

## Bougainville Male Advocates unite to support rights of Women & Children

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Feature Pic: Bougainville Male Advocates, Women Human Rights Defenders and NCfR celebrating the commitment of men to bring change to their lives and for their communities, 26 September 2019. Photo by Harjono Djyobisono/IWDA.

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Men from across Bougainville united during the Bougainville Male Advocates Forum held from 23-27 September 2019, in support of the rights of women and children to live free of violence.

Over 150 men, representative of the three regions of Bougainville (North, Central and South) pledged their commitment to keeping women and girls safe and to give their support to promoting gender equality within their homes and communities. From North Bougainville men also chose to commit to ownership of working with men and boys to promote gender equality; from South Bougainville men committed to reduce family and sexual violence through awareness; and from Central Bougainville men committed to the promotion of equal participation and positive role modelling.

The Forum was held in Chabai in Central Bougainville through the Men's Hub and the Bougainville Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) under the partnership between the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation (NCfR) and the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) supported by the Australian Government. Australian High Commission First Secretary (Bougainville), Clayton Harrington, opened the Forum and encouraged male participants to be leaders in their communities on gender equality and to call out sexual violence which he acknowledged takes "strength and courage".

The Forum brought together participants who were willing to be trained as male advocates, to learn about gender and human rights for the purpose of respecting and promoting women's rights and reducing family and sexual violence. The week long program enabled participants to build connections, strengthen their networks, and learn from WHRDs, national and international organisations and partners to deepen their understanding and engagement in transformational change. For many of the men, the majority being young, this was the first time to hear of the role and responsibility of being a male advocate.



Bougainville Male Advocates: men from North Bougainville, engaged in drafting their regional pledge of commitments towards the safe women and girls, supported by a WHRD. 27 September 2019. *Photo by Harjono Djoyobisono/IWDA.*

Male Advocates are those who commit to non-violent behaviours, challenge those behaviours in others, especially in the area of family and sexual violence, and who work together and in support of WHRDs. WHRDs are educators, advocates, counsellors and activists in their communities, who work towards changing harmful practices and beliefs to make communities safer for women and girls.

Sr Lorraine Garasu, Director of NCfR encouraged the men, stating that “to be a male advocate is a lifestyle, not a job and choosing change is foundational to the building of responsible families” and concluded by saying “Bougainville depends on you to lead change for the protection of rights, especially the rights of women and girls which is started by individuals in small ways”.

The focus of discussions included the various forms of violence, disability inclusion, community safety and security, the power and privileges of men, examples of men working with WHRDs to advance gender equality, accountabilities as a male advocate, and many other important issues relevant for the men and women of Bougainville.

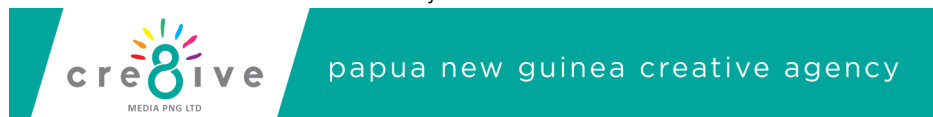
Five representatives from women’s organisations who are networking partners of NCfR attended the Forum, including from Voice for Change (Jiwaka), Eastern Highlands Family Voice (Eastern Highlands) and Wide Bay Conservation Association (East New Britain). These representatives shared their experiences of working with men for effecting community change. Chris Opai (Jiwaka) described the changes within himself and the respect he received from his children and family through gender training and adhering to the principles of being a male advocate, noting advocates must stand strong in the face of the challenges that will come in continuing this work.

Autonomous Bougainville Government departments were also invited to participate to share information on critical topics, including from the Department of Community Development and the Department of Police, Corrective Services and Justice. Of the latter, Kearnneth Nanei spoke of the key priority of the law and justice program to address gender inequality and sexual offences against women through training of Village Court officers on the Family Protection Act and the issuing of Interim Protection Orders, in combination with gender sensitisation.

The week long Male Advocates Forum program was coordinated by Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation, under the ‘From Gender Based Violence to Gender Justice and Healing’ project implemented in partnership with IWDA, which is supported by the Australian Government in partnership with the Autonomous Bougainville Government and the Government of Papua New Guinea as part of the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program.



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