

Summary of a report from Central Besena Mauri Ihatubuna Inc (CBMI)

The following is a report from Central Besena Mauri Ihatubuna Inc; one of the Community Development Scheme core groups that have a pool of trained field workers.

What they did

In all, 11,855 people attended awareness in Kairuku, Hiri, Goilala, Abau and Rigo.

In Goilala, four teams consisting of two people each covered the area. Abau had one team of 4 because this electorate had trialled the LPV system already in 2003 so had less need than the others. Rigo had 8 teams of two each. Here they worked closely with the Uniting Church network who allotted times for them to conduct awareness during church events. The church then encouraged these people to return to their village and tell others. CBMI checked on this when they themselves returned in October to these areas and they found that many knew about LPV because they had heard from church members involved in the original training so this appears to be an effective way of passing on information.

Motu, English and local dialects were used by the teams. The awareness covered who is eligible to vote (i.e. the electoral roll), good leaders and governance, the difference between the old voting system and the new LPV system, mock elections and counting.

The teams traveled by air, land and sea/river. They hired a vehicle for two teams whilst the rest walked; 10 to 30 kms at any one time between villages. They used bush tracks, walked along beaches, rode push bikes and dinghies.

They found that some people had met PNGEC officials when they were out on their first enrollment and awareness process. Local people said these official had mentioned there was a new voting system but the awareness had primarily covered enrollment, rather than LPV. So the CBMI project was timely as it concentrated mainly on LPV. Also CBMI was able to go beyond the LPV system to cover other relevant topics like good governance which are directly relevant to democratic voting.

The main problem they had was reaching remote places due to the closure of many local airports and leading the team to walk for three days at a time to places like Woitape, Tapini, and Fane.

Another difficulty was that despite advance notice given to village leaders and ward councilors, they often arrived and it seemed these leaders had not passed the message on so people were not prepared. This may also have been because the team heard from people that many were unhappy with their councillor's performance so unwilling to cooperate with them. As well, many people were disillusioned with their leader's performance generally so many were not interested in elections, enrollment and voting because of this.

This also meant that many people were willing to believe Jonathon Baure who has been very effective in spreading incorrect information that people in this part of PNG don't need to enroll and vote because they are actually Australian citizens.

Many of those who did want to vote told the team that they had not been enrolled during the election exercise as no-one had come to put their names on the roll, so they were anxious to be included during the verification process. Some of these who had enrolled had found the form confusing as it included a number of lines that were irrelevant for them e.g. street names, section and lot numbers.

Recommendations

CBMI recommended that enrollment forms should be in duplicate so the voter can keep a copy for their records and this could be produced during elections as their ID and as proof that they did register, in case their names are not on the roll when they go to vote.

They also recommended a separate, simpler enrollment form for rural communities to fill in.

Summary

The group covered a total of 213 villages throughout the province with 11,855 people attending awareness.

As the ballot paper changed midway through their awareness, they will need to go back and re-cover those areas they went to where they talked about the old 1,2,3, system. They have been topped up with funds to ensure this is done.