. Female candidates are faced with so many hurdles and challenges.

Vote buying further disadvantages female candidates

A common challenge reported by female candidates was bribery or vote buying. It is illegal to give money, food and materials to a voter for their vote. ‘Treating’ — paying for material things such as food for a voter is illegal under the Criminal Code Act 1974 and carries a penalty of a fine not exceeding K400 or an imprisonment of no more than one year. This law is not effective in practice. Vote buying is widespread and has also been observed in previous elections (Ketan, 2013; Standish, 2013; May et al., 2011).

According to the Transparency International PNG Report “almost half (45.2%) [of the respondents] reported that voters were offered bribes or asked for bribes in order to vote for a particular candidate on polling day” (Transparency International PNG, 2017, p. 19). Money politics is a worrying trend that undermines democracy when the voters are demanding and the candidates try to meet their demands.

The observation at the campaign houses was that some supporters believed there would be ‘free handouts’ — a practice used by other candidates in previous campaigns. This was also reported by the European Union election observation report, “as in the past, voters had expectations of financial or material reward in exchange for their votes and candidate vote–buying behaviour was widespread across the country” (European Union, 2017, p. 20). For example, many mentioned that the sitting MP, Loujaya Kouza, should have spent money during her campaign. However, she did not and had few campaign houses and did not provide food or handouts of any other goods. The unwillingness or inability for female candidates to meet people's expectations of buying votes with money or materials has been a challenge that has affected their support and, in turn, votes.

Money politics further disadvantage female candidates because they struggle to carry out a clean campaign. Ketan’s (2013) synthesis of election reviews mentioned that a lot of money in campaign hospitality and direct vote buying at the polling stations had contributed to the unequal playing field and had disadvantaged female
candidates. This hinders people from voting freely and also contributes to the gender gap in Parliament. Therefore, money politics is clearly gendered (Haley & Zubrinich, 2015) and will continue to disadvantage female candidates.

**Lack of political party affiliation and support to female candidates**

Political parties are vehicles for promoting democratic process. Parties have a responsibility to support their endorsed candidates. However, the behaviour of political parties is contrary to the principles in the OLIPPAC. Anere (2011) stated that the political culture dictates the behaviour of political parties and candidates, and some areas of regulation governing political parties have been difficult to administer. One is section 83, which deals with funding for female candidates.

Section 83 encourages endorsement of female candidates by providing a financial incentive of 75 percent of campaign funds to be reimbursed to the party; this is provided only if the endorsed female candidate receives 10 percent of the total votes in that electorate. However, political parties have not found this appealing and they only endorse candidates (both men and women) who they think will win elections (Anere, 2011; Anere & Wheen, 2009; Gelu, 2011). This is because parties tend to be more interested in power games than promoting democratic governance (Sepoe, 2002).

Two female candidates in this study — Loujaya Kouza (Lae Open) and Miong Kila (Huon Gulf Open) — were endorsed by the THE Party. The women agreed to join the THE Party because the party leader supported gender equality. However, the THE Party was able to support them with only 2,000 posters. According to the female candidates, many political parties did not have sufficient money to support their candidates to run an effective and successful campaign. It was also observed that the party leader’s non-presence at the electorate during the campaign was discouraging and also contributed to less interest and support from potential voters.

Lack of party support to female candidates is a recurring concern that has been highlighted in previous elections (Haley & Zubrinich, 2013; Sepoe, 2013; Gelu, 2011; Anere, 2009). In the 2017 national election, only 60 of the 167 (36%) female candidates were endorsed by political parties; the remaining female candidates (64%) stood as independent candidates. It was even more difficult for women who stood as independent candidates because they funded their own campaign. The fact that so few female candidates were endorsed by parties raises an important question: why do parties not endorse women? This area requires further research.

**Fulfilling community expectations**

The findings of this study indicate that having a good relationship with the community and leaving one’s *han mak* through tangible contributions are important to getting elected.

**Good relationship with the community**

Many voters mentioned that female candidates must have a good relationship with the community. Working with women and youth within the community has been highlighted by voters; it is considered a key priority that intending female candidates are involved in the community when preparing for elections. This is mainly related to the cultural perception that ‘a mother looks after the house’ and ‘the family’. However, despite the efforts by the female candidates to ‘connect’ with the community, people’s expectations vary because everyone has different needs.

During her term in Parliament, Loujaya Kouza implemented projects targeted at youth and women — for example, youth skills training through Ginigoada and Exodus Project Management programs. She also funded sewing machines for women to undertake sewing classes and built a resource centre in Butibum village. She visited communities that were facing problems such as tribal fights and violence, and she financed corrugated iron roof sheets for people in Busurum when their houses were burnt by tribal fights. Many of the beneficiaries of these projects supported Loujaya during her campaign. Her relationship with the people can be described as an ‘indirect relationship’ through their community leaders called ‘maus man’. These leaders represented the people during her campaign and spoke on behalf of the people in various communities.
Sharon Mathias, on the other hand, had ‘direct relationship’ with the people around the 4 Mile area and the people of Eastern Highlands in Lae. Her relationship was built on helping the people in her community. She provided a ‘soup kitchen’ out of her pocket to the youths at the 4-Mile area from 2014 to 2015. She fed 60 to 80 youths twice a week and prayed with them. However, the youths misunderstood that she was benefiting by helping them, so she stopped the soup kitchen towards the end of 2015. She later facilitated the youths to build a stone wall for the FODE School and employed some to help around the school. In addition, she mediated a conflict that existed in the 4-Mile area for some time, where she bought two cows and gathered the two tribes to resolve the conflict. This gesture contributed to her support from the men, women and children. However, she did not build relationships outside her base area.

Miong Kila built her relationship based on the network of the Provincial Council of Women. Her support base was comprised of women within the electorate. However, funding limited her ability to implement projects to support the women as well as implementing tangible projects leaving her han mak in the community.

**Han mak**

Candidates who make tangible contributions by leaving their *han mak* in communities are people with money, influence and power. Men usually have all three factors or at least two, and this gives them advantage over female candidates.

The three female candidates have made tangible contributions to their communities, but their *han mak* were not sufficient for them to be voted into parliament. The question is: how much is sufficient to get elected? There is no clear answer to this question because electoral politics are contextual, and there are varying challenges and critical factors that influence election outcome.

During Loujaya Kouza’s term in parliament (2012–2017), she implemented projects primarily in the areas where she received preference number one vote in the 2012 Election. The areas where she received second preference in the 2012 Election saw less *han mak*. This is not surprising because previous MPs have done the same when elected into parliament. Examples of Loujaya Kouza’s *han mak* are the supply of water and electricity to the Bumbu area and financing the building of a community centre in Butibum village. Despite her efforts to implement projects targeting different groups, many of the voters interviewed purported not to have seen or benefited from tangible projects during her term.

Implementing projects in the first term of parliament can be difficult, particularly as a female first-time parliamentarian, and she was prepared to do more if elected for another five years. For Loujaya, it became even more difficult because her private life was often portrayed as a public matter. Gendered stereotype sentiments make it harder for female candidates to compete on an equal footing with men.

Despite how well prepared female candidates are prior to and during campaigns, the wider socioeconomic, political and cultural factors contribute to hindering women’s electoral success.
This section ends with conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of this study to enhance women’s political participation.

**Broader support base**

Support is a key factor. Female candidates need support from within and outside their support base. They need to establish ties with the community and build a good relationship with people, particularly the women and youths and show *han mak*. Doing so would gain the trust and confidence of potential voters.

In this respect, networking is very important. Support from family and supporters alone is not sufficient to conduct a thorough campaign or gain votes. In addition, the media is a powerful tool that can be used to connect with other communities to circulate news and information.

**Intending female candidates preparation time is critical**

Campaign is important and female candidates need to prepare well to conduct an effective campaign. An early start to planning for critical campaign activities such as researching and developing policy platforms and designing campaign strategies is important. Female candidates should start preparing for campaign at least five years in advance to allow adequate time to secure sufficient resources, set up a core campaign committee and be ahead of the game.

**Finance**

Sourcing funds early is important. A female candidate must start early to secure sufficient financial resources to support her campaign. One approach could be through ‘crowd sourcing’ fundraising initiatives. For example, supporters both within and outside her support base can make a pledge of K1.00 every day for a period of four years to fund her campaign.

**Joining a political party**

Women who intend to contest are encouraged to join a party before elections and work with a party to be familiar with its roles and functions. In this way, party leaders can see a female candidate’s potential to be voted and endorse her. Otherwise, parties must make a commitment to substantially support its members — both men and women equally — as they carry the party’s policies and platforms. One approach is for parties to conduct effective fundraising events to support their candidates and work closely with members. In this way, parties can truly promote democratic principles of equality and participation.

**Addressing money politics**

System strengthening is most likely the way forward to address money politics. This includes enforcing the electoral laws and for all responsible agencies to work together: Police, Electoral Commission, Ombudsman Commission, and other relevant agencies. When money politics are addressed, people vote democratically and female candidates will have more chance to be voted without the undue influence of money from candidates.

**Approaches must be holistic and sustainable**

At the national level, approaches to address the underrepresentation of women in parliament must be holistic and sustainable (long term) with a wider scope. Many of the support programs are funded by international partners and are short term or one off. Such approaches must involve key stakeholders who are supporting the female candidates. For example, training for female candidates should also include men who are working closely with the female candidates, such as male campaign managers. This would allow men to share their experiences and ideas with female candidates in areas that need improvement. In addition, engagement of previous female MPs as mentors of intending candidates in these programs is vital.
Further, the mandated ODW should take full responsibility to coordinate programs under this area. This includes sufficient resources and a separate budget to implement programs that focus on women in leadership. Moreover, other agencies that are implementing related programs must involve or work alongside the ODW.

Finally, if all parties play their part effectively in promoting gender equality and good governance, we can at least get some women elected in the 2022 National Elections.

Areas that require further research:

- The question of why political parties do not endorse female candidates needs to be better understood.
- More research is needed to understand how some women overcome barriers and get elected.
The findings of this study show that female candidates who contested in the 2017 National Election in Lae and the Huon Gulf districts face enormous challenges with lack of resources, influence and money, which are key determinants that influence votes in elections. While many of these challenges affect both male and female candidates, women are also faced with deeply embedded sociocultural and gender stereotype sentiments that further reduce their chances of winning elections. This requires female candidates to work even harder to obtain the necessary votes.

Our contribution to understanding reasons that female candidates are not being elected is from the perspective of voters. It is critical for women to have a long-term presence in the community. They need to build relationships, especially with women and youth, and make tangible contributions or have some *han mak*. In addition, it is critical for female candidates to start planning well ahead to build and broaden their support base, secure funds, develop a good campaign strategy, and secure political party support.

Finally, unless female candidates have the support of relevant stakeholders, women will continue to 'struggle' in this unequal playing field of politics. At the national level, there is a need to establish holistic approaches to address the current gender gap in the parliament. Approaches must be inclusive, because poor representation of women in the parliament is no longer women’s issue only. We should involve men when working towards gender equality. Most importantly, the approaches should be long term and sustainable so that there is momentum and interest in the collective efforts towards addressing the gender gap in the parliament.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that female candidates who contested in the 2017 National Election in Lae and the Huon Gulf districts face enormous challenges with lack of resources, influence and money, which are key determinants that influence votes in elections. While many of these challenges affect both male and female candidates, women are also faced with deeply embedded sociocultural and gender stereotype sentiments that further reduce their chances of winning elections. This requires female candidates to work even harder to obtain the necessary votes.

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