



YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP PROJECT 2016 - 2018

Hear Our Voice! Stories of Young Women Leaders in Bougainville



Young Women's Leadership Program

The Young Women's Leadership Project (YWLP) was implemented by the Bougainville Women's Federation (BWF) in partnership with International Women's Development Agency, from 2016 to 2018. With funding from the Australian Government in partnership with the Government of Papua New Guinea as part of the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program, the YWLP worked across the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, the YWLP addressing the needs and ambitions of young women seeking to increase their leadership skills and opportunities.

The project provided a safe space for young women to develop as leaders, build networks and peer support. As part of the project, participants were involved in training and annual leadership forums for young women from Bougainville and other Pacific countries. Participants created structures to support the movement of young women's leadership in Bougainville, including through District Young Women's Associations and representation on the Executive Committee of BWF.

Judith Oliver is the Executive Officer of BWF and reflects on the YWL project:

"Understanding the challenges that young women face, our Young Women's Leadership Project helps young women to build their confidence and leadership skills. It provides opportunities for young women to take part in decision-making at all levels, through targeted trainings, mentoring, advocacy and building networks of young women working together."

Through this project, many inspiring young women have stepped up into leadership roles in various spheres, including in community, business, and politics. These young women demonstrate that they have the skills and resources required to create positive changes in Bougainville. They are the future, and here are some of their stories.



Young Women's Leadership Program

JOURNEY TO THE YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Young women are often missing from decision making spaces in Bougainville. Although young women have specific needs and make up a significant part of the population, their voices are not represented in government or community leadership.

As part of its work in empowering women, BWF wanted to understand why few young women were taking up leadership roles in their communities or working with mature women leaders.

In 2014, BWF undertook research in partnership with International Women's Development Agency and Australian National University to understand the barriers and opportunities for young women in leadership. The research found that young women face particular challenges in taking on leadership roles, including negative family and community attitudes towards young women's leadership, lack of confidence and education, and family responsibilities.

The Young Women's Leadership Project was designed to build young women's leadership capacity based on the research findings and the ambitions of the young women involved. The project invested in young women, empowering them to take on leadership roles in all areas. It did so by building young women's capacity to voice their views confidently and remove barriers between older women and younger women in leadership roles.



Photo Credit: Harjono Djyobisono/IWDA

Advocating for change

“Young women are the future leaders, and this program is empowering young women to build up their leadership capacity.”

ANGELINE KOBUKO, BANA DISTRICT

Secretary of Bana Ward Women’s Group

Angeline is a young woman leader from the Bana District, in the Southern region of Bougainville. She participated in Young Women’s Leadership Project (YWLP) in 2016 after Bougainville Women’s Federation staff recruited her, recognising her leadership qualities and potential.

She went on to become a trainer of other young women leaders and coordinates youth group activities in her ward. Angeline was also selected to attend the International Visitors Exchange program on Women, Peace and Security, in the United States in 2016.

Angeline recognises that YWLP enabled her to be a more effective leader and advocate on behalf of young people in her community. “Before the training I worked with Bana Institute Association as the President,” Angeline says. “I felt I lacked advocacy, mobilising and networking skills. After the training, I am now able to advocate on issues that affect young people,” she says.

In Angeline’s Ward, it is mostly the young women who are taking the leading role in organising youth group activities and participating actively in the community. “Young women are the future leaders, and this program is empowering young women to build up their leadership capacity,” she says. “If we have this network of young women, we will be in a better position for young women to contest in Community Government elections.”

Bana District – like other parts of Bougainville – faces challenges such as drug and alcohol abuse and sorcery-accusation related violence. Angeline believes that the leadership training supports young women to come together and deal with challenges in their community. She believes that there is a “great need for this young women’s movement” in ensuring young women’s voices are heard.



Photo Credit: Harjono Djoyobisono/IWDA

Confidence to lead

"I am Bethsiba and I am a young woman leader."

BETHSIBA HILLARY, BUKA DISTRICT

President of the Haku Young Women's Association

Bethsiba is a young woman leader from Haku, North Bougainville, and the President of the Haku Young Women's Association. Growing up with six brothers, Bethsiba always aspired to become a leader, but lacked the confidence to do so.

Taking part in the Young Women's Leadership Project (YWLP), Bethsiba has developed the skills and courage to lead. Previously excluded from decision making, she now works with women and men on decisions that affect her and her community.

Her good leadership qualities led her to be invited to represent young women on the community government referendum committee ahead of Bougainville's 2019 referendum on independence. As a committee member and young woman, Bethsiba will educate other women on how to vote and the importance of voting. She hopes that with more women in community government leadership positions, issues that affect women, such as water and sanitation, will be better addressed.

As President of the Haku Young Women's Association, Bethsiba is also using the skills she learnt from the YWLP to fundraise for a new resource centre, enabling more women in her community to receive leadership training. She says that one of the major challenges young women face is that they are often excluded from decision making, as their voices remain unheard. She hopes that through leadership training, more women will stand up and "be the change, be a leader".



Photo Credit: Harjono Djoyobisono/IWDA

BRIDGETTE MOHIN, BUKA DISTRICT

Young Women's Leadership Project Officer

Bridgette Mohin, 30, believes a good leader should be transparent, wise, trustworthy, humble and accountable.

In 2015, she applied to attend an introduction to leadership training and became part of Young Women's Leadership Project (YWLP). She learnt a lot from the program and gained the confidence and courage to take on leadership roles and represent young women in her community.

After attending a number of training sessions, Bridgette was inspired to develop her skills and leadership qualities. She is currently one of the Young Women Champions of the YWLP, acting as a trainer to other young women. Bridgette takes the issues and concerns of young women directly to the decision makers and other experts in her community. Her outstanding leadership led her to be recruited as BWF staff.

Following the 2017 Young Women's Leadership Forum, Bridgette helped to establish a Young Women's Association in Tonsu community. The young women members share skills and support each other in livelihood initiatives such as sewing reusable menstrual hygiene pads.

A voice for young women

"In my community, men make decisions, and young women are seen as implementers of the decisions."



Photo Credit: Sangita Singh/IWDA

Finding her passion

"Those of us who can speak up, we need to speak up."

FLORENCE NAINA, BANA DISTRICT

Finance Manager, Bougainville Women's Federation

Florence first engaged with BWF and the Young Women's Leadership Program in the initial research phase as a field researcher. Although she had already completed a degree in Environmental Science from the University of Papua New Guinea, this was her first time doing hands-on research.

Florence says that when she was studying, she didn't think of being somebody. The results of the research made her realise that young women's voices are not represented in leadership. Working with BWF, she realised the importance of women's leadership and found a mentor in Barbara Tanne, the former Executive Officer. Florence decided that she wanted to be a part of the change.

After completing the research, Florence assisted BWF on a casual basis, first becoming an Assistant Project Officer for two projects, then Finance Support Officer. This was her first exposure to finance. Florence has always been good at maths and enjoys working with numbers. Through her work at BWF, although she didn't have any background in finance, she discovered a passion for this work.

Florence is now the Finance Manager for BWF and plays a key role in supporting the Young Women's Leadership Project. She is receiving on-the-job training and her passion for numbers and accountability has led to positive changes in BWF.

"For a long time, young women's voices haven't been heard and our issues haven't been addressed. Now it's time to speak out and make sure those issues are addressed, rather than suffering in silence. Those of us who can speak up, we need to speak up."



Photo Credit: Harjono Djoyobisono/IWDA

A role model for Bougainville

*"I am a leader and I
am proud."*

FLORENCE TOMIETS, BUKA DISTRICT

Treasurer of the North Young Women's Association

Florence Tomiets, 33, is from Malasang village in North Bougainville.

She says that in her community, many people are illiterate and she wanted to become a leader to support other women. Florence was a participant in the pilot program and is now a trainer for young women in other districts. At first, Florence thought women couldn't make decisions, but after attending and being part of the program she had the confidence to stand up and talk in the community.

Through the program, Florence learnt valuable financial management and agricultural skills, which helped her to start her own farming business. She is extending her knowledge and skills to other young women in her community, helping them to get into farming. As a young woman in business, Florence says she is thankful and proud to help other young women become self-reliant too.

"After attending the leadership training, I wanted to run for Community Government election. I didn't make it, but it was a stepping stone for me just trying to experience how it feels to enter or try to go into politics."

Florence has established a Young Women's Association in her community, and is organising the young women to fundraise so that more young women can participate in the same trainings that she has benefitted from.

"I see that young women can make changes in the community. After the program I know that I can be a leader, I can really stand up. I can advocate for the issues that women are facing I have all this confidence that I can help other women that are being left behind."



Photo Credit: IWDA

HENRIETTA SINEI, KIETA DISTRICT

President of the Executive Committee Representative, BWF

Henrietta Sinei, 28, is from Siruna village of Kieta District and is married with one child. She finished her tertiary studies in 2009 and gained employment on a contract basis but due to lack of secure employment is now back home in her community doing community work.

Henrietta became President of the Kieta Young Women's Association after attending the Young Women Leadership Project (YWLP) training in Kieta. She is also the women's secretary at the Village Assembly Level and has just been elected to the Executive Committee of the Bougainville Women's Federation. This is the first time a young woman has been elected to such a position.

"The most important changes that happen after attending the leadership training and being involved in the YWLP is that there is now unity among us young women," Henrietta says. "Now, young women from different Village Assemblies work together and share ideas at our level."

"We are now being involved in decision-making and representing our young women in the district and when attending on behalf of our young women we are voicing and raising our concerns and issues to the next level. By observing and participating in the workshop and activities on advocacy, we gained confidence and respect from mature women leaders and young women colleagues."

Henrietta says the training helped her recognise her potential and the importance of young women leaders in all levels of decision-making. "The training has given me confidence and given me a space as a young woman leader to explore and learn from mature women leaders as mentors. Also the training has helped shape my life and provide a way forward which I intend to reach."

Stronger together

"Now, young women from different Village Assemblies work together and share ideas at our level."



Photo Credit: BWF

HILDA VERU, TOROKINA DISTRICT

Young Woman Leader

Hilda Veru, 28, is from Torokina district in South Bougainville. She comes from a remote village in the mountains of Torokina known as Evo/Rotokas. "I was able to make it to high school but dropped out during my Grade 10 and stayed in the village," she says.

Hilda participated in several training sessions as part of the Young Women's Leadership Project (YWLP), and has since begun agriculture training too. "I was invited to attend the Integrated Agriculture training at Buka-Halia Constituency by the Halia Family Farm project, which I very much appreciate," Hilda says. She is learning about crops and livestock, which she intends to put into practice in her village.

"The trainings equip me with the new skills, ideas and leadership as a driver of change in my community. I am happy with YWLP because I can say it sets the human foundation in all aspects. I have carried out basics awareness on child abuse, violence against women and shared ideas about financial education on how to budget at least a toea out of any income I earn during the day or week," Hilda says.

Hilda has received support from her family, community, village elders and her peers. "Do not let challenges defeat our community's well-being," she says. "I am most proud of YWLP because I have learnt many things."

Overcoming challenges

*"I am a driver of change
in my community."*



Photo Credit: Harjono Djoyobisono/IWDA

IRENE SUBALIK, NISSAN DISTRICT

Young Woman Researcher

Irene Subalik, 30, is from Pinipel Island, Nissan District. Irene is very interested in learning new things and works closely with women's groups. "Everyone in a community is part and parcel to achieving better living," she says.

Irene says that the biggest challenges when voicing women's issues are men not understanding the rights of each person because they have been brought up in a tradition or culture which influences their behaviour and attitudes towards women. "For example, some men don't have respect at all for the women and they don't support women including women in leadership positions," she says. "Women who are brought up by these customs and traditions sometimes stay silent and submit to the men. As a result, women do not understand their rights and voice out their issues."

Irene was invited to take part in the baseline research in 2014 by Bougainville Women's Federation and supported by the Australian Government and IWDA. The research was based on young women leaders and the barriers they face. "As one of the field researchers, I identified with what the young women said in the findings," Irene says. "I was motivated and interested by their views and said to myself, I need to do something."

When the Young Women's Leadership Project applications were launched, Irene quickly took the opportunity to take part. "Attending the trainings on leadership, family and sexual reproductive health, financial literacy and human rights – I learnt to lead as a young woman and be transparent. I gained confidence and courage, identified strength and found a way forward to address the issues," she says.

"All that I have learnt, I am now sharing with women in my community."

From research to action

"I learnt to lead as a young woman and be transparent. I gained confidence and courage, identified strength..."



Photo Credit: Harjono Djoyobisono/IWDA

Gaining respect for young women leaders

"Through the trainings, we opened our hearts and minds, and are seeing ourselves from a different perspective."

LAVINIA BIORI, WAKUNAI DISTRICT

President of the Wakunai Young Women's Association

Lavinia Biori is a young woman leader from Wakunai District in Bougainville. She participated in the Young Women's Leadership Project (YWLP) with 29 other women, and is now the President of the Wakunai Young Women's Association.

Before participating in YWLP, Lavinia, like many young women, was often excluded from important decision-making processes. However the training she received through YWLP not only gave her the knowledge and confidence to stand and make her voice heard, but it also encouraged community acceptance of woman leaders. The training Lavinia received increased her capacity to support her family financially, and also gave her legitimacy within the community, saying, "They respect me because I am a leader and I have responsibility."

Now the President of the Wakunai Young Women's Association, Lavinia is organising the women in her own community, holding events, and running training and mentoring programs to support young women's leadership. The community now recognises that the young women who have gone through the training are capable. "The mentoring program has really changed us and empowered us to stand up here. It gives me strength and confidence to talk out in public. I'm really happy, thanks to Bougainville Women's Federation."

Lavinia and the Wakunai Young Women's Association are expanding their capacity and reach, by investing membership fees into profitable activities such as chicken farming.



Photo Credit: Harjono Djoyobisono/IWDA

Speaking out for gender equality

*"The fear that I use to have
to talk in public is not in me
anymore."*

LYDIA KATSIA, SIWAI DISTRICT

Young Woman Leader

Lydia Katsia, 26, is from Siwai District, in South Bougainville. "In my community, young women had previously not been involved in any community activities due to some cultural beliefs," she says. "During meetings their ideas are not being considered or supported, even with young couples, women are categorised as one word - housewives, meaning they are seen as lesser value and with no authority."

After seeing an advertisement for the Young Women's Leadership Project (YWLP), Lydia applied because she was interested in becoming a leader.

Lydia attended YWLP trainings and workshops, and says she now has the ability to lead, demonstrate effective communication, relationship building, industry expertise, trustworthiness, commitment, passion, honesty and integrity. "The fear that I use to have to talk in public is not in me anymore, I speak to youths in the community to rise up and work together for the good of our community and I talk more about gender equality to them, so now they know and understand gender equality."

"Yes, women have the same power as men – gender equality is very important. What men do women can do, they both have the power and right," Lydia says. "The importance of young women's leadership is to support girls and to strengthen communities and our world."



Photo Credit: Harjono Djoyobisono/IWDA

MONA LISA KOVOHO, ATOLLS DISTRICT

Business leader

Mona Lisa, 30, is from Atolls District, north of Buka. She is a business owner, homeowner and an inspiring woman leader.

Prior to participating in Young Women's Leadership Project (YWLP), Mona Lisa lived at home with her parents. Since receiving leadership training in 2015, Mona Lisa says she has developed the confidence and skills to take control of her life. Through YWLP, Mona Lisa learnt how to make goals and plan. One of the goals Mona Lisa set was to become a business owner or to have a source of income, giving her independence and ownership of her life.

After participating in the training, Mona Lisa came together with other women from the YWLP to form an association. In addition to fundraising to facilitate community leadership workshops in other districts, the women realised they all shared a common interest – to achieve the five-year goal they set during the YWLP. They decided that the best way to achieve their goals was by working together. They supported each other financially by combining their money to provide small loans to members, to be used to build their businesses. The loans were then repaid from business profits, and then re-loaned to other members.

The impact YWLP has had on these woman's lives is undeniable. At the age of 30, Mona Lisa and two other women now own their own businesses. What is more, with the profits gained from these businesses, they have all built their own homes. "The program has really helped me to know myself and what I can do," Mona Lisa says. "At that time when I was young and before I attended the program, I went to the program with nothing. When I came out, now my hands are full."

Independence through small businesses

"The program has really helped me to know myself and what I can do."



Photo Credit: BWF

Leadership through economic empowerment

"To be a leader I need to be vocal, transparent, fair, helpful, considerate and most of all independent."

SANDRA BARIA, KIETA DISTRICT

Secretary of the Kieta Young Women's Association

Sandra Baria is from Bairima Village of Kieta District. She is 28 years old and married with two children. She is currently involved in the Young Women's Leadership Project (YWLP) and is the Secretary of Kieta District Young Women's Association. The program was introduced in 2016 and since then young women from the district have been engaged in training and workshops. "This has brought changes in our lives especially those of us who did not complete our studies and were married at very early stages of life." Sandra says.

Through YWLP, Sandra was among a group of young women who participated in the Integrated Agriculture Training Program.

"These trainings have taught me how to cultivate land or look after livestock to earn income in order to sustain myself and help others in my community know the importance of practising farming in their lives," Sandra says.

"The training also helped me develop my skills in becoming a leader since being a leader is all about being independent and the training has taught me ways of becoming independent. To be a leader I need to be vocal, transparent, fair, helpful, considerate and most of all independent."

"I have been doing all these with faithful support from immediate family and yes, there were challenges every now and then, especially with misunderstandings and criticism from and within the communities but all these were overcome by listening to the critics and explaining what this is all about since we have to understand and know our people."

"I am most proud of my fellow young women in Kieta District who have shown changes and can now do what is right for their family and communities."



Photo Credit: Harjono Djoyobisono/IWDA

Running for election

"I started to feel that I can become a leader."

SKAILIE KEVI, BUKA DISTRICT

President of the North Young Women's Association

Skailie Kevi is a wife, a mother of two, and an inspiring woman leader. She grew up and attended school in Buka, before moving to Lae to study business. Upon her return to Bougainville, Skailie undertook research on family health and safety for the United Nations Development Programme, and collected data on women from vocational schools for Bougainville Women's Federation (BWF).

In 2015, she joined BWF's Young Women's Leadership Project (YWLP) pilot program. Skailie was highly engaged during the YWLP, participating in training on Leadership, Sexual Reproductive and Health Rights, and Human Rights. These trainings provided Skailie with an opportunity to increase her leadership skills and build her confidence, making her feel like she could become a leader. Trained as a community trainer, Skailie is supporting young women's leadership by working to form young women's groups in each Ward in her constituency.

Community members also noted her leadership potential, prompting her to run for Community Government elections. After finishing second, Skailie is excited to run for the 2022 elections, stating that if she wins she will organise the young women and youth in her community, increasing their leadership skills while raising awareness around community issues such as alcohol and gambling. In the meantime, Skailie delivers one-on-one sessions with the youth in her community, but hopes to expand her training sessions to include the wider community and men.

Skailie's advice to young women is to "come join us, to receive the same trainings. They can come and learn how to manage themselves, manage the house, manage their finances. They can be somebody else in the future."



Photo Credit: BWF

SONIA SAPIA, BUKA DISTRICT

Young Woman Leader

Sonia Sapia is from Nova village, in Tonsu, North Bougainville. Sonia joined the Young Women's Leadership Project (YWLP) after learning about it from an alumni of the program. Although Tonsu is not one of the YWLP target areas, an alumna took the initiative to roll out the program in her home community.

"After attending the 2017 Young Women's Leadership Forum, I together with other Tonsu participants decided to form our own Young Women's Association," Sonia says. "I was then appointed to attend the Integrated Agricultural Training Program on behalf of our Association."

The main objective of the training is to help rural farmers to improve in agricultural techniques. For example, by backyard gardening and poultry farming.

Sonia says that participants and village community educators showed great interest in the training as a way to improve quality of living for women. "Also present were observers who willingly took part and who will take the knowledge and pass on to those who were not privileged to attend," she says.

"The hardworking team imparted so much to the participants and indicated that any issues concerning agriculture and farming encountered in our communities should be manageable because of our very successful training program. The agriculture sector is a way forward for rural farmers."

Skills for development

"I was then appointed to attend the Integrated Agricultural Training Program on behalf of the Alumni which I did not hesitate to do."



Photo Credit: Harjono Djoyobisono/IWDA

VERONICA OKURU, BUIN DISTRICT

President of the Buin Young Women's Association

Veronica Okuru, 27, is from Buin in South Bougainville. She is a champion of young women's empowerment and participation in decision-making. Since last year she has been a Welfare Officer for the Department of Community Development, helping young people to address social problems. Veronica applied for the Young Women's Leadership Project (YWLP) hoping to learn about leadership skills and become a more effective leader in her community. Since joining the program, she has been involved in trainings on gender and human rights, leadership skills, and financial literacy.

She says that through the trainings, young women are exposed to the idea that they have a voice. They gain confidence to talk freely and speak out about what they are feeling and the challenges they face. This can be particularly challenging for young women in Buin – one of only two areas of Bougainville that are patrilineal, where men are seen as the sole decision-makers. Veronica says that she has noticed that young women from other (matrilineal) districts often feel more comfortable to speak up around men, because when women have rights to land, they have a greater voice in the community.

Since the start of the YWLP, young women in Veronica's community have had more confidence to be involved in community activities, such as sports, fundraising, and church activities. This has helped Veronica and other young women in her community be heard by community leaders when they do speak out.

"When men see you doing something that is a good thing for the community, they start to give you respect." The young women of Buin District have since established the Buin Young Women's Association, under the umbrella of Bougainville Women's Federation. Veronica was elected President. The 30 members have contributed a membership fee, which was used as capital to start up a small business selling basic goods like rice. The profits from the store will help to involve more young women from the area in leadership trainings and other opportunities.

Young women have a voice

"When men see you doing something that is a good thing for the community, they start to give you respect."



Photo Credit: Harjono Djyobisono/IWDA

WILLIANDA HOLAN, BUKA DISTRICT

Treasurer of the Haku Young Women's Association

Willianda Holan, 30, is from Haku, North Bougainville. Married and with one son, she is a member of the Young Women's Association and works as a primary school teacher. She uses the leadership skills she gained from the Young Women's Leadership Program (YWLP) to advise parents and community members about the importance of education.

Willianda hoped that by attending leadership training, she would not only gain the skills needed to confidently lead, but that she would be able to pass on this knowledge to other members in her community unable to attend the training.

Describing the impact of the training, Willianda says, "It has given me more confidence to stand up and speak up for my people and help young women in the village who cannot come out and speak up their minds."


She notes that women need to work together to develop solutions to issue that affect them. By bringing together women from her community, Willianda is supporting women's leadership while raising awareness of community issues. She hopes that the YWLP will not only continue, but expand into other villages, giving the women leaders of tomorrow the opportunity to develop their leadership skills so that they may confidently stand up for the rights of women.

**Mobilising young women
to work together**

*"I can be a leader, I can be
the change."*

International Women's Development Agency is the leading Australian Agency entirely focused on women's rights and gender equality in the Asia Pacific region. Our vision is a gender equal world.

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Bougainville Women's Federation (BWF) is the umbrella and representative body for women of Bougainville. Its vision is to be a voice for women and its mission is to empower women to be equal partners in decision making.

Find out more

www.bwf.org.pg

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Young Women's Leadership Program

The Young Women's Leadership Project is supported by the Australian Government in partnership with the Government of Papua New Guinea as part of the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program.



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SHAPING PACIFIC DEVELOPMENT