



Qualitative Assessment Report

Women's Inclusion

**in the Post-Referendum Consultations between the
National Government of Papua New Guinea and the
Autonomous Bougainville Government**

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Summary of Assessment Findings

Despite delays caused by a series of political factors and the COVID-19 pandemic, the post-referendum intergovernmental consultations between the Papua New Guinea (PNG) National Government and the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) were initiated 18 months after the non-binding referendum in which 97.7% Bougainvilleans voted for independence. In 2021, the two governments achieved a few significant milestones in defining the consultation agenda. Ample public consultation, including by women, youth, and interest groups, would also be needed to guarantee buy-in and lasting results of the peace process. As the intergovernmental consultations on the future of Bougainville are steadily progressing, women call for more inclusion in the talks.

This assessment aims to provide women's groups and other civic activists an overview of the structure and achievements of the post-referendum consultation process to date, as well as insights on public views on the advancements and challenges of the process, including women's participation and expectations from the international community. Evidence-based analysis can help inform advocacy, public policy, and programming aimed at strengthening women's political participation, democratic processes, and inclusive peace in PNG. The study serves as a benchmark for future citizen monitoring and provides data for advocacy on women's inclusion in various consultation bodies. The qualitative assessment was conducted from January to September 2021 and included key informant interviews and focus group discussions in Buka and Port Moresby, a workshop with government and civil society leaders from Bougainville and PNG in Port Moresby, and a document review. Below are the key findings.

Increased communication between the national and Bougainville governments is seen as a sign of improving mutual trust and political commitment to advancing the outstanding matters of the peace agreement. In the absence of a broad shared understanding of the timeline and the anticipated outcomes of the consultation process, even just having a process in place is viewed as a step in the right direction. However, this positive development is seen as fragile and dependent on political circumstances that may swiftly change, thus impacting the intergovernmental consultations. Additionally, some hold reservations about whether the current National Government is committed to seeing through the consultation process and allowing the region to achieve independence.

The consultation process is taking place against a backdrop of sharpening economic stress in the context of COVID-19 and increasing demands for public services, strengthening rule of law, and mitigating the risk of reemerging localized conflicts. Some Bougainville-based participants see independence as the *prerequisite* to addressing the province's long-term governance, socio-economic, and security issues. For others, the main challenges—namely building a well-governed and self-reliant country—lie beyond independence and are chiefly the responsibility of Bougainville's leaders. Additionally, some Bougainville participants stressed the importance of keeping the province's population on board by enhanced communication to ensure that their initial buy-in continues to remain strong.

There is a significant knowledge gap between Bougainville and Port Moresby participants about the consultations process, and in particular about the various bodies and their operations. Participants in Bougainville professed familiarity with the consultation structures overall and saw the consultation process as a work in progress, but there is limited awareness about the mechanics of the consultation, beyond those directly involved in the consultation structures. Participants in Port Moresby had very little awareness of the process.

Bougainville participants praised the ABG's efforts to design an inclusive intraregional process. Multiple avenues—including a leaders' forum and independence-ready committees—have been created for leaders of the non-government sectors, including veterans, churches, civil society, youth, women, and the private sector, to participate in decentralized, regional forums where voices outside of the capital can contribute. Some would like to see this approach translated to the intergovernmental talks, too.

Though participants hold mixed views on the gendered nature of consultation priorities, there is consensus in principle about the value of having women at the consultations table to ensure fair representation and better outcomes. The participants in this research were also unaware of gender-sensitive and inclusion training offered to the members of the consultation structures, or if the intergovernmental meeting agendas took into consideration women and other groups' input. Additionally, some consider that consultations moderated by an international, impartial figure would lead to more inclusive discussions overall, where women and civil society would be recognized and given more opportunities to speak during official meetings, which are sometimes seen as dominated by male, government voices. Some women participants would also feel encouraged if a moderator and government officials explicitly acknowledged the importance of having women in the talks, which would bolster women's confidence to speak up.

Including more women can lead to improved outcomes, public outreach, and can reduce the risk of renewed conflict. Women demand the inclusion of more women's voices in the consultation process to increase its legitimacy and buy-in. Women are also seen as having more integrity and motivation to observe the consultation process than their male counterparts. Research participants in Bougainville reported that public communication on the consultation process needs to be improved, as some key information remains available only to political power circles, despite the efforts mentioned above. In some participants' views, due to their unique roles in their families and communities, women can contribute to conflict prevention by neutralizing tensions early on.

Participants see a need to build women's capacity to effectively fulfil high-level representation and consultation roles and call on development partners to cascade capacity building, such as negotiation skills and policy making at the community level, to avoid further exclusion. Women-led local civil society organizations in Bougainville are seen as active, but there doesn't seem to be a clear pathway to influence the consultations. There are concerns about a lack of opportunities for women to develop their civic participation skills and practice leadership, which are also shared by focus group participants in Port Moresby. They talk about a need to strengthen information exchanges between women's groups and delegations, to encourage the consultation parties to raise gender issues and protect women's rights, and create more avenues for advocacy outside the PNG parliament, which has no women members at the moment. A few participants also mentioned dissention and a lack of solidarity among women's organizations and leaders as a cause for their limited voice and impact in the consultation process.

The international community remains an important pillar for the inclusion of women and marginalized groups in PNG's transitional processes. Women participants in particular suggest continuing to build on inclusion successes in Bougainville by further supporting the elected members of the parliament in a push to open the national parliament to more women MPs. Additionally, international partners are seen as well-positioned to put pressure on the national and Bougainville governments to open space for the participation of marginalized groups. However, at the same time, participants across genders and localities request respect for the Melanesian culture, a long-term engagement, inclusive programming for women, and strategic patience from development partners.

Introduction. Context and Methodology

Despite delays caused by a series of political factors and the COVID-19 pandemic, the post-referendum intergovernmental consultations between the Papua New Guinea (PNG) National Government and the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) were initiated 18 months after the non-binding referendum in which 97.7% Bougainvilleans voted for independence. The constitutionally-mandated consultations require the national PNG government and ABG to consult on the result of the 2019 Bougainville referendum. If the two sides agree on the result of the consultations, it would be tabled in the national parliament—the final decision-making body—for ratification.

This development, under the leadership of the PNG Prime Minister James Marape and Bougainville President Ishmael Toroama, has been seen favorably by analysts and Bougainvilleans, but remains largely unknown by the public in PNG as a whole. As consultations progress, the two parties will have a few key issues before them. First, the consultation process, structures, and operations need to be better articulated to enable citizens to gain a deeper understanding of the goals, timeline, and possible outcomes of the process. While the Bougainville government has put forward a unified, clear agenda and message, the PNG government still needs to enunciate its position. Ample public consultation, including by women, youth, and interest groups, would also be needed to guarantee buy-in and lasting results of the peace process. However, women's participation in the political process in Papua New Guinea remains marginal, in spite of civil society and women's rights activists demanding more openings for women to have a say in key political developments and ensure that women's views and priorities are fairly heard and acted upon by decision makers. As the intergovernmental consultations on the future of Bougainville are steadily progressing, women call for more inclusion in the talks.

This assessment aims to provide women's groups and other civic activists an overview of the structure and achievements of the post-referendum consultation process to date, as well as insights on public views on the advancements and challenges of the process, including women's participation and expectations from the international community. Evidence-based analysis can help inform advocacy, public policy, and programming aimed at strengthening women's political participation, democratic processes, and inclusive peace in PNG. The study serves as a benchmark for future citizen monitoring and research efforts in the country, providing a baseline of women's inclusion in various consultation bodies and public perceptions from which changes can be assessed over time. The research draws on participants' input and international good practices and formulates recommendations for consideration by civil society, government, and development partners interested in supporting stability and good governance in PNG and Bougainville. The research explored the following areas:

- Legal framework provisions for the consultation process and the inclusion of women; inclusion indicators and accountability mechanisms;
- Post-referendum consultation process structures and operations, including the layout of the table(s) of consultations; terms of reference of consultation tables; composition, including the number of women chairpersons, moderators, members of consultations teams, and observers; adequate training and guidance on gender issues across the range of subjects addressed in peace consultations; members selection criteria and mechanisms; types of interactions—formal and informal—among various consultation bodies; and frequency of meetings and process timeline;

- Agenda-related analysis, such as agenda setting and anticipated results; identifying issues that are being elevated and included in the agenda of formal meetings; alignment of official talks agenda and women's needs and aspirations; incentives to facilitate the identification and appointment of qualified women as moderators, members of the consultations teams, and technical experts; expected overall outcomes from the process and gender-specific expectations; perceptions of women's influence in the process, including having adequate space to speak in official meetings; and proposals adopted in official documents;
- Public outreach and feedback loops, in particular, how individual women filling an official role in consultations and who participate on behalf of women as a social group report back to the community; and
- Advocacy initiatives, topics, and engagement with consultation bodies by domestic women's groups; assessing effectiveness and opportunities for improvement.

This qualitative research employed primary and secondary data analysis, through conducting in-depth interviews with key informants, focus group discussions, and a desk review of relevant literature. The desk review was used for the examination and interpretation of existing data to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge.¹ Interviews and focus group discussions were used for the collection of primary data to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study,² including views, perceptions, and attitudes toward the post-referendum consultation process. While the in-depth interviews provide a deeper understanding of the issues studied due to increased access to decision-making circles, official documents, and broader social networks, the focus group discussions enable participants to participate in an exchange of ideas, and in the process, reveal why a certain view is prevalent in a community.

The desk review involved consulting several types of printed and online publications, including:

- Legislation, including the PNG Constitution and the Bougainville Draft Constitution; the Bougainville Peace agreement;
- Resolutions adopted by the Joint Supreme Body (JSB);
- Other official documents, such as joint statements by PNG and Bougainville leaders;
- UN resolutions and reports;
- Parliamentary reports, policy papers, and analyses published by governmental and nongovernmental organizations in the Pacific region;
- Official bulletins and governmental websites;
- Academic articles, and
- Media reports.

The literature review looked at the following main themes to set the context for the research: women's role in building peace and security, including common challenges and opportunities; Bougainville women's place in society and their peacebuilding role during and after the conflict; and the architecture and key stakeholders of the post-referendum consultation process, including intra-Bougainville initiatives. A limitation of this research was the inability to triangulate some of the data identified on third-party websites or mentioned by research participants during the primary data collection with official data. In particular, data related to the structure, mandate, selection criteria of, and the exact composition of the consultation bodies, including technical teams and observers, was difficult to verify; the findings will need to be revisited when more official

¹ J. Corbin & A. Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008).

² J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018).

information becomes available for a clearer understanding of the architecture and interaction of various consultation and technical bodies.

In the first phase of the research, in February and March 2021, the research team conducted seven key informant interviews with selected individuals who had direct knowledge of the Bougainville peace process, due to former or current roles. The interviews included former and current MPs, members in the consultation teams and other officials, women civil society leaders, an ex-combatant, and an academic. As leaders in their communities, these individuals can speak to the aspirations and concerns of others. The seven key informants were five women and two men. Their insights contributed to further refining the literature review and informing the focus group discussions. In the second phase the research team conducted four focus group discussions. To ensure homogeneity and open conversation among more like-minded individuals, two focus groups were conducted in Port Moresby, the PNG capital, and two in Buka, the capital city of the Bougainville region. The focus groups were also gender segregated. A short screening questionnaire implemented during the recruitment was used to assess the prospective participants' familiarity with current national affairs and their openness to speak their mind. All findings are qualitative and inherently not statistically representative, as they are based on the opinions of 44 participants in total. As political views in Bougainville converge greatly on the topic of pursuing independence, as the 2019 referendum has demonstrated, and as the participants in Buka are exposed to a cross-section of Bougainville society due to their roles and affiliations, they are therefore able to speak to these people's priorities and concerns. Due to the complexity of PNG society as a whole and the range of views across socio-demographic groups, more focus group discussions would have been needed to reach data saturation. The focus groups specifications are detailed below:

Location of focus group	Date	Number of participants	Gender	Socio-Demographics
Buka	June 14, 2021	9	Men	Public servants, self-employed and entrepreneurs, civil society representatives
Buka	June 14, 2021	8	Women	Ward, church, and civil society representatives
Port Moresby	June 5, 2021	9	Men	Public servants, journalists, academics, students
Port Moresby	June 7, 2021	11	Women	Students, academics, and public sector employees

The in-depth interview and focus group analyses aim to capture themes, key conclusions, and points of tension, as opposed to following the question-by-question structure of guidelines, as this latter approach risks falling into a more descriptive style or straight reporting and excludes the core benefit provided by qualitative research—depth, imagery, and expression. Two analysts read the transcripts independently to draw key takeaways. The key findings and recommendations were presented for discussion and validation at a workshop conducted on September 29, 2021, which was attended by 24 participants, including government officials from PNG and Bougainville, members of the consultation bodies, members of parliament, women's groups, church leaders, and academics. The desk research was conducted throughout the research period, to capture ongoing decisions and official positions. This report is the culmination of these efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the research timeline and the primary data collection stage. The initial schedule coincided with an outbreak of cases in PNG, in February 2021, which led to prolonged disruptions of travels, restrictions on public gatherings, and self-isolation policies. The lead field researcher first traveled to Buka in March to conduct scheduled interviews and focus group discussions in March 2021, but a swift lockdown and flight cancellation led to deferring the focus groups discussions until June 2021 when domestic travel became more permissive. The interviews and focus group discussions in Port Moresby were postponed several times, as COVID-19 cases soared from March to June. Rescheduling some of the research activities due to COVID-19 affected the initial selection criteria envisioned for participants. Initially, NDI planned to recruit an equal number of key informants in Buka and Port Moresby, and to select focus group participants who meet one of the following criteria: participated in or observed the negotiations for independence from PNG; are academics or researchers who have studied the negotiation process; or are involved in civil society or in other groups in this capacity have conducted activities related to the negotiations process of at least one of the three pillars of the Bougainville Peace Agreement (BPA). These criteria became impossible to maintain throughout the focus groups, as some participants withdrew from the research because of COVID-19 concerns, and others were no longer available when we rescheduled the discussions. Consequently, some participants in focus groups discussion have not directly participated in the peace process. All primary data collection was conducted in person in compliance with COVID-19 safety regulations.

Part One: Key Findings of the Literature Review

I. Women's Role in Building Peace and Security

I.1. Engendering a peace process

There is widespread acceptance that women should be equally represented in peace negotiations during conflicts and the peace-building process following conflicts, but in practice most political institutions in conflict and post-conflict societies tend to perpetuate an exclusionary attitude towards women.³ The UN Resolution 1325/2000 urges all parties involved in peace negotiations and post-conflict negotiations to involve women in the “planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration” and to consider the different needs of women, among other marginalized groups. However, women are alarmingly underrepresented in negotiations.⁴

Inclusive negotiations are the foundation of achieving sustainable peace. Involving women in these processes is not merely an argument for quantitative representation. Insufficient representation has implications for the content of agreements; when women are present, even as observers, accords reflect increased attention to gender and women's priorities and needs. Women also often strengthen accords' focus on ensuring security on the ground, promoting reconciliation, and reintegrating both former combatants and those displaced by conflict into society.⁵

*Women are likely to put gender issues on the agenda, introduce other conflict experiences, and set different priorities for peace building and rehabilitation.*⁶ Acting as linchpins of peace processes, women raise political and social issues and elevate the concerns of victims, non-combatants, and other groups. Women also have a solid record of building bridges among opposing parties in unofficial talks. When women are actively involved, peace agreements are more credible and cover a broader range of issues. Their participation widens negotiations beyond topics of military action, power, and wealth sharing, while promoting a non-competitive negotiating style and building bridges among negotiating parties.

Women are also usually perceived to be more trustworthy and less corruptible, and to favor a non-confrontational negotiating style. For example, women negotiators help establish positive relationships and steer talks away from zero-sum games over political domination.⁷ Women also often demand increased political participation post-accord, at both local and national levels, such as quotas, affirmative action measures or non-discrimination guarantees, as well as the creation of national gender machineries at the ministerial level.

I.2. Common Challenges to Women's Participation in Peacebuilding

At least three challenges emerge from studies on women representation in conflict and post-conflict negotiations are relevant to this study. First, in traditional patrilineal societies, women may

³ Bouta, Tsjeard; Frerks, Georg; Bannon, Ian, *Gender, Conflict, and Development*, World Bank., 2005, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/14873>

⁴ In 2012, UN Women found that in 31 major peace processes between 1992 and 2011, only 4 percent of signatories, 2.4 percent of chief mediators, 3.7 percent of witnesses and 9 percent of negotiators were women.

⁵ *UN Women Sourcebook on Women, Peace and Security*, 2012, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2012/10/wpssourcebook-01-overview-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1156>

⁶ Page, Dylan, *Complexities and Context: Women's Peace-Building in Conflict and Post-Conflict Bougainville*, 2012, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/41337679.pdf>

⁷ Koppell, Carla, *Supporting Women in Negotiations: A Model for Elevating their Voices and Reflecting Their Agenda in Peace Deals*, Institute for Inclusive Security, 2009, <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/supporting-women-in-negotiations-a-model-for-elevating-their-voices-and-reflecting-their-agenda-in-peace-deals/>

be further discriminated against in the post-conflict negotiations just as they were before the conflicts.⁸ Up until the end of the Bougainville crisis in 1997, only three women have been elected to the PNG parliament in its 27 years of independence from Australia. None of these women members of parliament (MPs) were from Bougainville. Although Bougainville is predominantly a matrilineal society, as discussed below, this does not necessarily translate into greater political representation or involvement in formal decision making.

Second, in some cases, women make substantial gains in terms of social, economic, and political equality during violent conflicts but struggle to consolidate these gains after the cessation of hostilities. This was the case in Somalia, where women were initially involved in the official peace process, but were marginalized later when men refused to have women be their representatives.⁹ Similarly, the women of Bougainville made significant contributions toward peace building during the conflict, but in the years immediately following the peace deal, the timing was considered not yet “right” to include more women in the formal decision-making structures.¹⁰

Third, even in societies where women have some political authority, a devastating conflict can erode such authority, and consequently marginalize women in post-conflict negotiations and peace-building processes. For instance, in Liberia, both international agencies and local groups ignored the political power women had held previously because it conflicted with their own framework for post-conflict development projects.¹¹ In Bougainville, with the exception of Buin in the South and a few clans in the Nissan and Siwai atolls, land is predominantly owned by women.¹² Despite having this elevated status in Bougainvillean society, literature on the role of women in negotiating autonomy, weapons disposal, and referendum following the years after the peace agreement in 1997 in Bougainville has provided little evidence in support of this assumption.¹³

I.3. Bougainville Women’s Role in the Peace Process

The following section reviews the place of women in Bougainvillean society, analyzing how women utilized this position to push for an end to the Bougainville crisis, and their role in adopting and localizing international resolutions on women’s political rights. This will provide the background and context for the research that will follow, which aims to assess the role of in the negotiations after the peace deal. With the few exceptions mentioned above, cultural groups in Bougainville practice matriliney, meaning that the inheritance of land passes down the female line.¹⁴ This status is critical to their work as peacemakers, as has been documented by various researchers.¹⁵ Bougainville women’s land ownership includes the right to veto decisions on land-related matters. While the male relatives have rights to ownership, these are quite limited and are conditional on the female relatives’ “tok orait.”¹⁶

The nature of this close relationship with the land would imply that women have had a significant role in Bougainvillean political decision making, but this has not always been the case. When it comes to public representation, elder men act as spokespersons for the clan. For instance, the Siwai

⁸ Page, 2012

⁹ Meredith Thursen. “Engendering Relations of State to Society in the Aftermath” in *The Aftermath: Women in Post-conflict Transformation*, eds. Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay and Meredith Turshen (2001).

¹⁰ Lorraine Garasu, “The role of women in promoting peace and reconciliation in Bougainville,” *Accord*, no. 12 (2002).

¹¹ Mary H. Moran, “Gender, Militarism, and Peace-Building: Projects of the Postconflict Moment” in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 39, 2010.

¹² Regan, Anthony J. “Identities Among the Bougainvilleans” in Anthony J Regan and Helga M Griffin (eds.) *Bougainville before the conflict*, 2005.

¹³ Garasu 2002.

¹⁴ Regan 2005.

¹⁵ Garasu 2002; Page 2012; R. Saovana-Spriggs, “Bougainville women's role in conflict resolution in the Bougainville peace process,” *A Kind of Mending: Restorative Justice in the Pacific Islands* (Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, 2003).

¹⁶ This expression refers to women granting permission.

culture is largely matrilineal, with land being customarily owned by women and inherited down the female genealogical line. This gives women a significant position of power, but men still act as rulers in a “bigman” system, which is a practice of patronage rather than an acquired hereditary title as chief.¹⁷ Furthermore, in the consultation process prior to the opening of the Panguna Mine, women were marginalized and excluded, even though women exclusively own land around Panguna. Language barriers, greed on the part of the men in the communities affected, and a certain male-centrism of mining company officials—who failed to recognize the need to include women in the consultation process—largely contributed to women’s exclusion from the process despite their traditional role as custodians of the land.¹⁸

The lack of women in the PNG parliament, as well as the male-dominated pre-conflict negotiations around the Panguna mine, show that women’s rights-based elevated status did not always translate into greater decision-making roles in formal structures before the conflict. Another dominating perspective on women’s roles is that they are mothers, sisters, wives, and relatives. During the conflict, women were perceived as neutral; they were considered non-combatants as they did not carry weapons and did not pose a direct threat to others.¹⁹ This perception helped women spearhead local peace initiatives during the conflict, but it can also shape a perception that women’s roles are limited to soft power or confined household activities.

I.4. Role of Bougainville women in negotiating peace during the conflict

There were numerous players in the process, including the international community,²⁰ the PNG government, and various factions in Bougainville. However, well before any major international intervention to address the conflict, at the village level people had already begun peace talks among themselves as early as 1990.²¹ As a result, members of warring factions were surrendering on their own accord, while others were persuaded to do so by women, chiefs, and churches. Women’s involvement in the early peace process can be generally classified into two stages: first, the informal, small-scale peace efforts in their immediate communities in the mid-1990s and second, their involvement in the formal peace negotiations starting in 1997. Throughout the Bougainville crisis, women took an active role in pressuring the menfolk to negotiate for peace. Sister Lorraine Garasu’s account states that about 7,700 people participated in women-led initiatives for peace during the conflict.²² An example was a peace march followed by an all-night vigil organized by women from the area around Selau in August 1991. Up to 5,000 people may have attended this event, although it is difficult to verify this claim. The women and the local council of chiefs staged a reconciliation ceremony that included the PNG Defence Forces (PNGDF) and led to the village being officially neutral for the rest of the conflict.²³

This in turn provided an example to neighboring areas, and Bougainville as a whole saw the potential for peace and reconciliation even at this early stage in the overall conflict. Another notable example of women’s desire for peace and their organizational capacity in the early stages of the conflict was a peace conference of church-affiliated women in Arawa in 1996, which drew 700 attendees.²⁴ One of reasons why peace efforts during the conflict—including those led by the women—remained localized and small-scale, was because the conflict had become fractured and

¹⁷ D. Oliver, *Black Islanders: A Personal Perspective of Bougainville 1937-1991* (1991).

¹⁸ M. MacIntyre, “Informed Consent and Mining Projects: The view from Papua New Guinea,” *Pacific Affairs*, 2007.

¹⁹ Saovana-Spriggs 2003.

²⁰ New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, Vanuatu, the UN, and various NGOs.

²¹ Saovana-Spriggs 2003.

²² Garasu 2002.

²³ J. Rolfe, *Peacekeeping the Pacific Way in Bougainville*, International Peacekeeping (2001).

²⁴ Page 2012.

complex, with at least three main groups vying for dominance: PNGDF, the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), and the Bougainville Resistance Front (BRF). The BRF were supported by the PNGDF to fight against the BRA. The breakdown in law and order and a gun culture that emerged during the conflict also led Bougainvilleans to settle pre-conflict grievances.²⁵ Large-scale peace negotiations initiated by the PNG government and the international community before 1997, including five peace talks and two ceasefire agreements broke down.²⁶ At that time, the only way forward was to push for peace initiatives at the grassroots level, an opportunity seized by the women of Bougainville to conduct their local-level interventions.

The second stage of women's involvement in the peace process was during the formal peace negotiations that took place in the later stages of the conflict, mainly in Australia and New Zealand. Women travelled overseas as part of the formal peace attempts that took place during the conflict. In 1995, PNGDF, BRF, and BRA representatives met in Cairns to try to find a mutually acceptable agreement, and women were invited to attend as well as the combatants. When the Burnham talks were initiated two years later, led by New Zealand, women were given even greater representation. The first Burnham talk, known as Burnham I, consisted solely of parties from Bougainville, mostly representatives from the BRA and BRF, with the New Zealand government acting as a neutral host and not becoming involved in the negotiations. Representatives of the PNG government did not take part until the second round of negotiations, or Burnham II, and the formal peace agreement was not reached until a third round of talks, known as the Lincoln Agreement after the name of the university in Christchurch where the talks were held. The Lincoln Agreement stipulated a six-year peacekeeping mission made up of unarmed troops from New Zealand, Australia, Fiji and Vanuatu, which was known as the Peace Monitoring Group (PMG). This was effectively an extension of the Truce Monitoring Group (TMG), which had been operating in Bougainville as a result of the Burnham talks.²⁷ At the Lincoln Agreement in January 1998, 50 Bougainville women participated, and drew an adjourning statement that read: "We the women hold custodial rights of our land by clan inheritance. We insist that women leaders be party to all stages of the political process in determining the future of Bougainville."²⁸

There are a few takeaways from women's role in ending the conflict that may bear lessons for the future. First, although women were better placed to negotiate peace because of their status as landowners in most of Bougainville,²⁹ a decade of violence and the resulting loss of any semblance of stability on Bougainville had a dissipating effect both for formal state institutions as well as cultural structures. This means that the post-conflict social environment was not a strict continuation of the cultures that had existed prior to the outbreak of violence. Women could not rely solely on their status as landowners to influence peace, as these structures were weakened. They had to organize and actively campaign for peace at the grassroots level. Second, the political vacuum created the space for churches and local NGOs, including those led by women, to play a larger role.³⁰ Peace initiatives led by women's groups were a result of a confluence of factors. Their elevated standing in society as landowners, and general perspective as non-combatants or mothers and sisters,³¹ may have played a role. But they also had to actively pursue peace as a group, leading to the development of nascent NGOs. Various accounts argue that these grassroots movements led by women, chiefs, and churches paved the way to bring combatants to the negotiating table when formal peace talks began in the latter part of the 1990s.³²

²⁵ Id.

²⁶ Regan 2002.

²⁷ Savovana-Spriggs 2003.

²⁸ Garasu 2002.

²⁹ Page 2012.

³⁰ V. Boege, "Peacebuilding and State Formation in Post-Conflict Bougainville," *Peace Review* (2009).

³¹ Page 2012.

³² Saovana-Spriggs 2003; Page 2012.

I.5. Legal provisions and women's inclusion in formal decision making in Bougainville

Immediately after the peace negotiations were completed in 1998, two interim political arrangements were set up. In May 1998, the Bougainville Constituent Assembly (BCA) was formed on the basis of a combination of selection, nominations, and appointments, including representatives from churches and women's groups on the island. The people elected a new body called the Bougainville Reconciliation Government in 1999, renamed the Bougainville People's Congress (BPC) in 2001, symbolic of their aspiration for an independent homeland. Despite the women's appeal for greater participation in the political process, only six women were appointed to the 106 member BPC. This became a pattern in future political discourse. Out of the 52 members of the Bougainville delegation at the September 2001 talks on autonomy, a referendum, and arms disposal, only two women were selected to participate. In determining how many women should be part of the negotiation, it was decided that the "timing was not yet right" for greater female representation.³³ It is unclear what arguments were used to legitimize this claim, if it was justified by men's status as "spokespersons" and therefore it was their prerogative to make the decisions, or because women were non-combatants, which meant they should have limited representation.

Established in 2002 under the Bougainville Peace Agreement, the Bougainville Constitutional Commission (BCC) was tasked with drafting the constitution, and included three women's representatives who advocated for a guaranteed voice for women in any new political institutions. As a result, in the 2004 Bougainville Constitution,³⁴ three parliamentary seats out of 40 were reserved for women, along with three seats reserved for ex-combatants; one seat of each category was allocated to each of the three major regions—North, Central, and South Bougainville. Women may also compete against men in the other 34 open seats. Additionally, the Constitution guarantees women a seat in the Bougainville Executive Council (BEC), ensuring their participation at the cabinet level. The Bougainville Constitution provides, "there shall be fair representation of women and marginalized groups on all constitutional and other bodies." Since then, women's groups have successfully lobbied for and supported the development of local frameworks to implement international resolutions, such as the 1979 Convention on all Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW) and Resolution 1325/2000.

The development of the Bougainville Women Peace and Security Action Plan and the Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality, Peace and Security Policy (2016) to contextualize the international instruments have been particularly important in strengthening local claims for women's rights and recognition, as has working in partnership with diverse groups of Bougainvilleans to progress their implementation.³⁵ The Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality, Peace and Security policy (2016) highlights the importance of women's active decision making at all levels of government. Also in 2016, the ABG enacted the Community Government Act (2016), which sets out equal representation of women and men at local government level.³⁶ Then, in 2018, the ABG created an Office for Gender Equality to ensure the integration of gender equality across ABG departments, policies, and programming.

The long-term outcome of all these laws and policies is that there is a woman representative in the Bougainville Executive Council and three women representatives in the ABG House of Representatives under the reserved seats guaranteed by the Constitution. At the local level of

³³ Garasu 2002.

³⁴ The Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, 2004. <http://www.paclii.org/pg/constitution-bougainville-2004.html>

³⁵ A. Kirkham, S. Close & Z. Yousuf, "Gender in political transition: Bougainville's peace process," *Conciliation Resources* (2018).

³⁶ For more information on the ABG Community Government 2021 election calendar, please visit <https://www.abg.gov.pg/index.php/news/read/announcement-of-community-government-election-and-atolls-by-election-dates>.

government, there is gender parity as per the 2016 Community Government Act. This is a significant change from the previous system, where women made up approximately 15 percent of the Council of Elders' membership. The UN Resolution 1325 was adopted through a local policy framework, and a gender office established to ensure gender equality in formal government structures.

There are incremental gains for women's involvement in formal decision making, but two associated limitations stand out. First, the most gains are at the local level. At the highest level, only one woman has been voted into a non-reserved seat since 2005, and there is a misconception that non-reserved seats are "men's seats" because women already have three reserve seats.³⁷ The improved security situation and renewed contact with the outside world has also seen the engagement of external governmental and nongovernmental organizations with the people of Bougainville, with many of these agencies committed to promoting gender equality and awareness of gender issues. With improved security, women's work towards peace and reconstruction shifted to form the foundation of the current grassroots NGO movements.³⁸ Today, there is a well-established women's movement, and the very existence of a resilient civil society—in which women have a prominent role—is widely seen as a legacy of the crisis and peace process.³⁹ Women in Bougainville have therefore had more influence on their male counterparts than women in PNG or other countries.

II. Overview of the Post-Referendum Consultation Process

II.1. The Framework of the Consultations

The 2019 Referendum set the stage for a new phase in the PNG-Bougainville relations. Even though 97.7% of voters in Bougainville voted for independence, the outcome of the referendum will automatically lead to political separation. The general principles of intergovernmental relations between the National Government and the Bougainville Government are enshrined in the PNG Constitution⁴⁰ and state that the autonomy arrangements—having been reached through *consultation* and cooperation—should be implemented in a like manner. The founding documents—the BPA and the Constitution—do not include specific provision for the inclusion of women and other groups in the JSB and on the agenda of the joint consultation process, but the Constitution calls for "equal participation by women citizens in all political, economic, social and religious activities" and "as far as possible, political and official bodies are so composed as to be broadly representative of citizens from the various areas of the country" opening the possibility to increased engagement in the consultation process.

Similarly, the constitution does not define the concept and the framework of the post-referendum consultation process, which is left to the leaders of PNG and Bougainville to decide. The constitution also calls for establishing a procedure to avoid, minimize, and resolve disputes, and prohibits the National Government to withdraw powers from the Bougainville Government or to suspend it. Once the consultation concludes, the PNG Minister for Bougainville Affairs is to present the referendum results to the PNG parliament to decide the future political status of Bougainville, a process also known as the *ratification* of the referendum results.

³⁷ Id.

³⁸ Page 2012.

³⁹ Kirkham et Al. 2018.

⁴⁰ "PNG Constitution and Amendments," https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=44016.

There are a few aspects to highlight here. First, the 2019 referendum is non-binding. Even though a large majority voted for independence, other political options such as “free association” and greater autonomy could be discussed in the joint consultations. To date, the National Government has not formulated an official position in support of Bougainville’s independence or in support of an alternative solution. Second, the presentation of the referendum results to the PNG Parliament and the deliberation by the legislature depend on the outcome of the consultations. The intergovernmental consultations will decide whether the results should be presented to the parliament, and whether ratification should follow. The presentation of the referendum and consultation results would inform the national parliament’s decision—known as the “ratification” of the referendum results—on the political future of Bougainville.

Essentially, the national parliament has the exclusive right to decide whether Bougainville becomes independent or not, but while the intergovernmental consultation is mandatory, the tabling of the results in the National Parliament and the making of a decision by the Parliament are not. In other words, the consultation between the governments could result in a decision not to table the results either for a period or even not at all. The very concept of *ratification* is up for debate and interpretation, too. And finally, unlike the three pillars of the BPA on weapons disposal, autonomy, and referendum—which had clear timelines—neither the consultations or the ratification had a clear timeline enshrined in the fundamental law or the BPA. This means that political will on both consultation sides has a significant weight on the pace and substance of the consultation process.

Additionally, the BPA provides for a gradual realization of autonomy through the transfer of powers and functions from the National Government to the ABG. During the peace negotiations it was understood that Bougainville would need time to develop the capacity to implement laws and undertake functions that had never been its responsibility. Section 295 of the PNG Constitution requires the Bougainville Government to develop its capacity before requesting to the National Government transfer of the powers and functions by giving 12 months’ notice. ABG is then required to consult with the National Government on the transfers of the powers and functions requested. The request can be amended during the consultation before a transfer of the requested power or function takes place. An inter-agency memorandum must then be signed for the transfer to take place. Until the 2019 referendum, the transfer of powers remained slow and incomplete. Not all autonomy powers envisioned in the BPA have been drawn down due to the complexity of the arrangements as well as a turnover of virtually all key PNG personnel since the 2001 agreement was negotiated. This required a renewed effort from Bougainville leaders to socialize these commitments with the new PNG leaders, which proved challenging due to limited political commitment on the part of ministers in the PNG government.⁴¹

II.2. Intergovernmental Consultation Bodies

The BPA and the PNG Constitution provision that intergovernmental consultations are led by a Joint Supervisory Body (JSB) consisting of equal numbers of national and Bougainville government representatives. Originally, the mandate of the body was to oversee the establishment of the autonomous government, prepare the draft legislation to further the objective of the Agreement, and resolve any differences or disputes. The foundational documents state that disagreements are to be settled first through joint consultation; second, through arbitration; and lastly, through legal action in the national courts. The PNG Constitution further provisions that the JSB should provide a forum at which consultations between the National Government and the ABG and their agencies can take place. It gives powers “as are necessary to enable it to perform its functions”; the mandate to develop its own procedures and fix the frequency of its meetings (at least once in each year); set meeting agendas; and set up a rotating chairmanship. Once joint

⁴¹ Regan 2002.

consultations completed, the PNG Minister for Bougainville Affairs would present the referendum results to the PNG parliament, as discussed above. In the beginning, the JSB consisted of PNG and Bougainville government officials, but chronically failed to meet regularly for the review of the pillars of the peace agreement.

Since the mandate of the JSB was first enshrined in the fundamental law, its structure, vision, and operations have evolved and continue to change. To prepare for the post-referendum period, the JSB established a Post-Referendum Planning Task Force in June 2018, chaired at a ministerial level, with senior ministerial representation from both governments, including two women.⁴² The Task Force commenced planning preparations for the post-referendum process and met eight times in 2019, with support from the UN and Conciliation Resources. The Taskforce provided guidance for the two governments on the post-referendum process, including to establish a Joint Post-Referendum Secretariat, to bring together a group of eminent people to support the consultation leaders, as well as to bring in an external moderator.⁴³

After the Referendum, the JSB was retained, but its mandate and structure have evolved from the initial inter-government consultation framework. Now it acts as a high-level political body, co-chaired⁴⁴ by the PNG prime minister and the Bougainville president, and it has been given the role of making final resolutions. The February 2021 JSB Resolution⁴⁵ adopted in Arawa restated that the body would also act as the dispute resolution mechanism for conflicts arising from the joint consultations.

Discussions around dispute resolution mechanisms are not new. A few years ago, the Joint Ministerial Task Force proposed having an international moderator as a potential solution to address perceived bias and prevent conflict between the parties to the intergovernmental consultations. Building on previous JSB resolutions (2019), a Joint Communiqué⁴⁶ endorsed by JSB in February 2021 recommended the selection of an international moderator, but this suggestion has not materialized to date. In fact, in November 2020, Bertie Ahern, former Irish leader and Chairman of the Bougainville Referendum Commission, was invited and accepted to take on this role,⁴⁷ but it is unclear if COVID-19 restrictions or other reasons have delayed the implementation of this decision. At the moment of drafting this report, the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in PNG, chairs the intergovernmental meetings.

The desk review and interviews revealed that each delegation attending the intergovernmental-level talks—one representing the National Government and the other representing ABG—is composed of five members, all male. It is understood that a number of officials from PNG and Bougainville, as well as foreign diplomats, attend the JSB meetings in an observer role, but it is unclear whether there are any guidelines or criteria for attendance, and how many of them are women. The two delegations are drawn from the National Government Consultation Team—which represents the PNG Government—and the ABG Consultation Team. The PNG Prime Minister, James Marape, has been in charge of the national team; the ABG President, the Speaker of the Bougainville House of Representatives, and the Minister for Post-Referendum Dialogue have been co-chairing their respective team. The four Bougainville women MPs observe the JSB meetings. Information

⁴² “PNG Post-Referendum Process Support,” UNDP, 2020, https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/PNG/2020-06-26_Post%20Referendum%20Process%20Support%20Project%20Document_final_signed.pdf.

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ The primary data collection and the desk research have shown that references to “chairmanship” are used inconsistently. In some instances, “moderator” and “chairman” are used interchangeably to refer to the role of the UN Resident Coordinator.

⁴⁵ “JSB Arawa Resolution,” *Bougainville News*, February 2021, https://bougainvilleneews.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/050221_arawa_jsb_resolution.pdf.

⁴⁶ Signed by prime minister James Marape and president Ishmael Toroama in January 2021. For details, see “Bougainville News Alert: On the Occasion of the Signing of the Joint Communiqué by the Prime Minister of PNG and the President of the Autonomous Bougainville Government,” *Bougainville News*, January 11, 2021, <https://bougainvilleneews.com/2021/01/11/bougainville-news-alert-on-the-occasion-of-the-signing-of-the-joint-communique-by-the-prime-minister-of-png-and-the-president-of-the-autonomous-bougainville-government/>.

⁴⁷ “Ahern to moderate Bougainville negotiations with PNG,” *RNZ Pacific News*, November 10, 2020, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/430302/ahern-to-moderate-bougainville-negotiations-with-png>.

regarding the composition of the National Government consultation team is inconsistent. It is unclear how many women are part of this structure. The national team is supported by a National Advisory Body, a team consisting of bureaucrats and technocrats like lawyers and economists, and individuals possessing institutional memory. It appears to have three sub-structures for: women and persons with disabilities; church representatives; and “eminent persons” (equivalent of Bougainville’s people with ‘institutional memory’). In June 2021, the government approved the composition of the body.⁴⁸ At the time of drafting this report, the government was yet to approve allowances and other related expenses for the Advisory Group to become active. Additionally, the “technical support team” draws on institutions including the PNG National Fisheries Authority, Treasury and Finance Departments, Department of Justice and Attorney General, Department of Commerce, and Internal Revenue Commission.

According to the Bougainville Post-Referendum Consultation and Dialogue Department (renamed the Department for Independence in 2021), the Bougainville Consultation Team consists of 29 members: 25 men and 4 women. The four women are MPs in the ABG government. Three represent the reserved seats, and one represents an open seat. The other 25 are male MPs and members of the ABG government. The ABG Technical Support Team to the Consultation Team is made up by the leaders of 14 ABG Departments as Chaired by the Chief Secretary. The ABG Consultation Forum provides technical support to the ABG Consultation Team. The intra-Bougainville consultation processes are discussed in the next section.

This assessment found that information about the Joint Consultation Secretariat is somewhat inconsistent. In September 2019, the JSB approved the establishment of a Joint Secretariat to support the Joint Ministerial Task Force on Post Referendum,⁴⁹ whose guiding principles were drafted in a way that would “honour the spirit of the Bougainville Peace Agreement.” The Secretariat’s anticipated mandate was to support the consultation process through a collaborative engagement between Bougainville and the rest of Papua New Guinea, based on “mutual trust, mutual respect, and mutual responsibility;” hence the consultation process would follow the Melanesian culture, values, and understanding; would secure legitimacy by being participatory, inclusive, transparent and by providing clear and accurate information; would be conducted in a way that contributes to reconciliation; would take into account the livelihoods of the Bougainville people; build trust and solidarity; and be flexible and able to adapt to change. The envisioned structure of the Joint Secretariat (also referred to as Permanent Secretariat) was a mix of officers of the National Coordination Office for Bougainville Affairs (NCOBA) headed by the Director and Officers of the ABG Department of Post Referendum Consultation and Dialogue (DPRCD) and headed by the Acting Secretary. We understand that the structure has not finalized at the time of drafting this report.

II.3. Intra-Bougainville Consultation Bodies

In contrast with the lack of public engagement in PNG, the architecture of the Bougainville consultation tracks and mechanisms is quite robust. As early as September and October 2019, the ABG conducted regional consultations⁵⁰ to gauge the views of the people in relation to the membership and composition of the Bougainville Consultation Team. The key recommendations

⁴⁸ “Cabinet approves Bougainville Advisory Body to Attend JSB Meeting in Enga,” Post Courier. June 28, 2021, <https://postcourier.com.pg/cabinet-approves-bougainville-advisory-body-to-attend-jsb-meet-in-eng/>. According to the media, the members of this body are: Eva Pukari, Joe Itaki, Roger Joseph, Stacey Onea, Clemence Kanau, Allan Mana, Valentine Kambori, Sir Sinai Brown, Margaret Loko, Luther Wenge, John Endemogo Kua, Gabriel Pepson, Yauka Liria, Julie Soso, Stephen Pokawin, Ila Geno, Susan Setae, and Commodore (Ret.) Peter Illau.

⁴⁹ JSB Resolution, September 2019. https://www.abg.gov.pg/uploads/documents/12092019_JSB_Resolution.pdf.

⁵⁰ Correspondence with a former official.

were that the Bougainville Consultation Team be inclusive, gender-balanced, and have the power to create avenues for ample participation and constructive dialogue within the region, while having a small core team to sit in the Joint Consultations.

II.3.1. The Bougainville Leaders Consultation Forum

In October 2019, the Bougainville Executive Council (BEC) established the Bougainville Leaders Consultation Forum, composed of all members of the Bougainville House of Representatives (BHOR) and members of the civil society, women, youths, and other recognized leaders in Bougainville. A milestone meeting took place in January 2021 to gauge views from leaders in different sectors in preparation for the consultation process between ABG and the National Government, and inform ABG's position at the JSB meeting in Arawa the following month. Vice President Hon Patrick Nisira, in his opening remarks, stressed that it was important that leaders representing various sections of the community in Bougainville contributed to sharing ideas and collaborated on a mission to secure independence for Bougainville, saying, "Your presence here today is endorsed by the Bougainville Executive Council (BEC) to be advisors to the Bougainville Consultation Team to share ideas on Bougainville's preparation on Post Referendum."⁵¹ This was preceded by a Bougainville Development Consultation Team meeting attended by members of BHOR, Bougainville veterans, members of civil society, women and youth representatives and other recognized leaders in Bougainville. However, it is not clear what the difference between the two bodies is in terms of their mandates.

Currently, the Bougainville Leaders Consultation Forum—also known as the ABG Consultation Forum—consists of 80 members; 71 are men and 9 females. Its membership includes technocrats such as lawyers and economists, institutional memory holders,⁵² chiefs, representatives of the local government, churches, ex-combatants, youth, the Bougainville Youth Federation, and the Bougainville Women's Federation.

II.3.2. The Bougainville "Independence-Ready" Program

Soon after his election, President Toroama has called on Bougainvilleans to support the government, stating that it is not only the government's responsibility, but all individual Bougainvilleans' responsibility, to drive their efforts towards preparing Bougainville for independence. In November 2020, the House of Representatives adopted the Independence Ready Mission⁵³ resolution and subsequently the Department of Bougainville Independence Mission Implementation⁵⁴ was created to coordinate and deliver Bougainville's preparations for independence. Honorable Ezekiel Massat, Member for Tonsu Constituency and Attorney General, serves as the ABG Minister for Bougainville Independence Mission Implementation.

The mandate of the department is to advance issues pertaining to the Bougainville referendum; conduct research and policy on referendum; deal with former combatants affairs and veterans' participation in reconciliation, weapons disposal, and referendum; advance veteran skills and educational development; support negotiations with the government of PNG and the JSB; develop and disseminate information to all stakeholders; coordinate international groups assisting in the referendum in pre-referendum and post-referendum; and set up constituency-level Independence Ready Committees.

⁵¹ "ABG press release," January 27, 2021. <https://www.abg.gov.pg/index.php/news/read/bougainville-leaders-discuss-about-bougainvilles-independence>.

⁵² Institutional memory holders are individuals who have either pushed for peace during the crisis and/or participated in the peace talks, and know the history of Bougainville's fight for independence.

⁵³ "Independence Mission," <https://www.abg.gov.pg/government/departments/independence-mission>.

⁵⁴ "Departments," <https://www.abg.gov.pg/government/departments/independence-mission>.

The Committees⁵⁵ are composed of the Constituency Member as the Chairperson, Community Government Chairpersons as the Deputy Chair or Deputy Co-chairs, and representatives of wards, churches, youth, women, and other interest groups in the community. Each constituency may decide on a variation in their criteria and the manner in which they make their constituency independence ready. Each of the constituency MPs and the Independence Ready Committee must uphold standards of good governance, accountability, and transparency. The Independence Ready Process is to be open for “public observation by PNG and members of the international community for Bougainville to secure international confidence that it is capable of being an independent Sovereign State.” Under the leadership of the Department, Independence Ready Constituency Inductions were completed in July 2021. The Department also convened the Bougainville Leaders’ Forum⁵⁶ twice by September 2021.



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ABG CONTINUES PROGRESS FOR JOINT GOVERNMENT CONSULTATIONS

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TOK KLIA BILONG STRONGIM BOGENVIL INDIPENDENS MISIN

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COMMUNITY CORNER:

- ROAD SAFETY FOR KIDS
- KEEP OUR TOWNS CLEAN

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Independence-Ready Mission Program launched in Bougainville



process at the ward levels.

The Committee will comprise of the Constituency Member as the Chairperson, Community Government Chairpersons as the Deputy Chair or Deputy Co-chairs, and representation from wards, churches, youth, women and other interest groups in the community.

Each Constituency on Bougainville has its own unique features in terms of geography, terrain, population, language and interests therefore each Constituency may decide on a variation in their criteria and the manner in which they make their constituency independence ready.

“The responsibility to prepare Bougainville towards its aspirations for independence lies with all Bougainvilleans.”

- President Toroama

President Ishmael Toroama speaking to the public at the Christmas Park in Arawa Town during the recent launching of the Central Bougainville Independence-Ready Mission.

Figure 1: ABG has made significant efforts to communicate its plans and preparations for independence. Source: ABG website

⁵⁵ “ABG Bulletin,” May 2021. https://www.abg.gov.pg/uploads/bulletin/BB_Edition_17_May_2021_FINAL_SPREAD_compressed.pdf.

⁵⁶ “ABG Government press release,” https://www.abg.gov.pg/index.php/news/read/bougainville-leaders-hold-consultation-forum-in-buka?fbclid=IwAR2Xj5p4R757zgFxmG9MMnhoCzGmdPNISgBdojiUH_YRrwOBvJMW4ao.

The independence readiness activities are run in parallel with the intra-regional consultative bodies detailed above. The president's *Six-Point Strategy*, announced in his inaugural address, is also to be brought in line⁵⁷ with the Independence Ready Mission. At the time of drafting this report, the Independence Ready Committees focus chiefly on issues that are affecting the local communities, such as raising awareness on alcohol and drug abuse, improving for law and order, and diffusing local conflicts. Participants in this project showed various levels of awareness and held diverging views regarding the ties and interactions of the Independence Ready Initiative with the intergovernmental consultations, which emphasizes the need for more public communication on this matter.

II.4. Post-Referendum Consultation Themes and Timeframe

After the 2020 Bougainville General Elections, the PNG Cabinet, led by Prime Minister James Marape, and the newly elected ABG, led by president Ishmael Toroama, showed renewed political will to re-energize the consultation process. President Toroama, in his inaugural speech, put Bougainville's "road to independence" at the top of his presidential agenda. Similarly, PM Marape has repeatedly expressed support for fulfilling the peace process goals, although he has not put forward a PNG official position yet. Intergovernmental meetings were anticipated to resume in November 2020, but a political crisis—triggered by the Opposition's move to table a vote of no confidence motion against the National Government—led to cancelling an intergovernmental meeting.

The JSB meeting held in the Arawa province, on February 4 -5, 2021, remains the first significant step in the post-referendum consultation process. During this high-level meeting, the two parties agreed on a post-referendum framework, which set the agenda and the schedule for the intergovernmental consultation. According to the Arawa JSB resolution, the intergovernmental body would meet at least three times a year, tentatively in January, June, and December. Though the schedule for the Joint Technical Teams consultations is not specified, it is thought that these structures would meet before every JSB to prepare the agenda and the leader's positions. On this occasion, the JSB also endorsed a Joint Communique, signed in January 2021, as a roadmap of the joint consultations. The JSB adopted the following resolution⁵⁸ in its February 2021 meeting:

- A. Bougainville Economic and Investment Summit to be held from May 5-6, 2021.
- B. Transfer BCL shares from Kumul Mineral Holdings to ABG's Bougainville Minerals Ltd.
- C. Transfer of Powers and Functions to from PNG to ABG before February 26, 2021.
- D. Inter-Government Joint Consultations to commence between March 4-5, 2021.
- E. Conduct a delimitation exercise to determine Bougainville's waters by June 2021.
- F. K10 million to be paid to ABG: K5 million outstanding from 2020, and K5 million for 2021; and the intention to establish a cannery in Bougainville.
- G. Reversal of the formula of the taxation structure where 30% goes to ABG and 70% goes to PNG.
- H. PNG government to provide funding for Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) funding to Bougainville through Bank of South Pacific and National Development Bank.
- I. Foreign Affairs Department to establish an office in Bougainville for trade, development, and cooperation between Bougainville and development partners.
- J. PNG to pay Bougainville K100 million between 2020 – 2030 for infrastructure.
- K. PNG and ABG to explore options for Sovereign Guarantee loan against RDG Arrears of K621 million.

⁵⁷ "ABG President inaugural Address," August 2020. <https://www.abg.gov.pg/index.php/news/read/president-ishmael-toroama-parliamentary-address-august-parliament-session?fbclid=IwAR0kzcp43jWit6wFU8lsqkz8DOA3S4c1PgYr3FylPlFcqbScNEvzdajglcU>.

⁵⁸ "JSB Arawa Resolution," February 2021, https://bougainvilienews.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/050221_arawa_jsb_resolution.pdf.

- L. The JSB acts as the conflict resolution body for issues that are discussed at the joint-consultations.
- M. JSB meets in January, July and December every calendar year.

Other priorities proposed by the Joint Technical Teams ahead of this meeting—including appointing an international moderator, asking UNDP to fund the consultation process, and establishing a joint permanent secretariat for JSB—were not included in the final JSB document. The proposed milestones have been largely missed in the context of a COVID-19 surge, including organizing the Bougainville Economic Summit that has been rescheduled for November 2021.⁵⁹

In another significant development interwoven with the consultation process, on May 13, 2021, in Port Moresby, Prime Minister James Marape and President of Bougainville Ishmael Toroama signed a Joint Memorandum of Agreement on the Dispensation of Constitutional Requirements relating to the Process of Transfer of Functions and Powers⁶⁰ pursuant to Section 295 of the National Constitution. The two leaders acknowledged the protracted drawdown of powers as one of the main challenges of the consultations process. The agreement removes certain steps that had been seen as a hindrance to the implementation of the drawdown process, including the need that ABG assess its capability to operate the transferred the function or power; the issuance of a 12 months' notice to the National Government; and assessing funding issues before the National Government allow the transfer of a power to the Autonomous Bougainville Government. The leaders also agreed to remove the need for a specific request to be made in this sense by the Bougainville Government. Furthermore, the Autonomous Bougainville Government will have the power to legislate on any, or all, of areas or powers under Section 290 of the Constitution. The arrangement, also called the Sharp Agreement, repeals the 2017 Memorandum of Understanding on the Overarching Framework for the Transfer of Functions and Powers from the National Government to the Autonomous Bougainville Government Pursuant to the Bougainville Peace Agreement.

These changes were deemed necessary as the two sides prepared for the first intergovernmental consultation over the result of the Bougainville referendum, to separate administrative from political matters. The agreement aims to allow all outstanding autonomy implementation issues to be dealt with at the administrative level, and to ensure that the two executive governments remain focused on political matters that are at the heart of the transition. It also aims to set the tone of the consultation by reaffirming the leaders' joint commitment to maintain and strengthen PNG and Bougainville relationships at all levels. There are limitations to fast-tracking a full transfer of powers, however. Some of the issues under consultation include substantial financial assistance from PNG to Bougainville. Such assistance cannot be attained by legislation, nor does Bougainville's request automatically trigger its release. On matters like this, Bougainville relies on the National Government's political will and ability to provide support. Second, resource constraints will remain an impediment for Bougainville's state building efforts even if it accesses these powers and functions.

The first intergovernmental consultation was conducted in Kokopo, East New Britain Province, on May 18-19, 2021. At the meeting, the Bougainville Consultation team tabled the Referendum results and proposed 2025 as the year for Bougainville's independence. The Kokopo Consultations also agreed to consult on a joint roadmap in the second consultation to guide the post referendum process. The second intergovernmental consultation⁶¹ took place in Wabag, Enga province, on July 6, 2021. The JSB acknowledged that the consultation process needs to be agreed upon—in the form of a joint roadmap—in order to decide a final political settlement between the PNG and

⁵⁹ "Summit" ABG, 2021. <https://www.abg.gov.pg/economicandinvestment/summit>.

⁶⁰ "Joint Media Statement on the Signing of the Sharp Agreement," ABG, 2021, <https://www.abg.gov.pg/index.php/news/read/joint-media-statement-on-the-signing-of-the-sharp-agreement>.

⁶¹ ABG, 2021. https://www.abg.gov.pg/index.php/news/read/joint-statement-on-the-second-joint-inter-government-consultations-wabag-en?fbclid=IwAR04W_SsNGvFbAzgOLUXtTfa6Wj8yjQUM54hgAO00LNWcvgEFuUg1MyrIUw.

Bougainville. According to the JSB, the political settlement itself has to be determined “no earlier than 2025 and no later than 2027.”⁶² The leaders agreed to continue to consult and develop clarity on establishing constitutional and parliamentary pathways for the tabling of the results of the Referendum; the outcome of the consultation to give effect to the results of the Referendum; and the pathway consequential to the outcome of the National Parliament’s decision. Additionally, they committed to take all actions necessary to process an end point which is the culmination of all the activities that flow from the constitutional amendments that give effect to the National Parliament’s decision.

According to the roadmap, the two governments would initiate immediate actions focused on the full implementation of the Bougainville Peace Agreement subject to the National Constitution, with



Figure 2: Joint Inter-Government Consultations, Wabag, Enga Province. (Source: ABG Facebook page)

a focus on completing outstanding tasks under the pillars of the Bougainville Peace Agreement, including the implementation of the Sharp Agreement, to support the economic growth of Bougainville to ensure that Bougainville is in a position to effectively and efficiently manage its own economic affairs in preparation for a political settlement. Finally, the roadmap “allows” the National Government to undertake consultations across Papua New Guinea on the outcome of

the Referendum, noting that the constitutional amendments which would have been set in motion by the signing of this Statement will need to be enacted to give effect to Bougainville’s final political status.

Despite these steps forward, a few questions about implementation timing remain. For instance, the Bougainville constitution would enter into effect only after independence. Similarly, some powers under section 289 of PNG Constitution cannot be transferred, unless parliament votes for Bougainville to become independent. In September 2021, Prime Minister Marape was quoted by the media reflecting on some of the challenges related to Bougainville’s political future,⁶³ qualifying the matter as the greatest issue facing PNG. He reiterated that a roadmap had been adopted for a final proposed political settlement to be put before the National Parliament for a vote in 2025, but stressed that neither he nor his government could legally make any commitment on independence. Subject to the MPs agreeing on a political settlement, whatever form it may take, implementation would occur in 2027. Finally, the prime minister argued that “all Papua New Guineans have a say in the process” and announced that the PNG government adopted a national strategy to consult with the people of PNG as the two governments undertake their negotiations. The research team was not able to locate and review the said document by the time this report was issued.

⁶² The National, July 7, 2021. <https://www.thenational.com.pg/seven-years-to-freedom/>

⁶³ RNZ Pacific News, 2021. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/451390/marape-says-bougainville-outcome-cannot-be-pre-determined>.

Part Two: Key Findings of In-Depth Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

III. Views on the Consultation Process

III.1. Trust and political will

Increased communication between the national and Bougainville governments is seen as a sign of improving mutual trust and political commitment to advancing the outstanding matters of the peace agreement. Research participants see positively the reignition of the post-referendum intergovernmental engagement under the leadership of Prime Minister James Marape and President Ishmael Toroama. The frequency and constructive tone of these talks are viewed as a step in the right direction and a notable departure from the political dynamic during the former National Government, when the post-referendum process was largely put on hold. However, this positive development remains fragile and dependent on political circumstances that may swiftly change, as discussed below, thus impacting the intergovernmental consultations. Against a backdrop of historical political instability in PNG—where shifting allegiances can undermine long-term policies and government office tenures—some participants in Bougainville feel a pressure to reach a conclusive point of the consultations during the mandate of Prime Minister Marape. In the absence of a broad, national political consensus on the future of Bougainville ahead of the 2022 elections, some participants in Bougainville are concerned that a new National Government and legislature would need sustained “sensitization” efforts to fully grasp the intricacies of the process, or even reverse the progress registered so far.⁶⁴

Overall, Port Moresby participants showed sympathy for Bougainville and largely believe that the province should have received more support in the post-conflict period, especially to rebuild its infrastructure and education systems. Some even see Bougainville’s pro-independence drive as being in part fueled by the failure to address the deep-seated needs of the region. There is wide awareness of Bougainville’s unequivocal position to pursue independence from PNG. However, participants in the capital—similarly to some in Bougainville—refer to politicians’ media statements expressing concern that a swift political separation could lead to an economic crisis and social conflict that would have ripple effects throughout PNG. In particular, participants in Port Moresby mentioned PNG’s dependence on natural resources in Bougainville; a fear that a political separation could create a precedent that would lead to the disintegration of the country; and concerns that Bougainville is “not ready for independence” due to lacking state-building capacity—including sustainable economic, defense, and education systems. To make a case for taking a more cautious approach to Bougainville’s emancipation, some in Port Moresby draw parallels to family, “father-son” relationships, when a responsible parent needs to make sure that their offspring’ desire for independence is matched by their abilities to fully function before leaving the family home.

Some participants expressed reservations about the current National Government’s intent to see through the consultation process and allow the region to achieve independence. Reservations about willingness to “let go” of Bougainville stem from politicians’ public statements that the region might not have the capacity to govern itself. Additionally, there is an increasing realization that the

⁶⁴ A particular episode that reminded Bougainville leaders about the fragility of the talks took place in November 2020, when a motion of no-confidence initiated against Prime Minister Marape triggered a national political crisis. The Bougainville intergovernmental consultation delegation was unaware of the intentions of the opposition at the time when it travelled to Port Moresby for a scheduled meeting; as a result, the delegation found out on arrival that the meeting had been cancelled due to the unfolding crisis. This situation was seen by some research participants as an indicator of lacking consensus and commitment to the consultation process from all political sides in the capital, and made Bougainville feel exposed to the changing political winds in the capital.

ratification of the result of the referendum is not a formality, but that the national parliament is the final decision body. While Port Moresby participants see this as a legitimate prerogative of the highest legislative body in the country, Bougainville participants express frustration and suspicion that PNG could potentially use this avenue to prevent a political separation. A man from Bougainville illustrated this point saying, “Now they are trying to talk about the definition of the word ratification. Why are they trying to talk about it now? Parliament should not even vote on it because it's not a treaty. So, what is actually ratification that they are trying to come up with? That is the question. We are concerned.” Another distinct concern was that adding a plethora of topics to the agenda of the consultations—such as the drawdown of powers—may in fact distract from the main goal of laying the foundation of Bougainville independence and contribute to delaying a decision. In their views, the only priority of the JSB should be getting the PNG government to commit to a date for ratifying the result of the referendum. Some Bougainville men—while expressing their own doubts about “readiness”—said that this should not be a *sine qua non* condition for independence. Confident that things would work themselves out in the end, as they did for PNG when it pursued independence, a focus group participant said, “look at PNG, was it ready for independence in 1975? Or was it ready for self-governance in 1973? PNG gained self-government in 1973 without much to show for, and then got independence in 1975. So, 2025 is a good time, and ready or not, we should be given independence!”

Finally, *Bougainville participants value the strong multilayered connections with PNG*. In their views, pursuing political separation should not come at the cost of losing strong social, family, and religious ties with PNG, in participants' views. Cohesion built on social and cultural proximity can drive sought-after neighborly relations between Bougainville and PNG. With the civil conflict fresh in mind, participants hold strong views that a peaceful transition is paramount for good relations, and look at the post-independence collaboration between Australia and PNG as an encouraging precedent.

III.2. Expected timeline and outcome of consultations

The consultation process is taking place against a backdrop of sharpening economic stress in the context of COVID-19 and increasing demands for public services, strengthening rule of law, and mitigating the risk of reemerging localized conflicts. Some Bougainville-based participants see independence as a *prerequisite* to addressing the province's long-term governance, socio-economic, and security issues, but for others the main challenges—namely building a well-governed and self-reliant country—lie *beyond* independence and are chiefly the responsibility of Bougainville's leaders. Taking ownership and developing the pillars of state building in parallel with the consultation process is therefore seen as a more adequate approach to address these issues. Additionally, the Bougainville-based participants stressed the importance of keeping the province's population on board by enhanced communication to ensure that their initial buy-in continues to remain strong. Some research participants—both in Port Moresby and Bougainville—expressed concerns that weak governance institutions in Bougainville can perpetuate a sense of poor public administration, the struggling economy, and insufficient accountability, transparency, and rule of law. To build a self-reliant state, investing in building the capacity of the public administration apparatus and streamlining intra-region governance processes and responsibilities are seen as an important first step.

There is a lack of a broad, shared understanding of the timeline and expected outcomes of the consultation process. However, having a consultation process in place is viewed as a step in the right direction. The unequivocal result of the 2019 Referendum—when 97.7 percent of the region's voters opted for independence from PNG—is the linchpin of a broad political agreement in Bougainville about the future direction of the province. But despite strong support for the

independence goal, research participants not directly involved in the process in Bougainville and Port Moresby remain unaware of its specific mandate and timeline. While there was a shared sense among Port Moresby participants that the consultation is critical and “it can make or break Bougainville,” they unanimously complained about a lack of public awareness of what the process hopes to achieve. A woman in the Port Moresby focus group illustrated this point saying, “it’s really bad that the whole population doesn’t know where the Papua New Guinea government stands... and we don’t know what’s actually going on in these negotiations. For them to vote on behalf of us on the result of the referendum doesn’t seem right to me... It’s really bad the population doesn’t know and our leaders will be making a decision on behalf of us.”

As the drawdown of powers continues to be discussed between the PNG and Bougainville leaders, more deliberation is needed in order to set expectations and build a shared vision of the outcome of this process. For some participants in Bougainville, one of the main issues up for discussion in the context of post-referendum consultations is achieving “political versus economic independence.” As a woman leader in Bougainville explained, “James Marape announced in Arawa he is planning to give Bougainville *economic* independence. I think that is the position of PNG... Bougainville’s demand is *full* independence. Independence is something that is in the minds of the people. That was the thing in the minds of the people during the conflict. But how we understand independence is another question. ABG has to come clear on that: do we push for full independence? And what does it take?”

The research shows that the media coverage of the high-level meetings in Kokopo (May 2021) and Enga (June 2021) has increased the public visibility of the process, to some degree. However, more needs to be done to improve the transparency of the talks, as a woman participant in Port Moresby explained, “I heard that the next JSB meeting will be in Enga. The reason for taking it to Enga is to create awareness to the rest of PNG on the consultations and negotiations that are going on. My point is, if they want to carry out awareness through the process of holding those meetings in those different places, I disagree with that. The most effective way to do or carry out awareness for the general public to know about is to carry out negotiations between the PNG government and the ABG government is to actually invite the media into the negotiation and actually record these negotiations taking place and just let it out there into the public. The media can then report how many women there are, and who is actually speaking, and what are their concerns.”

Those who are eager to leverage the good will shown by the current PNG government would prefer to complete the process before the next elections, even if they admit that this might be unrealistic. Some hope to have the result presented to the PNG National Parliament for ratification within three years, while others think that five or even six years is more feasible. While participants in the Bougainville men’s focus groups quote President Toroama, who announced 2025 as the deadline for obtaining full independence from PNG, some are reserved about the feasibility of getting all the building blocks of statehood in place within this timeline:

“(...) for the first time, in Kokopo, Bougainville through its president [Ishmael Toroama] presented to the government what Bougainville really wants. That is, we want independence, it has been brought forth by this current government and a timeline was set which is 2025. Yes! Bougainville is on the right path. Negotiations and consultations must continue.”

“I think so far we are good, there are some changes. Just that some areas, like the economy, need to improve. The 98% is just a vote. If PNG gives us independence tomorrow, are we ready? The answer to that is obvious. We are not ready.”

“Our President has already proposed 2025 as the year we are going to get independence. That’s a good move. Move in the right direction.”

“I’m 50-50. There are movements under this president and Prime Minister James Marape. Under O’Neill it was difficult. There was no progress.”

“(…) let’s not beat around the bush. The president’s announcement has actually caught the National Government by surprise, and they should be blamed because they never even came up with a timeline.”

An additional concern mentioned by key informants in Bougainville is related to former combatants who may have high expectations for independence to be achieved swiftly. This might lead to a continued security volatility that needs to be addressed through conflict prevention efforts. As a woman leader in Bougainville explained, “we need to continue to train and give the tools to community leaders to deal with armed conflicts. I come from a community that still has post-conflict issues. South Bougainville is still a volatile area... Our government is going in the right direction, improving the relationship with the National Government, so that the final ratification may go well with all the people, especially the veterans who fought in the war. They want to see the outcome they dreamt about during the crisis.” For some women in Bougainville, independence in itself is not the end goal, but rather the foundation that would lead to justice and reconciliation to allow social and personal trauma to heal, as this discussion shows:

“The mixed-race youths you see on the streets, some of them were born out of rape. Both PNG soldiers and BRA and BRF raped women in Bougainville. Below the hype there are very hurtful experiences. So, the best outcome is not only independence, but some form of justice for these women.”

“I think reconciliations should continue. We need funding for continued reconciliations. Reconciliation and peacebuilding in the communities should continue. It must not stop.”

“We need to pull together as a people. Men, women, children. The best possible outcome would be one where the people of Bougainville live in peace, and opportunities are equal for men and women.”

“Let’s say Bougainville gets the independence it wants. And then what? What is independence if women are not involved? What is greater autonomy if there are limited opportunities for the youths? So, it’s more than the political status of Bougainville. It’s about the people. Whatever the outcome is, it must be people focused. People are the main resource, not the Panguna mine.”

III.3. Consultation agenda and priority themes

In 2021, the two governments achieved a few significant milestones in defining the consultation agenda, as discussed in Part I of this report. First, the Joint Supervisory Body adopted a Communique in February 2021, in Arawa, which set the framework and a pathway for further consultation. Subsequent meetings in May (in Kokopo) and July 2021 (in Enga) added substance to the timeline and further refined the anticipated outcomes. Of particular significance is the Joint Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) signed by the two leaders of governments in May 2021. The agreement aims to advance the process of transferring government functions and powers to the Bougainville authorities, as per Section 295 of the National Constitution. However, this research shows that the specific agenda items and expected results of these high-level meetings remain difficult to grasp for those not involved directly in consultations.

*Recognizing the region's complex needs in preparation for independence, Bougainville-based research participants prioritized economic, good governance, and foreign affairs issues. The research participants were asked to discuss the February 2021 JSB resolution and select the most important topics to be addressed in the context of the consultation process. They reflected on the status of the public governance of the province and called for a concerted effort to strengthen rule of law, increase government transparency, and address corruption in parallel with conducting consultations with the PNG government. In their views, in order to improve public services and lift underprivileged communities from poverty and isolation, one needs to first build the capacity of civil servants and officials at all levels of government. Enabling public employees to better understand and perform their duties would lead to improved decisions and follow-through. A woman leader in Bougainville said, "governance comes first, because it is the *quality of governance* which determines whether there is law and order. It is *governance* that will tell us whether there is good health coverage. Some things you can do with money; there are some things you can do without money. If you are proactive on things, the cost will be controlled."*

When it comes to which issues that are currently before the consultation teams, opinions are somewhat divided along gender lines. Most of the participants in the women's focus group in Bougainville say that funding Small to Medium Enterprises (SME) is a key priority, as it would allow informal vendors—mostly women—access to capital in order to start their own businesses in Bougainville. Additionally, organizing the Bougainville Economic Summit is seen as a key measure to bolster local production and create trade mechanisms that would allow local producers access to a larger market. A woman leader in Bougainville explained, "there are very limited economic opportunities. Like in Buin... we have crops but where can we sell them? We can raise pigs, but where do we sell them? We can raise chickens, but who will buy them from us? [The Bougainville Economic Summit] should be the priority. Because the economy is the foundation of any country." The male participants in Bougainville, on the other hand, see the transfer of powers and functions from the national to the provincial level as the most important issue that both governments should discuss as a prerequisite of pursuing independence.

*In participants' views, opening a foreign affairs office would address an acutely felt political and economic isolation. It would help the region's government promote its vision about Bougainville's place and role in the Pacific region's political and security architecture. It would also provide avenues to advocate for financial support and negotiate much-needed trade and development deals to sustain a post-independence Bougainville. On the other hand, focus group participants in Port Moresby suggested that the National Government open an office in Buka to monitor ABG spending and hold it accountable for the funds received from the national budget. As a participant explained, "[in Bougainville] they uphold this *bigman* system (...) the problem is that people don't have any say in regards to government issues or government concerns. Like whatever the government does—or the decisions for Bougainville, in this case. So that's the problem to be concerned about in the process of negotiation." Although participants hold mixed views on the gendered nature of consultation priorities and generally can't articulate specific demands put forward by women—or even gender-sensitive policy recommendations—there is consensus about the value of having women at the consultations table to ensure representation and better outcomes.*

The participants in this research were also unaware of any gender-sensitive or inclusion training for members of the consultation teams, or if meeting agendas took into consideration women and other groups' input. The discussion among women participants in Bougainville illustrates this point:

"If only those who attended the consultations communicate what is being said in the consultations to the public, only then would we know if the women's interests are represented in the consultations. Since that is not the case, we do not know. But I suspect the women's interests are not a priority because women are not part of the consultations."

“If you ask about whether the Bougainville government’s stance on independence represents Bougainville women’s views, then the answer is yes. But if you ask about other things, we do not know for two reasons: first, not many women are in the consultations; and second, what they discuss in the consultations is not communicated to the people.”

Participants in this research largely preferred using the term “consultation” to “negotiation” to describe the current process. In some participants’ views, the negotiation phase ended with the signing of the Peace Agreement, and the current consultation process implies an equal footing and no dominating side. However, some participants admitted that while formally the process is framed as a consultation, it entails sustained negotiation, especially by the technical teams tasked to prepare political meetings and ensure that political decisions are followed through by the bureaucracy.

III.4. Consultation structures and operations

There is a significant knowledge gap between Bougainville and Port Moresby participants about the consultations process in general, and about the various bodies, their mandates, and their operations in particular. On one hand, participants in both Port Moresby focus groups said that they had little or no knowledge about the functioning of any consultation bodies, such as the Joint Supervisory Body, the Joint Technical Team, or the Permanent Secretariat. Participants in Bougainville, on the other hand, professed familiarity with the consultation structures overall and saw their functioning as a work in progress. While there is a perception of strong political leadership, there is limited awareness about the mechanics of the consultation, even among some of those directly involved in the consultation structures. For instance, there is some understanding about the mandate and composition of various consultation structures, but less so when it comes to selection criteria and the members’ responsibilities to liaise with other consultation tiers and the general public. The number and role of women members are also less clear for those not involved directly in the process. They see a need for the process to be further articulated overall, and to function more effectively in order to yield tangible results.

Participants in Bougainville praised the ABG’s efforts to design an inclusive process. Multiple avenues—including a consultative leaders’ forum and independence-ready committees—have been created for government representatives, leaders of the non-government sectors, including veterans, churches, civil society, youth, women, and the private sector, to participate in decentralized, regional forums where voices outside of the capital can contribute. Many women leaders consulted as part of this project see women’s intraregional participation as very strong, where structures cater to women’s views throughout the process. Participants in the focus group discussion mentioned women having broad access to the local “independence ready” gatherings. As discussed in Part I, as part of this initiative, MPs, ABG representatives, and community governments mobilize constituencies to exchange opinions and raise awareness, as part of the preparation for independence. A participant explained that her MP invited her to be part of the 15-person organizing committee explaining, “There is a budget for it. Dancers will be paid. Those who provide a feast will be paid as well.” While women’s participation at the community level is more palpable—for example, the majority of community government chairs will be women⁶⁵ in the next electoral cycle—some women believe that more needs to be done for women to be included at highest level in consultations between PNG and ABG for women’s “voices need to be heard at that level.”

⁶⁵ For more information about legislative measures to ensure women’s participation in the Bougainville Community Government see Part I of this report.

Awareness of orientation and training programs varies among research participants in Bougainville. A member of the Leaders' Forum said that an induction session is provided to members, including talking points and positioning on the main consultation topics. Another participant mentioned that an eight-day induction was scheduled for May 2021. A few participants mentioned the lack of appropriate funding for the consultation process as a hindrance, while others were concerned that large delegations, choosing remote locations, and extended travels burden the budget unnecessarily and add barriers to women's participation. One woman leader in Bougainville said, "as we travel, our travels are sometimes expanded too much. We tend to fly a lot of people, chartering planes. That's not really justice to the funders."

Overall, the participants in the research did not have a strong awareness of selection criteria, job descriptions, or training provided to members of the consultation structures. Some noted that past experience in conflict resolution and being recommended by their local chief or non-governmental organization played a role in their selection. According to a woman leader, "the Department for Post-Referendum Consultation and Dialogue [now the Department for Independence] compiled the list and gave it to the Bougainville Executive Council, and they approved it," suggesting that for the Permanent Secretariat, it is a matter of selecting committed public servants who are already in the system.

III.5. Views on introducing an external moderator

While the assessment suggests that in Bougainville there is openness to inviting a foreigner to facilitate the talks, in Port Moresby, participants, especially men, were more reluctant to include a foreign moderator in the consultation process. Men in Port Moresby enumerated a few character traits and behaviors that they would like to see from an external figure in order to find them acceptable. These include recognizing PNG as a sovereign country; respecting the local and Melanesian culture and customs; being neutral and refraining from taking any sides; being aware of the sensitive nature of the process and potential conflict triggers; using international best practices of facilitation; and refraining from setting the agenda or advocating for decisions that would be in the interest of foreign states and organizations.

A woman from Port Moresby noted that due to divergent interests, an impartial moderator was essential to the process, "because they will surely end up in a conflict" and she added, "I think if the majority of the Bougainvilleans voted to remain an autonomous region, and still be part of PNG, then we could talk about working things out the Melanesian Way, as brothers. But they voted for independence, which means PNG and Bougainville aspirations will not be the same. So, there will be conflicts. That is why you need an external moderator." An argument raised by Bougainville participants was that a strong international moderator would be able to keep politicians on both sides in check. In their view, the highly consensual Melanesian way of negotiating—consensual and without a hard time frame—might indicate a delay strategy and might prolong discussions and lead to untransparent decisions. A woman leader in Bougainville said, "it really takes a courageous man, a moderator, to be really bold and frank, not to compromise. For me, I'd rather [have] you know that an international moderator be brought in... They are the neutral people."

Some women participants would also feel encouraged if a moderator and government negotiators explicitly acknowledged the importance of having women in the talks, which would bolster women's confidence to speak up. Additionally, some consider that consultations moderated by an international, impartial figure would lead to more inclusive discussions overall, where women and civil society would be recognized and given more opportunities to speak during official meetings, which are sometimes seen as dominated by male, government voices. A woman leader

in Bougainville said, “we may be part of the consultation team, but a lot of times women only come in when we feel that things are not going right. It's better for women to be acknowledged.”

IV. Women's Participation in the Consultation Process

IV.1. Openings and barriers for women's participation

While many acknowledged various intra-Bougainville pathways for women's participation, participants view the inter-government level consultation as not gender inclusive. Some of the main structural barriers are rooted in the design of the process itself. Men and women participants in Port Moresby commented on the fact that there are no women representatives in the PNG Consultations Team and commended the Bougainville women for their activism. These participants did not profess much familiarity with the Bougainville women's actions in the consultation bodies though, and their comments referred to women's political participation more broadly. Only a few focus group participants in Bougainville could recall the names of or the how many women are part of any regional consultation structures. Additionally, due to the limited number and visibility of women members, research participants found it difficult to assess their influence in the process. A man participant in Port Moresby explained, “if we look at the negotiating team, there's no avenue for the inclusion of women into these teams... In fact, men are making decisions on whether the women participate or not in the first place.” Echoing similar concerns, a woman participant said, “I do not think men would allow women to be the lead negotiators. You know, knowing our culture, men are expected to lead in big discussions.” Port Moresby participants also discussed at length about the need to leverage the momentum created around the push to create reserved seats for women in the national parliament, which represents a milestone for women's political advancement and an opening for a more inclusive consultation process.

In Port Moresby, a government representative mentioned that the newly-created Advisory Body has a substructure focusing specifically on women and marginalized groups—a sufficient to cover women's issues and their inclusion in his view. However, women representing civil society groups stated that women's access to the official process is insufficient: “We are going through the same issues as my mother and grandmother, and we are still discussing them today.” They commented that “it is important to highlight the differences and inequalities in opportunities and commitment to including women in the consultation process between ABG and the National Government,” and to learn from ABG's efforts of building a multi-pronged, inclusive process.

A few participants in Bougainville believe there is no need for increasing women representation; they are not necessarily against women representation per se, but believe that delegations are already too large, rendering meetings ineffective and expensive. They argue that Bougainville needs a small group of negotiators to keep the agenda focused on obtaining independence. Women participants commented that being part of JSB requires holding a *senior* ministerial position, and at the moment all senior ministers are men. Additionally, they complained that the Bougainville Women Peace and Security Action Plan and the Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality, Peace and Security policy are still to be implemented. Finally, some women expressed safety and accessibility concerns over choosing locations and times for meetings that may not be appropriate for women's participation, such as isolated and difficult-to-reach venues in PNG provinces, and events scheduled for late in the evening.

Women participants in Bougainville largely appreciate that members of the intra-regional consultation structures—including women—are able to express their views freely, but some lament that intra-region structures are government-heavy. Additionally, they commented that the agendas of regional and intergovernmental bodies tend to be driven by men who shape meeting agendas and occupy the space. To address this participation gap, women suggested that members

of the official consultation tiers conduct outreach to collect information from different women's groups so that "they know what the expectations of women are even if women do not participate in the consultations," at regional and constituency-based meetings where women can air their views on issues surrounding independence. Responding to criticism that intraregional Bougainville consultation structures are dominated by male politicians and bureaucrats, as well as male leaders of churches, youth, or ex-combatants, a woman leader in Bougainville explained the government has made significant efforts to accommodate women. These intraregional consultation bodies and the Independence Ready Committees draft feedback and ideas for the consideration of the consultation team, thus informing the consultation agenda. Additionally, while the Independence Ready Program is not formally tied to the intergovernmental consultation, it has a far-reaching role in advancing the ABG's post-referendum agenda, as a woman leader explained. "The Independence Ready Program has finalized the implementation framework with a whole-of-government approach, with three prongs—regional, national, and international—that view women as key to disseminating and implementing process."

Across genders and geographies, participants also see a need to build women's capacity to effectively fulfil high-level representation and consultation roles. One woman leader in Bougainville explained that while they have practiced leadership and negotiations at the community level, women need more training in order to be effective in intergovernmental processes. Participants also commented that most of the training opportunities offered by the international community are limited to participants from Buka or other regional centers, and called on development partners to cascade capacity building, such as including negotiation skills and policy making at the community level, to avoid further exclusion. Bougainville men also called for strengthening information exchanges between women's groups and delegations, as leaders tend to pay more attention if there are many people or groups involved. As a participant explained, "Masses create a movement. Masses make change. In terms of network, resources, influence, and it's better if [women] work together." Another participant argued that "networking is a powerful tool to get women into these negotiations. Including women groups in Bougainville and PNG. Not only should Bougainville women be in the consultations, but also PNG women. They need assistance from international partners as well." Furthermore, a participant noted that networking alone is not sufficient; instead, creating a movement would help get more women into the consultation process. He encouraged women to "form broad-based peace coalitions to lobby for a seat at the table. It's all about having access to a seat at the table. Not making noise."

Concerns about a lack of opportunities for women to develop their civic participation skills and practice leadership are also shared by focus group participants in Port Moresby. They talk about a need to strengthen information exchanges between women's groups and delegations, to encourage the negotiating parties to raise gender issues and protect women's rights, and create more avenues for advocacy outside the PNG parliament, which has no women members at the moment. Unpacking the shortcomings of women's participation, a man participant explained that women's voices seem to be fragmented and lack a consolidating platform, which affects their ability to affect change. He added, "how can you expect them to come in such negotiations when they have no avenue for them. If this is dormant, where will women come in and participate? You failed the first part of becoming active, and becoming a one voice for all the women to write and coming to participate in other things. This is like an awareness, but the platform for them to write on, where is it? Like the negotiation, did the male participants think about the whole framework of the negotiation, thought about including women and now what will the media play if there are no women included, there's no platform."

Women-led local civil society organizations in Bougainville are seen as active, but there doesn't seem to be a clear pathway to influence the consultations. Participants mentioned the president of the Bougainville Women's Federation as being part of the Bougainville Consultation Team and the Leaders Forum. Organizations that also received recognition for their work in the region included the Bougainville Women's Advocacy Against Mining, Bougainville Women's Federation,

Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency, Nazareth Rehabilitation Centre, and Catholic Women's Federation. The CSOs focus on a range of issues from advocacy through gender equality campaigns to supporting economic empowerment and oversight of the mining sector. But participants felt that these organizations do not have a tangible impact on the consultations, due to limited access and financial resources. Additionally, to bridge this gap and highlight the importance of women's participation, the media is seen as a platform for women's advocacy that can encourage more substantive participation. A man participant added, "We need one woman, or a group of women, or an NGO, to start talking about it. And build momentum. I think women just accept it, even though they know that it's not right. They feel defeated. And the men, well, as usual they will not voluntarily invite women in."

A few participants also mentioned a lack of solidarity and dissension among women's organizations and leaders as a cause for their limited voice and impact in the consultation process. It is not uncommon that allocating a limited number of seats for women at official tables leads to increased competition or conflict among women's groups as they vie for representation. Dissenting opinions challenging the legitimacy of the official women's representatives or their positions in the meetings can be then used to reinforce women's marginalization, by using the lack of unity or contradictory demands to justify it. As a woman leader said, "if we want to bring a lot of women to the lead negotiation table, we really need to support each other. (...) If we need to put one person in at the political elections, we all should congregate to support that person. From my experience [in running for office], I got the biggest support from men, not from women."

While for Port Moresby participants women's inclusion is a matter of civil rights, in Bougainville, tradition and experience are seen as key drivers for women's participation. The matrilineal customary system in Bougainville, where women are traditional landowners, is viewed by both male and female participants as the main source of legitimacy to participate in the consultation process in leadership roles. Another key aspect is the Bougainvillean women's role in both peace-making generally, and in supporting the referendum for independence. Finally, the technical expertise of women public employees, elected officials, and civil society activists is seen as an asset that could add value to the post-referendum process. Views on how women should be included, however, are gendered. While women strongly demand equal representation—for having significantly contributed to the peace agreement and the referendum—men hold softer views on their prospective roles. Some men are grateful for the roles women played in the recent peace-making and political milestones in the province and support improved participation of women in principle, but feel that because women have already made their pro-independence views clear, their inclusion is not a top priority—obtaining independence is.

In consonance with these views, some Bougainvillean women participating in this research feel that they are currently losing political influence in the province, and their skills and knowledge are not fully harnessed in the consultation process. For instance, some participants noted that once women's official roles in the government or parliament end, they are marginalized and retain few avenues to continue to impart their knowledge and affect change in the province. A woman leader in Bougainville said, "women who have been part of this process in the past are now excluded; [they are] women who have institutional memory of what happened in the past." Another woman, a ward representative, noted that she was unaware of "what is going on at the government level" and complained that "most women are left out," and only hear about the ongoing talks on the radio. Participants concluded, "the consultations should involve the grassroots, the churches, youths, and women. We do not know what goes on in the consultations because we are not involved. It is very sad." In Bougainville, some also recognize the need to seek inclusion beyond the participation of established women, to grow a new generation of leaders, activists, and civil servants who can contribute to independence and subsequent state building. According to a woman leader in Bougainville, to address the generation gap, leaders have to go back into the communities and mentor women to "get women to realize the potential that they have within themselves." She also called on women who are already in influential positions to create space for younger women.

On their side, Port Moresby participants—men and women—noted that conservative social norms are changing and women have progressively advanced in many areas of public and economic life in the country. This development is seen as an opening due in part to the implementation of gender equality and social inclusion policies across the public sector. However, politics and political processes are seen as still lagging behind, inclusion-wise. Participants suggest applying gender inclusion principles and policies to the high-level process of intergovernmental consultations. Finally, some say that a more appropriate way to legitimize women's participation would be framing women's rights as fundamental human rights, instead of speaking of equality between men and women.

For women participants, being lead negotiators and members in the consultation and technical teams stood out as the most desired roles. In contrast, the observer role was seen as less important because it was viewed as a rather passive a passive one. A woman participant in Port Moresby explained why, "I am just tired of seeing ladies being observers. We have been observers enough, and now it's the time for us to lead our nation, to come up with decisions, we have to be a participant in decision making. This is a very important decision that is going to be made especially for Bougainville... but Papua New Guinea as well." Women see the role of the moderator somewhat ambivalently. While some argue that this position can influence the agenda of the consultations, others regard it as a mere facilitator or referee. Furthermore, in assessing the impact the women have had so far in the consultation process as very limited, some women participants demand leadership roles, noting "we need women as lead negotiators and in roles that will take lead and have influence. You can say that you are members of the negotiating team but what kind of influence do you have, to what extent are you being in that team making a difference?" Interestingly, some men and women see the role of the moderator as one of great importance, where women could increase their visibility and influence the process, while others view it as a simple as a "referee," and therefore not a highly desirable position for women to pursue.

IV.2. Benefits of including women in the consultation process

For many research participants, including more women in the consultation process is a matter of principle. Women in particular, in both Port Moresby and Bougainville, speak of fair representation as a sufficient argument for inclusion, but they also discuss specific ways in which women could enhance the process by informing the agenda, setting an appropriate tone, and replicating a model that is recognized internationally as leading to more sustainable peace, prosperity, and future levels of democracy.

Including more women can lead to improved outcomes of the consultation process. Women demand the inclusion of more women's voices in the consultation process to increase its legitimacy and buy-in, as a woman leader in Bougainville explained, "the best possible decision outcome must be one that is achieved because of inclusive decision making. There must be inclusion, and the decisions must promote the wishes of the people. They must promote the decision that people of PNG and people of Bougainville must be happy with. Even if it's a good decision, but the people do not understand it, that will be a risk for the sustainability of the outcomes that the both governments will come up with. It's more than making a good decision, it must be an inclusive decision." Women are also seen as having more integrity and motivation to observe the consultation process than their male counterparts. "Most of the time, when you put men as observers, they will observe and, when they go outside, they will not communicate with anyone. So long as they get their allowance, that's it," said a woman leader in Bougainville.

Including more women can improve and deepen public outreach. In Bougainville, public outreach is conducted through an array of governmental and non-governmental avenues, including regional consultation teams, the working group on Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality, Peace and Security, the Bougainville Women's Federation, the Sharing & Collaboration Platform managed by the Department of Independence and funded by the Conciliation Resources, and some radio programs. Research participants in Bougainville reported that public communication on the consultation process needs to be improved, as some key information remains largely available only to political power circles, despite the efforts mentioned above. In the view of a woman leader, those who are not in the government "just get bits and pieces of information on Facebook"; she called on the government to publicize its positions and expectations from the process "so that the civil society can disseminate the information for the people to know about the political outcome. The challenge now is to convince the people to accept whatever political outcome that two governments agree to. And this is only possible if there is greater consultation leading up to the ratification." The watchdog role of the civil society is recognized as a means to hold the government to account and advocate for more transparency. To align government positions with citizens' views and priorities, women could be a resource for conducting information-sharing and consultation meetings with their communities, and filter these views to leadership bodies. Women could also act as feedback loops to report decisions back to the community, as a woman leader said: "as activists we go between the people and the government, where we represent the people, but also translate the government's position to the people, and inform them." This work requires sustained technical and financial support, but is currently not funded systematically.

Including more women can reduce the risk of renewed conflict. As trauma and suffering in the aftermath of the recent civil conflict run deep, most research participants in Bougainville showed concern about potential renewed conflict if expectations related to the consultation timeframe and outcomes are not well managed. In some participants' views, due to their unique roles in their families and communities, women can contribute to conflict prevention by neutralizing tensions early on. While the civil conflict ended with the Bougainville Peace Agreement, localized outbreaks of violence still occur and women do the peace-building groundwork, as a woman leader explained: "women must be involved because they do the hard work. The dirty work. For instance, where I come from, conflicts are still going on. Women are always in the front lines, intervening, in times of conflicts. Men stand and stare. Women do not spectate; they intervene to solve the problems. So, when women are included in the consultations, they bring this ability to actively seek to solve problems and issues. When there are disputes in the consultations, women have all this information and experience to help. During crises they are always at the forefront brokering peace, but when a formal government steps in, they push women to the back."

V. Participants' Expectations of the International Community

In the absence of broad support from the country's political decision makers, the international community remains an important pillar for the inclusion of women and marginalized groups in PNG's transitional processes. Women participants in particular suggest continuing to build on inclusion successes in Bougainville by further supporting the elected members of the parliament in a push to open the national parliament to more women MPs. Additionally, international partners are seen as well-positioned to put pressure on the national and Bougainville governments to open space for the participation of marginalized groups. Across gender and localities, participants also call for a long-term engagement, inclusive programming, and strategic patience from development partners. While grateful for the ongoing support, participants voice some criticism about short-lived programs that may not be in line with local needs and priorities. For instance, women in Port

Moresby complain about the late start and short timeline of election programs, noting: “Consultations were set to follow the referendum. The international community, the international organizations that are interested in this issue, should have already started the work on helping women. Because when the talk starts, and then you try to fix it, it will be too late. Just like what we are experiencing now. So, learn to start early.”

Views on the role of the international community converge only to a certain degree in Port Moresby and Bougainville. Participants across geographies and genders both call on the international community to support women’s capacity-building efforts and advocacy to improve their inclusion in the consultation process. However, when it comes to political stands, views start to diverge. In Bougainville, participants are keen to see support from the international community that goes beyond supporting women, namely by acting as a watchdog and advocating for completing the consultation process and achieving independence within a clear timeframe. In particular, the United Nations is favored as an observer or a referee. Bougainville participants also hope to see donor countries amplifying the visibility of Bougainville’s road to independence across the Pacific region. In their views, this would contribute to shaping a constructive narrative about the nascent country in the South Pacific and could lead to more positive foreign relations engagements. In Port Moresby, however, participants are more reluctant to engage foreign actors in the process; they see only a limited role for them, and demand respect for the country’s sovereignty and for the Melanesian culture of dealing with social and political issues.

A man participant in Bougainville explained the risks of delaying the resolution of the process, with direct implications for the international community: “It was promised to us that the year after the referendum ratification would follow. We are in the second year of the post referendum and there’s a growing level of frustrations, especially in the local areas. It’s taking too long. What if we get up again, rise again, and take arms again? What are you [the international community] going to do about it? Forget all the other rubbish, we want to know when the independence would be, and so the international community has to play their part and get the two governments to remain focused on delivering independence. The governments must not cause disillusion amongst the people again and cause the rise of the secession movement again. Answer that question, when is independence! The longer we prolonged this date of independence, I’ll tell you this, in the past, only the local people fought. But now if it’s delayed, the elites of our group here will rise up with the rest of the people and take up arms against the PNG government. (...) This is a very serious point so all authorities must come now and answer this question now. Stop beating around the bush and thinking that we are back at paradise again.”

VI. Recommendations for Improving Women's Inclusion in the Consultation Process

VI.1. Strategic options for women's groups

- **Women activists can develop specific collaboration strategies** to engender the negotiations by increasing the number of women delegates, technical experts, and gender advisers to the moderator.
- **Women's groups can form broad-based coalitions** to lobby for a seat at the table and articulate women's demands in declarations and statements. The effectiveness of this strategy can be enhanced if the women's coalition is truly representative and a mechanism has been established in advance to ensure that the coalition's views systematically find their way to the consultation table. Even when these conditions are in place, resources are still needed to ensure that women's civil society groups are informed and receive logistical support.
- **Additionally, women's groups can also create more tracks for informal discussions between women from Bougainville and Papua New Guinea**, to deepen understanding of the needs, wants, and concerns of each side. For instance, women can initiate an all-female coalition representing a women's agenda, a parallel forum or movement, or a separate table or working group devoted to gender issues. Identifying strategic entry points for women's inclusion at the beginning of the process can increase their access to consultations. These groups can forge joint recommendations that take the perspectives of PNG and Bougainville women into consideration.
- **Activists can also develop plans to connect those at the consultation table back to the public**, especially in the conflict-affected areas, thus creating a feedback loop. Women can prioritize community concerns and communicate decisions made during consultations to their constituents.
- **Women civil society observers can provide female delegates with specific suggestions** for strengthening attention to key issues being discussed. They can also help draft declarations and position papers by female delegates.
- **Women can proactively ask for support from the chair or moderator.** They are more likely to gain access to talks and influence the peace agreement when a neutral facilitator helps them develop a common agenda.
- **Strengthening information exchange between women's groups and delegations can be a powerful strategy to encourage the consultation parties to raise gender issues** and increase the chance for the peace agreement to advance gender equality and protect women's rights.

VI.2. Recommendations for the international community

- **The international community can advance women's participation in negotiations by emphasizing the importance of their inclusion** to delegates involved in talks. Advocating for including women on negotiating teams can encourage their selection.
- **Gender-awareness training for male and female delegates** can enhance awareness of and attention to the varied priorities and needs of men and women.
- **Encouraging all sides to facilitate input from civil society** can help enable women's engagement in consultations.
- Women's participation in talks can often be constrained by obligations to family members; **providing financial and logistical support** can help enable women's active involvement.
- **Explicit acknowledgement of the importance of having women in the talks** by the chair, moderator, diplomats, and other actors can also help support women's inclusions.

- **Development partners can continue to encourage the two parties** to build trust, to ensure the predictability of the process, and to commit to a timeframe for the process to be completed, independently of the outcome of the next elections.
- **The donor community could support capacity-building and advocacy efforts** such as community outreach; communications and messaging; negotiation and overcoming domination techniques; and issue-based coalition building and conflict resolution

VI. 3. Opportunities for the government

- **The two governments can enhance their public communication efforts** to build a genuine dialogue across society.
- **The two governments, through the official consultation bodies, can make firm commitments to women's participation.** It may be difficult to integrate women and women's priorities into the already-established structure of the discussions further down the line. As the intergovernmental process is in its beginning stages, this creates an opportunity for authorities.
- **Gender experts can be given more access** so that they can be a greater resource. With no formal mechanism for gender advisers to understand what transpires in formal sessions, they are limited in their ability to act as resources. Greater interaction with male members of official delegations would increase their ability to keep current with the negotiations and to influence the proceedings.
- **Choosing locations and times for meetings can impact the participation of women.** Officials should take into consideration women's safety concerns and care provider responsibilities when deciding on the location or duration of a meeting. Ensuring the security of women decreases their vulnerability and can facilitate their involvement in peace processes.
- **Governments can engage the media to inform the public about the progress of the process and highlight the importance of women's participation.** Specifically, educating all parties (formal delegation members, mediators, international partners, and the public) as to the importance of women's concerns and their involvement can increase the number of women involved.
- **Governments can also broaden the scope of women's contributions beyond traditional roles,** and engage them in preparations and discussions on all items on the consultation agenda, including "hard" topics such as the economy or security, which remain largely male dominated.
- **Governments can make conscious efforts to connect women members in secondary forums** with the main intergovernmental consultation process.
- **Governments can insert specific provisions to strengthen the vision for social healing and reconciliation,** with special reparations measures for women survivors of gender-based violence during the internal conflict.
- For an inclusive agenda and more balance of power at the table, **discuss who can set the agenda.** Dominant actors can encourage a diversity of views and set appropriate times for women to speak.
- For a meaningful inclusion, **put mechanisms in place to ensure that that seat at the table can actually have an impact.** Balance old elites and new voices, develop selection criteria, and proactively engage those with strong relations with their communities.