

Papua New Guinea's National Standard for Community Development Workers

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Community development workers from CARE PNG and the Community Development Agency (nightly debrief and reviewing plans during drought response, Gumine District, 2016)

Papua New Guinea (PNG) has a competency-based National Standard for Community Development Workers. It is home-grown and government endorsed, and was officially launched in May 2007 by the then Minister for Community Development, Dame Carol Kidu. The Standard falls under the auspices of PNG's National Apprenticeships and Trades Testing Board (NATTB). It describes the minimum performance criteria for tasks commonly carried out by Community Development Workers (CDWs), including field officers, field workers, pastors, community liaison officers, ward development committee members, community volunteers, district officers and extension officers.

The National Standard for CDWs reduces the complexity of development approaches to common minimum criteria for performance. It's not a recipe to follow, but the absolute minimum ingredients that need to be in the recipe. It complements other specialist skills and supports existing workplace practices, so that when a CDW with sectoral expertise such as an agricultural officer, pastor or a district commerce officer carries out their normal duties, they will also have the common minimum skills and knowledge to work with families, groups and communities in ways that facilitate participatory, inclusive, locally led and self-reliant development.

Because literacy and education levels are generally still low in PNG, development initiatives that help families, groups and communities rely on CDWs from outside or inside the community to help facilitate the process. The National Standard is a great tool for building the capacity, confidence, professional identity and employability of CDWs, leading to better development assistance.

The desire to establish the National Standard for CDWs was driven by PNG civil

society organisations (CSOs) and tertiary institutions, and its development facilitated through an AusAID-funded program (the Community Development Scheme). A committee of PNG experts was nominated by CSOs and the tertiary sector to develop the National Standard. It comprised representatives from Divine Word University's PNG Studies, the University of Technology's Communications for Development department, the PNG Department for Community Development, the NATTB, and PNG CSOs working across improved forestry practices, conservation, disability services and advocacy, agricultural extension, family violence, health, education and broader community development. This committee formulated the minimum competencies required of PNG CDWs when they: conduct training or awareness programs; help a community, group, or family to analyse their development situation and identify priorities; help communities to develop a plan, facilitate an agreement or implement an activity; and monitor progress and evaluate activities. The National Standard also includes minimum competencies required of PNG CDWs when they make preparations, conduct community entry and prepare reports.

Since 2007 the National Standard for CDWs has been reviewed, and it has evolved. Notably, the assessment and accreditation process has become workplace based, and simpler and easier to use for organisations wanting to help their personnel to obtain nationally recognised (government) accreditation. For many organisations, however, it has been sufficient to train their personnel so that they have the skills to meet the National Standard, even if they are not formally assessed and accredited. Competency-based training handbooks and coursebooks that target the National Standard have been refined and are now widely used. Currently, PNG's Fresh Produce Development Agency, the Coffee Industry Corporation, CARE International in PNG, Ok Tedi Development Foundation, Oil Search Ltd and Oil Search Foundation have officers participating in CDW training. Many districts and PNG NGOs have trained officers and community volunteers against the National Standard in recent years including Gumine District, Obura-Wonenara District, Menyamya District, Bougainville Women's Federation, the Autonomous Bougainville Government, Backyard Farms and the Community Development Agency.

As well as providing a basis for CDW duty statements and training courses, the National Standard helps CDWs and the organisations they work for by:

- providing benchmarks for CDW assessment
- broadening the CDW's skills base
- recognising the skills held by those in both formal and informal employment
- developing a portfolio of a CDW's competence to support professional and employment opportunities
- providing a basis for in-house accreditation and the option of NATTB accreditation

- identifying further training needs
- delivering a common standard for CDWs in PNG.

There is also the opportunity for CDWs and the organisations they work for to market themselves as delivering development assistance in line with the National Standard.

Over time the standards may gradually be raised and added to so that CDW practice also continually adapts and improves. Capitalising on progress so far, there are opportunities for the National Standard to be more broadly adopted and embedded. This will ensure that the Standard is sustained and improved, and that its benefits are realised more widely in PNG. These opportunities include:

- Commitment from larger organisations, including the resource industry, to provide their CDWs (field officers, extension officers, community liaison officers, etc) with ongoing access to training, assessment and accreditation against the National Standard. Just as minimum standards must be met in traditional trades, so too minimum standards should be met when it comes to engagement with industry-affected communities (for example, Oil Search is currently partnering with the Australian Council for International Agricultural Research to develop CDW coursebooks that will be integrated into the professional training of Oil Search field officers).
- Commitment from international agencies to ensure that their PNG programs are conducted in ways that enable field activities to meet (and exceed) PNG's minimum standards for CDWs.
- Web-based open access to the National Standard and related information (currently access relies on people phoning and requesting hard copies from the NATTB).

The National Standard provides a simple foundation – the minimum requirements – for the complex and sensitive work of CDWs and community development practice. It provides a structure for professional development and professional recognition of CDWs and has the potential to continue to drive improved practice. Whether engaging CDWs in long-term community development programs or providing support during times of emergency such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, having access to and confidence in the professional capacities of CDWs to effectively facilitate engagement and action is critical. How then could more agencies and organisations be made aware of, and take up, the PNG National Standard for Community Development Workers? Your ideas welcome!

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