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Increasing rural women's involvement in government decision making

Teresa Maiolo

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INCREASING RURAL WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING.

Teresa Maiolo

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report was to identify why rural women's involvement in government decision-making is of a low level despite the concerted government action, and to furthermore provide solutions to inform action. The strength of the research presented is that all information is firmly established in the rural women's experiences.

Twenty-one Western Australian rural women leaders were individually interviewed. These women represent the larger rural regions of Western Australia: South West, Great Southern, Goldfields-Esperance, Mid-West, Gascoyne, and Kimberley regions. These women were familiar with the broad systems of government, leadership, information and communication technology, and obviously rural life.

The diversity of the rural women included in this research is demonstrated by the women's ages, personal and professional responsibilities, farming and town subsistence, and the rural, remote, and regional lifestyle. Women's ages ranged from thirty to sixty five years of age. With the younger women having the added responsibility of dependent children at home. Almost all of the women had business or work commitments. Further diversity experienced among the women in their degree of isolation, committee involvement, and use of information and communications technology.

The opening question asked in the conversational interviews was, "What new ways can rural women become more involved in government decision-making?" Prompts were given to explore how information and communications technology could be used as a solution, and prompts were given to gain insight into the women's needs, concerns, and ideas. All the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

An inductive analytical approach was used to analyse the data by identifying and triangulating common themes. The purpose being to understand the restraining and driving forces behind rural women's involvement in government decision-making, and to generate solutions to increase rural women's involvement.

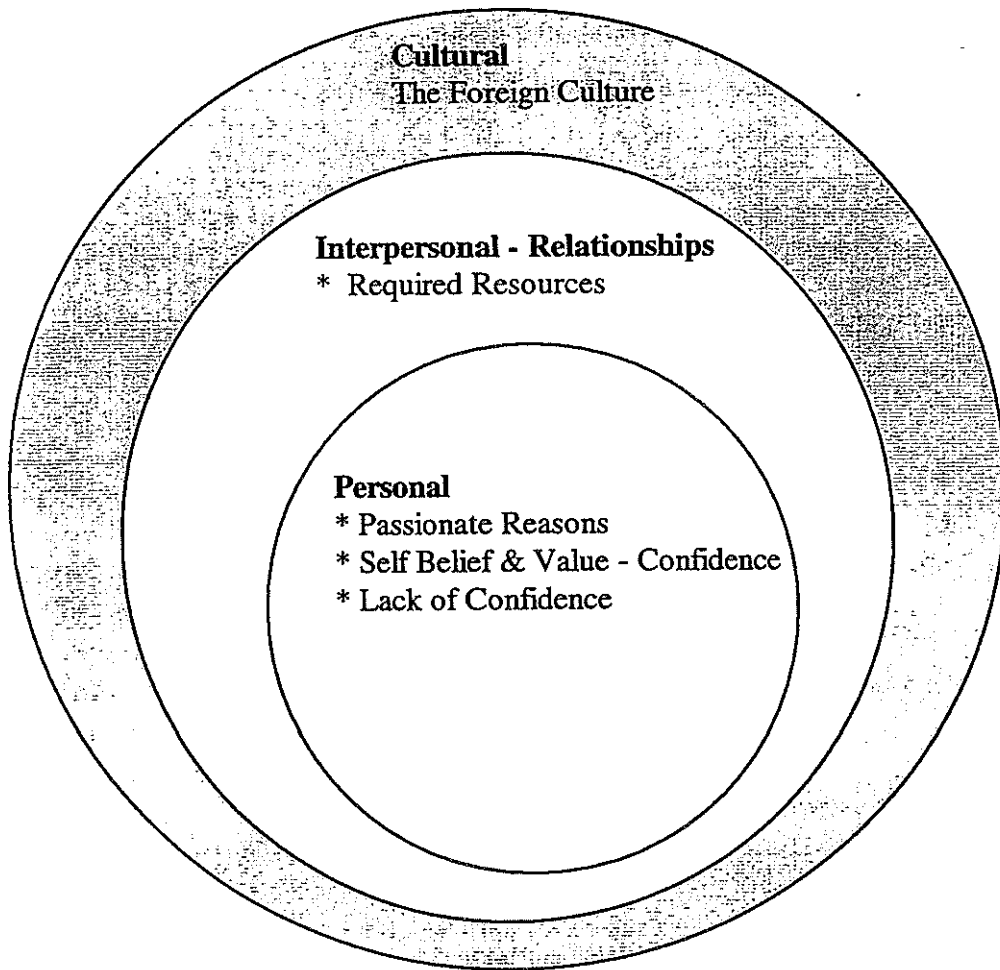


Figure 1: A framework incorporating contributing factors of rural women's involvement in Government decision making

A comprehensive framework, illustrated in Figure 1 incorporates all the contributing forces to women's involvement in government decision-making. In brief, the impeding factors hindering many rural women's involvement in government decision-making are:

- many rural women who are not involved, lack the necessary confidence and belief that she can make a difference;
- the resources required such as time, money, and support are limited, and compete with many rural women's current responsibilities and commitments; and
- the culture of government decision-making is often encountered as foreign and rigid.

The driving factors leading rural women to be involved in government decision-making are:

- All the rural women involved have a passion, a driving reason to be involved, which is borne from their care, responsibility and concern of themselves, their families, their communities, and in general, people and their surroundings; and

- All the rural women involved value and believe in themselves. This confidence is characteristically associated with the rural women's proactive attitude to instigate action and an understanding that they uniquely contribute to action and to the decision-making process.

Figure 1 demonstrates the broader, complex, and dynamic qualities of impeding and driving forces that contribute to rural women's involvement in government decision-making.

A set of principles to guide change strategies and solutions was generated from the rural women's interviews. These principles intend to alleviate potential impediments so many rural women have the opportunity to be involved in change strategies.

These guiding principles include:

- Ensure the inclusiveness of all rural women.
- Acknowledge the developmental nature and individuality of leadership
- Use local community and personal networks to access women.
- Maintain broad solutions that tailor rural women's needs.
- Include all rural decision-making groups, not just government.
- Simultaneously implement change strategies that reflect the complex nature of the current situation.
- Cultural change requires the inclusion of people with diverse responsibilities and commitments.

It is essential that solutions are developed from the framework (see Figure 1) which identifies the interdependency of the personal, interpersonal and cultural reasons leading to the low involvement of rural women. Furthermore these solutions be guided by the above set of principles.

Specific solutions to create change to increase rural women's involvement in government decision-making include:

1. Train, support, mentor, and increase interest
2. Develop links with other organisations and expand change strategies.
3. Have more and diverse decision-making forums
4. Support women's current responsibilities and commitments.
5. Promote values of government decision-making
6. Increase information and communications

Information and communication technologies can be an effective tool that facilitates the above six solutions as they can:

- increase communication and the transfer of information, without the need of geographical proximity;
- enable tasks and activities to fit in the rural women's life, with her current responsibilities;

- provide additional opportunities, both for involvement in government decision-making, and personal, economic, and professional developments;
- facilitate representation and advocacy on all levels; and
- give women a voice in a global environment.

Each of the above six solutions has a multi layered and dynamic effect as once implemented will impact on more than one level – personal, interpersonal, and cultural – of the framework. With the implementation of all six solutions having the following outcomes:

- Increase personal leadership qualities.
- Decrease resource competition.
- Culture is flexible and inclusive.
- Increase in knowledge and skills.

In summary, an effective solution to create change involves the implementation of a package of solutions based on a set of principles.

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines current research that addresses the continuing problem of rural women's low level of involvement in state government decision-making. The purpose of this report is to provide government agencies with new ways to involve rural women in their decision-making processes. Particular attention is given to using information and communication technologies as a facilitating tool.

The development of this research hinges on two main facts. These being:

- There is still a lack of rural women in state government decision-making, despite the constant effort by governments to increase their (the women's) involvement.
- The lack of rural women in state government decision-making impacts directly on the government's delivery of services to the rural women, their families and their community.

Recent research¹ and current state and federal government documents² have emphasised the need to increase rural women's involvement in decision-making. The Commonwealth Government is concerned that 'the result of women's invisibility has been that women are not seen as essential to the policy process or to decision-making. The rural and agriculture sector has the lowest representation of women of any sector of Australian society'³. Recently, the Western Australian Government released a Two Year Plan for Women (1999 - 2001) which prioritised women's involvement in government decision-making.

Decision-making role in government includes a variety of tasks such as: attending meetings; representing people and organisations; sourcing people's ideas, thoughts, and feelings; providing and updating people on recent decisions, issues and information; writing reports; regularly communicating with committee members; accessing information; liaising with public servants and stakeholders; and making decisions.

This report provides a guide to the Western Australian government by:

- providing a framework to understand the impeding and driving forces leading to the current situation;
- developing solutions from the framework, where change principles and specific solutions are provided; and
- briefly indicates the relevance of information and communication technologies as a tool to facilitate specific solutions.

¹ Duckworth, 1995; Elix & Lambert, 1998; Gale, 1997; McMillan, 1998; Rea, 1995

² ; Agriculture Western Australia, *Women Clients of Agriculture Project*, 1998; Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy, 1998; Daniels, 1997a; Daniels, 1997b; ; National Forum on Women in Agriculture and Resource Management, 1997; Western Australia Government, 1996; Western Australian Government, 1999

³ Board, 1998, p.38

This research has used a scientific practitioner approach where rural women's interviews are the basis for all findings presented in this report. This approach will firstly provide an understanding of the impeding and driving forces contributing to rural women's current involvement. Secondly, these forces will inform change strategies and actions, to increase the involvement of rural women in government decision-making. The strength of this research process is that the information provided is firmly established in the rural women's experiences.

It is intended that findings from this study will provide a basis for current and future dialogue between rural women and government agencies, when developing and implementing actions to increase the women's involvement in government decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

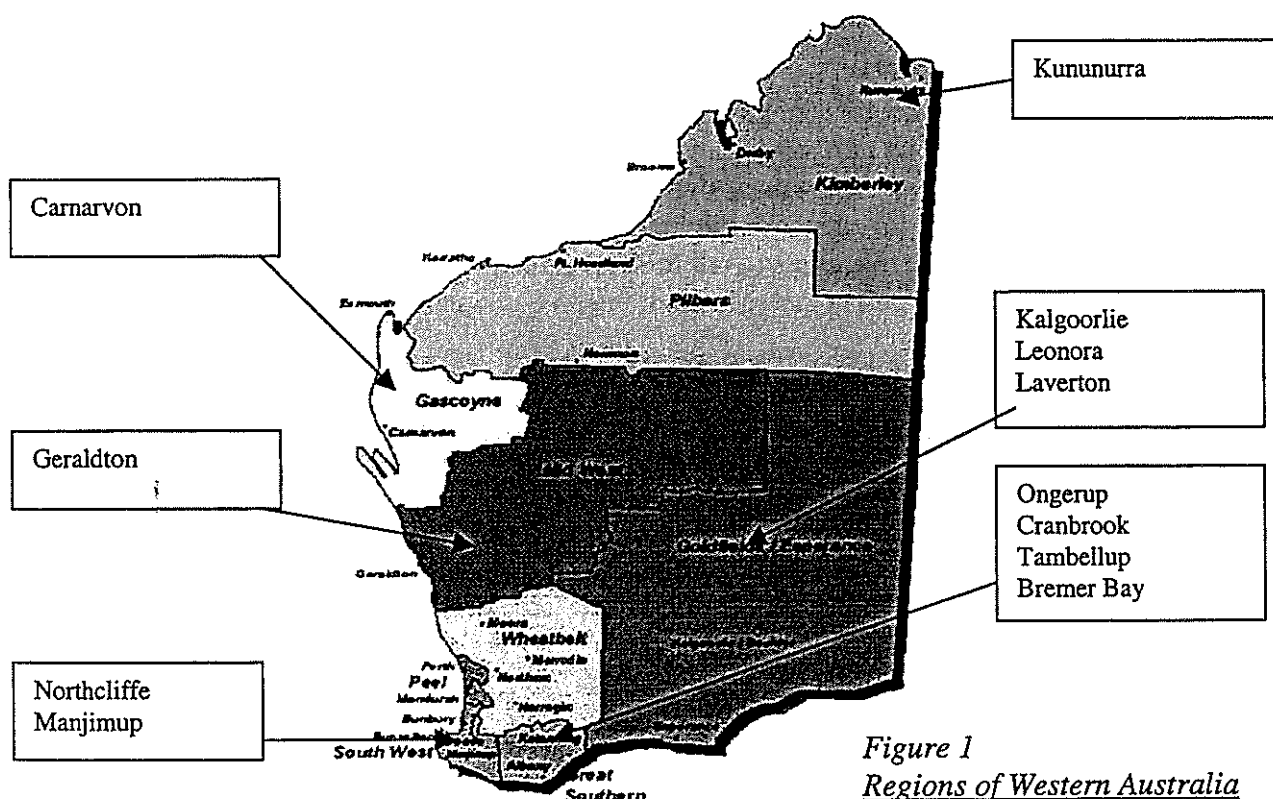
Feminist and qualitative research methodologies were adopted to:

- gain an understanding of the rural women's experiences with government decision-making forums; and
- to formulate new actions to increase rural women's involvement in these forums.

This research is the foundation of the author's Doctoral thesis. Special attention has been given when selecting the most appropriate research methods. Both, the Higher Research Degrees Committee and the Ethics Committee of Edith Cowan University have approved the research methodology.

The Rural Women:

Twenty-one rural women in Western Australia were participants in this research. These women were recruited from as far north as Kununurra and as far south as Bremer Bay. As illustrated in Figure 1 the rural women interviewed represent the larger rural regions of Western Australia: South West, Great Southern, Goldfields- Esperance, Mid-West, Gascoyne, and Kimberley regions.



*Figure 1
Regions of Western Australia*

Of the twenty-one women, three women were recruited from each of the following areas:

- Bremer Bay,
- Ongerup - Cranbrook - Tambellup,
- Kununurra,
- Northcliffe - Manjimup, and
- Kalgoorlie - Laverton.

Four women were recruited from Carnarvon and two women were recruited from the Geraldton - Yalgoo area.

Each of the twenty one women interviewed met the following criteria, she:

- had contact with government processes such as agencies and services;
- had experience with using and was aware of information and communication technologies such as the world wide web; and
- was considered as a leader, or potential leader, or highly involved in the community.

Given the fulfillment of the above criteria, the research findings are confined to rural women who are likely to be involved in government decision-making forums in the immediate future. Consequently, recommended government actions will impact on current rural women leaders. In addition, interviewing rural women who are familiar with the broad systems of government, leadership, and technology will contribute to the relevance and success of government actions.

To capture the diversity of rural women a snowballing technique was used to recruit women. This entailed accessing seven rural women (one from each of the communities) who have participated in the government agency's leadership program. The Rural Leadership Program Coordinators from Agriculture Western Australia were contacted to provide rural women's contact details. Each of the seven women selected from the Leadership Program, nominated two other women leaders in their community to be interviewed.

The diversity of the women included in this research is demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2.

Age Range (Years)	Frequency	Dependent children at home	Working commitments
30 - 39	5	yes = 3 (60%) no = 2 (40%)	yes = 5 (100%) no = 0 (0%)
40 - 49	8	yes = 3 (38%) no = 5 (62%)	yes = 8 (100%) no = 0 (0%)
50 - 59	6	yes = 0 (0%) no = 6 (100%)	yes = 6 (100%) no = 0 (0%)
60 - 69	2	yes = 0 (0%) no = 2 (100%)	yes = 1 (50%) no = 1 (50%)
	N = 21	N = 21	N = 21

Table 1. Demographics of the twenty one rural women leaders interviewed.

The rural women leaders in this research ranged from thirty to sixty five years of age, with the majority of the women clustering around the forty to fifty five year age span. Two demographic attributes of the women to assimilate from Table 1. are:

- the younger rural women have the added responsibility of dependent children at home, and
- almost all the women have business or work commitments, including all the rural women with dependent children.

Age Range (Years)	Perceived Degrees Of Isolation	Committee Involvement	Information and Communication Technology
30 - 39 (n = 5)	none = 1 (20%) partially = 2 (40%) yes = 2 (40%)	lots (state, local) = 0 some (state, local) = 0 lots local = 0 some local = 2 (40%) none, desire to = 3 (60%)	astute = 0 proficient = 3 (60%) basic use = 2 (40%) aware = 0
40 - 49 (n = 8)	none = 5 (62%) partially = 2 (25%) yes = 1 (13%)	lots (state, local) = 1 (13%) some(state, local) = 3 (37%) lots local = 1 (13%) some local = 3 (37%) none, desire to = 0	astute = 5 (50%) proficient = 3 (37%) basic use = 1 (13%) aware = 0
50 - 59 (n = 6)	none = 3 (50%) partially = 0 (0%) yes = 3 (50%)	lots (state, local) = 2 (33%) some(state, local) = 1 (17%) lots local = 0 some local = 3 (50%) none, desire to = 0	astute = 1 (17%) proficient = 2 (33%) basic use = 2 (33%) aware = 1 (17%)
60 - 69 (n = 2)	none = 0 (0%) partially = 2 (100%) yes = 0 (0%)	lots(state, local) = 2 (100%) some (state, local) = 0 lots local = 0 some local = 0 none, desire to = 0	astute = 0 proficient = 0 basic use = 1 (50%) aware = 1 (50%)
N = 21	N = 21	N = 21	N = 21

Table 2. Social demographics of the twenty one rural women leaders interviewed.

Their degree of isolation, committee involvement and use of information and communication technology further demonstrate the diversity of the rural women.

The majority (57%) of rural women were living in relatively isolated conditions. Isolated means without 24 hour power (electricity), without internet capable telephone lines, and living 60 minutes from a General Post Office. Partially isolated means that the women met two of the above criteria.

Age impacts on rural women's proficiency with information and communication technology. The oldest women (60 - 69 years) have the most basic use of technology. Whilst the rural women in the forty year age group demonstrate the highest level of proficiency.

Both the women's age and degree of isolation affect their proficiency with information and communication technology. Women in the forty year age group are proficient users of technology. These women are also the least (13%) isolated. It is logical to conclude that:

- rural women who have residential access to the infrastructure are more likely to use and become proficient with information and communication technology, and
- women who use these technologies become less isolated.

A definite age relationship exists with the number and extent of women's involvement in committees:

- there are relatively few younger, (30 - 39 years) and older (60 - 69 years) rural women involved in committees;
- the middle aged, (40 - 59 years) rural women dominant committees
- the younger (30 - 39 years) women are scarcely involved in committees, with 60% of these women wanting to be involved but are not;
- the older (60 - 69 years) women are extensively involved in committees, with both women (100%) being involved in numerous state and local committees; and
- there are some middle aged (40 - 59 years) women who are extensively involved, whilst there are other middle aged women who are minimally involved with some local committees.

This age-committee relationship indicates that rural women commence their committee involvement during their middle age years. Most of these women exit from this responsibility as they enter the age of sixty, leaving relatively few older women at the most involved level. Although this conclusion is limited by the cross sectional nature of this study, these insights are consistent with the older rural women's interviews.

Data Collection Methods:

The rural women were individually interviewed. These interviews were conducted in an unstructured, in-depth format where each of the interviews started with the individual describing her involvement in government, community, and experiences with information and communication technology. The opening question asked was: *"What new ways can rural women become involved in government decision-making?"* Prompts were given throughout the interview to explore how information and communication technology could be used as a solution. Prompts were also given to gain insight into the women's needs, concerns and ideas. Duration of individual interviews ranged from forty to ninety minutes, with an average of sixty minutes. The style of the interview was conversational, with the participant's ideas, thoughts and feelings structuring the interview. All interviews were conducted in the location of the participant's choice, which was generally at the rural woman's home. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Triangulation or cross checking, a rigorous research method, was employed across the women's interviews to validate the women's needs, concerns and ideas. Saturation was reached with the twenty one women's interviews, whereby in the later interviews no new needs, concerns, or ideas were being expressed. With the latter interviews producing no new information, one outcome of this research is that it captured all the common and pertinent issues regarding rural women's involvement in government decision-making.

Data Analysis Method:

An inductive analytical approach was adopted to analyse the data. This meant all interviews were analysed by identifying common themes. Three broad themes were identified from the initial analysis phase. Further detailed analysis revealed the rural women's needs, concerns, and ideas, within each of these themes. The purpose of the data analysis process was to gain an understanding of the restraining and driving forces behind rural women's involvement in government decision-making. Furthermore women's ideas and issues were used to generate solutions or recommendations to increase rural women's involvement in government decision-making.

FINDINGS

This section will outline the main forces - impediments and drivers - contributing to the current situation where few rural women are involved in government decision-making. An outline of solutions to create change will be drawn from an understanding of these main forces.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO RURAL WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING

An understanding of the impediments and drivers is fundamental when planning for change. A brief overview of these main forces is outlined in Table 3.

IMPEDIMENTS	DRIVERS
Lack of Confidence	Passionate Reasons
Resources Required	Self Belief, Value, & Confidence
The Foreign Culture	

Table 3. An overview of the main forces involved with rural women's involvement in government decision-making.

Details of each of these contributing forces will be given to gain an understanding of the issues that are to be incorporated in solutions.

Drivers To Women's Involvement In Decision-Making

Drivers are essential forces that have instigated the interviewed women to be involved in government decision-making. These forces create an energy and dynamism in the woman, which emanates to other people. This emanating energy gives rise to action, direction and movement, in contrast to inactivity and inertia.

An understanding of the driving forces required by rural women decision makers is critical when formulating effective change strategies. It is recommended that the driving forces become the foundations of future change strategies to increase rural women's involvement in decision-making.

The drivers that are fundamental to rural women's decision to be involved in government decision-making are:

- All the rural women involved have a passion, a driving reason to be involved, which is borne from their care, responsibility and concern of themselves, their families, their communities, and in general, people and their surroundings; and

- All the rural women involved value and believe in themselves. This confidence is characteristically associated with the rural women's proactive attitude to instigate action with an understanding that they uniquely contribute to action, and to the decision-making process.

These two drivers are strongly inter linked, given their personal origin which resides in the woman's control. The combination of these two drivers generates a powerful force directing rural women to become involved in government decision-making. These women have the foresight that for desired changes to occur in their rural amenity, they need to be proactively involved in government decisions. There is an appreciation that without their involvement, government decisions will impact on them, for better or worse. Consequently the women understand it is better if their voices are heard, to ensure that the rural community's and people's needs are met.

All Rural Women Involved Have A Passion, A Driving Reason To Be Involved

The primary reason rural women have become involved in government decision-making is similar to their decision to be involved in other decision-making forums: local community decisions, commercial decisions, and family decisions. All the rural women feel responsible to care for themselves and other people, being aware of people's needs and the desire to find solutions to create a better standard of living. In brief, all the rural women interviewed demonstrate a shared responsibility for their own and other's lifestyle, reflecting their independent and interdependent leadership qualities. One main difference between the uninvolved and the involved rural women interviewed was the latter women consider government decision-making as important when finding solutions to address their rural needs.

Rural women found government decision-making provides the following solutions for their current and future needs:

- the distribution and securement of resources;
- the coordination of local, state and regional activities;
- the awareness of and participation in Government's future direction; and
- the benefits of information and personal networks.

In brief, many of the rural women interviewed had input into and influenced the government decision-making process. Without their input, these rural women know that their concerns, needs, and ideas, would not have been heard. Consequently knowing many of their new services and achievements would not have eventuated.

Rural women decision maker's believed they were had a unique ability to simultaneously acknowledge individual's perspectives as well as the whole perspective, particularly on issues such as children and family needs, telecommunications, Aboriginal issues, community vision and direction, and economic farming concerns.

When the rural women interviewed were asked “*What were the areas rural women were, in general, passionate about?*”, the overwhelming response was twofold, that:

- rural women are passionate and interested in everything, there is no exclusion; and
- as rural-government interests is an individual choice, that depends on the rural community and on the woman, other women would not recommend rural women specific issues.

It is important to include in change strategies the principle that there is no set or specific rural women issues, and instead acknowledge rural women’s broad and diverse interests. This diversity is demonstrated by the interviewed women’s rural-government interests, which follows:

- education;
- health;
- community, with a focus on its economy;
- development, including tourism;
- agriculture and pastoral issues;
- children and family;
- conservation and the environment;
- Aboriginal issues;
- land issues;
- arts;
- marketing; and
- communications and technology.

This list indicates the interests and passions of the twenty one women interviewed, and as strongly spoken by the women should not be generalised to all rural women.

All Rural Women Involved Are Empowered - They Value Their Uniqueness, Believe In Themselves, And Take Action To Achieve Change.

All the rural women interviewed who were involved in government decision-making were empowered. Empowerment is “a social action process that promotes participation of people, organisation, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger society. With this perspective, empowerment is not characterised as achieving power to dominate others, but rather power to act with others to effect change.”⁴

These women participated in creating and promoting individual and social community change, with many women achieving power, improved self-esteem, or increased control over their individual rural amenity. Although empowerment implies giving power, it is understood to give power is an oxymoron, as it is a self giving process.

⁴ Nina Wallerstein and Edward Bernstein, 1998, p.380 cited in Jane Stein, 1998, p.7

It is a privileged position, that rural women have disclosed details of their empowerment given its personal, and self giving nature. These personal insights are significant as they provide an understanding and foresight required to develop change strategies to enable other rural women to make the first step of self empowerment. This first step is foundational to women decision to be involved in government decision-making.

The three main aspects to the interviewed women's empowerment were, the women:

- have confidence and believe in themselves;
- value their own uniqueness as a woman decision-maker, and as an individual person; and
- are proactive, taking actions and risks.

The rural woman decision maker was aware and confident in her own identity; who she was, what was important to her, the many different aspects of her, and knowledgeable about her strengths and areas of improvement. These women were strong in their ability to focus and care for their own needs. Particularly with respect to training to develop their skills and knowledge, and to seek mentors and support.

These women were informal community mentors as they would actively support and encourage other women and men to take control of their own lives and social community circumstances. Ways in which these women would mentor men and women was to actively encourage men and women, to better themselves, to be involved, to take action, and to take risks through being involved in new or challenging experiences. There was an understanding by these women that the whole community would benefit through people's participation. It is the women's promotion of people's and community's participation that clearly identifies their own empowerment and leadership.

It is critical to understand that the attainment of confidence (and empowerment) is not a binary on-off characteristic. Instead confidence is a developmental process which involves individual's acknowledging their strengths, areas of improvement, and overall (humble) value of her or himself, regardless of where she or he is developmentally. It is essential that change strategies are hinged on this understanding of confidence, whilst acknowledging that a certain threshold of confidence is required for individual rural women to be involved in government decision-making.

They valuing their own uniqueness as a decision-maker accentuated rural women's confidence. The women interviewed, value the following unique decision-making characteristics:

- an ability to take a broad perspective, as well as detailed issues in decisions;
- a willing inclusion of logical reasons and feelings in the decision-making process;
- lateral thinkers, particularly when formulating solutions;
- a nurturing role with a focus on people issues and families;
- a personal focus in decisions and an intolerance of game-plays in politics;
- the pressure on women having to be better decision-makers, given their experience of 'not being part of the group or club';

- a focus on achieving a win-win situation and being cooperators instead of competitors;
- a willingness and openness to change;
- a willingness to share information;
- good communication skills, particularly listening skills and expression;
- a willingness to take on grass-roots work and not be figure heads in the decision-making process; and
- an ability to take someone else's different perspective, with an appreciation of different cultures.

It is important to assimilate the diversity of the above list so that it is not used to stereotype a rural woman decision-maker. Particularly as it is unlikely that one individual woman will identify with all of the above characteristics. Instead it is likely that women will value and identify her uniqueness with only some of these decision-making characteristics. The main point being that these rural women decision-makers' value their unique qualities.

The women decision-maker's interviewed believed they had unique qualities to contribute to the decision-making process, even though many women did not feel totally united with the government decision-making culture. In brief, the woman's confidence was her sustenance to affirming that it was okay to be different from the decision-making culture. All of the women interviewed valued their decision-making qualities, and did not identify as a token woman decision-maker.

The rural women interviewed were proactive. These rural women did not only have the mental prowess or personal attitude to be involved in government decision-making, but most importantly took action. These women were characteristically 'doers' as they:

- persevered with action on issues they believed in, despite resistance or barriers;
- became involved in activities, particularly with the local community;
- took responsibility for and identified with their rural community;
- found and embarked on alternative strategies and solutions if current proposals were problematic;
- challenged current practices if there were foreseeable benefits from new practices; and
- most importantly they would take risks and be involved in new experiences.

Impediments To Women's Involvement In Decision-Making

Impediments are the restraining forces that hold back many rural women from becoming involved in government decision-making. An understanding of these forces is critical when formulating effective change strategies. An appreciation of these impediments will ensure that rural women's current concerns are heard and considered.

The impediments that many rural women report as obstacles and barriers which restrain their, and other rural women's involvement in government decision-making are:

- Many rural women who are not involved, lack the necessary confidence and belief that she can make a difference;
- The resources required such as time, money, and support are limited, and compete with many rural women's current responsibilities and commitments; and
- The culture of government decision-making is often encountered as foreign and rigid.

Although the individual rural woman's life circumstances will determine how much these three impediments impact on her, these impediments were constant as the reason why many rural women are not involved in government decision-making. In planning for change, particularly for the resources required impediment, it is important that the woman's individual circumstances are acknowledged. For example, a rural woman who has dependent children at home, and work commitments may have less available time for government decision-making, compared to a rural woman who has no dependent children at home. It is suggested that in general, the lowest common denominator be used for plans to ensure the inclusiveness of rural women.

Many Rural Women Who Are Not Involved, Lack Confidence

Confidence is a prerequisite for rural women to become involved in government decision-making. All the rural women interviewed, who were involved in committees, did not experience a lack of confidence. Instead these women demonstrated high esteem and self confidence as decision-makers. All of the women stated with conviction that developing confidence was a key issue when increasing rural women's involvement in government decision-making. Developing rural women's confidence is foundational to change strategies aimed at reversing the current situation: where the same few, rural women leaders are involved in decision-making.

The interviewed women described the presenting problem as rural women who are not involved:

- do not feel they have anything to offer those decision-making forums;
- lack the self-confidence to take a risk and be involved; and
- feel pessimistic about the overall outcome of their possible involvement, particularly questioning the benefits or achievements from being involved.

In addition, many rural women have a misperception of what is valued as a decision-maker. On the one hand, the Government is yearning for their involvement, affirming that rural women are valuable in decision-making, whilst on the other hand many rural women do not feel that their voice or perspective is important. The interviewed women's perception of what makes a 'good' decision-maker (see Appendix 1), indicates that they have high expectations. Furthermore they do not prioritise their individual voice or the maturing-developing nature of this role. It is recommended that the meaning of what rural women give to a decision-maker is explored and demystified by future and potential rural women decision-makers. This will ensure that rural women develop their own meaning of what it is to be a decision-maker. Women's confidence will be developed

through embracing, owning and constructing their own role of a government decision-maker.

Many rural women's lack of confidence and involvement in government decision making is perplexing when many rural women are directly involved in decisions with business, farming and family. Expanding rural women's decision-making role to include government, is a key solution.

Resources Required Such As Time, Money, Energy And Support Are Limited.

If rural women believed and wanted to be a government decision-maker, the next impediment to address is the resources required to be involved. The resources of time, money, energy and support were often demanded by the decision-making role, and competed against the rural women's current commitments of commercial business, careers, family and personal responsibilities.

The key point is that involvement in state government decision-making requires different resources for rural people compared to the resources required for urban people. Rural people require additional time, money, energy and support, due to the extra:

- distances to attend meetings;
- resources required to communicate with meeting delegates;
- resources required to communicate with the people who they represent; and
- resources required conducting research or seeking information.

Many rural women find the demand of additional time, money, energy and support of a decision-maker too high when it competes against their current commitments and responsibilities, which are priorities. This situation is exacerbated by:

- the absence of community services in some rural communities, such as no child care services and no power or electricity;
- the current demanding and diverse roles that rural women fulfill in their local community, family, businesses and farming, with little spare time left over;
- commercial businesses such as farming and tourism, and the weather create seasonal routines where there are peak busy periods;
- rural women's high expectations of what is required to be a 'good' decision-maker;
- the difficult economic times experienced by many rural people;
- often not having close family for support; and
- feeling that their current support networks are not appropriate for the high resource demands of state government decision-making.

Although some of the women interviewed did not experience resources as an impediment, there was an understanding that it is an impediment for many rural women who have a number of diverse and demanding roles. Finding ways to both, decrease the demands imposed by the decision-making role, and provide the resources to free up rural women's current commitments, will lead to more and different rural women being involved. It is recommended that strategies address the following groups of rural women:

- the 30 to 49 year rural women who in this study are the least involved in state government decision-making; and
- rural women who are involved in decision-making, but feel overburdened.

Rural women interviewed commented that they needed their decision-making role to fit into their life and not the other way around. Given the balancing act that many rural women perform now, the government decision-making role's resources needs to be kept to a minimum. Women in the Kimberley, Gascoyne, and Mid-West areas have found that the resource demands of meetings has been minimised by using teleconference meetings.

The Foreign And Rigid Culture Of Government Decision-Making.

The impediment of government decision-making culture is one which an individual rural woman or for any matter, any sole individual, does not have direct, immediate control of. Although rural women can directly change their level of confidence and can directly change their level of resources, changing culture is an elusive process. Culture resides in and emanates from the organisation's system of decision-making.

Culture is the 'total range of activities and ideas of a group of people with shared traditions'⁵. The culture includes the members' ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge which all constitute the shared bases for social action. Culture is perpetuated by members of the group transmitting and reinforcing activities and ideas, which evolve from a shared tradition⁶.

Many of the rural women interviewed experienced and perceived the culture of government decision-making as predominately masculine in nature. Consequently they encountered the culture as foreign and believed this was one reason why many rural women were not involved. Rural women clarified the foreign culture of government decision-making as follows:

- government decision-making is intimidating with the obscure language, the rigid processes, the predominance of masculine symbols, the often antagonistic atmosphere and the formalities;
- women felt separate from government decision-making, as there are very few women in these forums, and further the system is associated with 'a man's place' or 'the boy's club';
- government decision-making is associated with white masculine territory, which is very different to other decision-making processes, such as the ones that the Aboriginal communities-culture use;
- women feel alienated from government decision-making when there is little support or mentors;

⁵ Hanks, 1991, p. 364.

⁶ Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998

- many rural women who have little knowledge of the government decision-making system, relied on the media, stereotypes, network associates, and friends for information;
- the government decision-making system hardens some of the women and men involved, with emphasis on the effects on women; and
- government decision-making has limited or no flexibility in decision-making processes or forums, where often current systems were rigid, not open to diversity, difference, change or new innovative ideas.

In brief, rural women encounter the culture of government decision-making as foreign and not flexible or accommodating. This experience is exacerbated when many women and different cultures, such as Aboriginals, use different ways or processes to make decisions.

There is a healthy cross pollination and interdependency of the three impediments. Ultimately to change the culture of decision-making, the people responsible for that system need to promote and instigate action. Chief Executive Officers and Ministers are in prime influential positions to initiate cultural change. In principle, cultural change will provide opportunities for people, with many different commitment and responsibilities, to be involved. Although the culture will evolve over time, proactive action is required immediately to attract more and different rural women to government decision-making.

Conclusion

The impeding and driving forces contributing to the status quo are best understood in a broader context. Figure 3 illustrates a comprehensive framework, which incorporates all contributing forces.

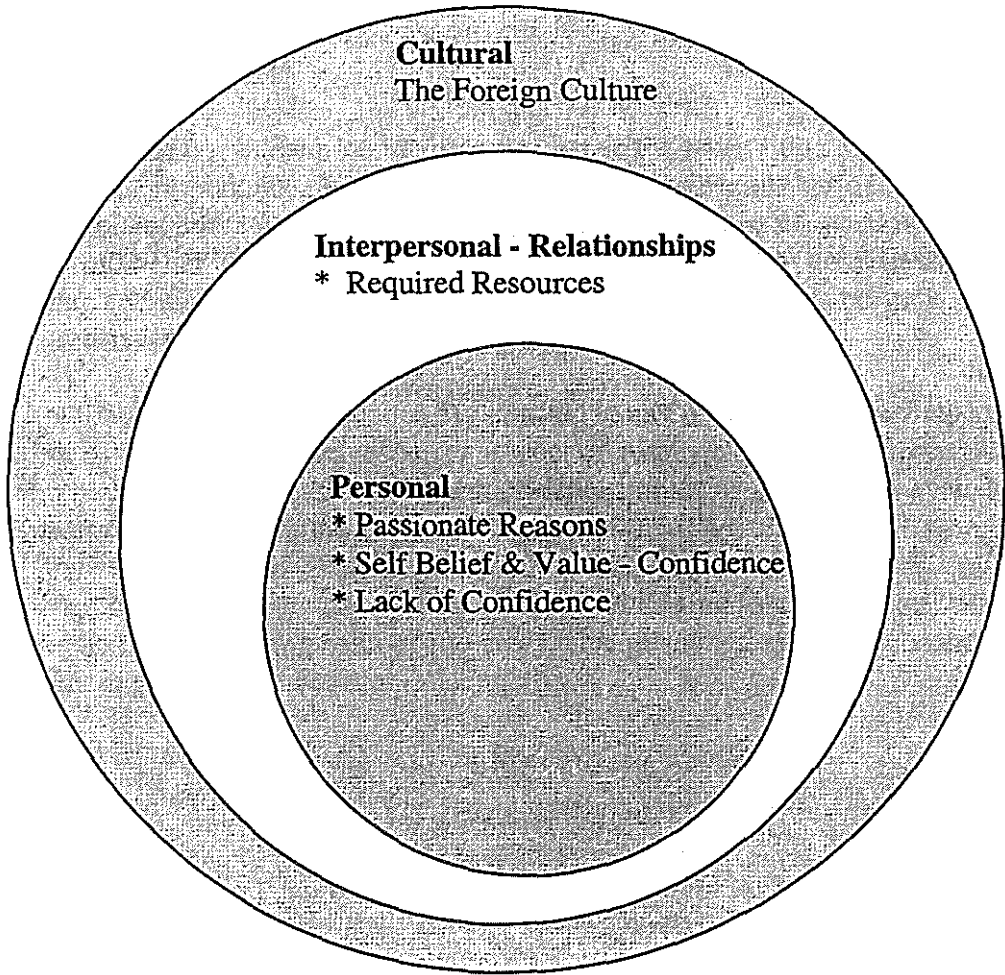


Figure 3: A framework incorporating contributing forces to rural women's involvement in government decision-making

In brief, the impeding forces hindering many rural women's involvement in government decision-making are:

- many rural women who are not involved, lack the necessary confidence and belief that she can make a difference;
- the resources required such as time, money, and support are limited, and compete with many rural women's current responsibilities and commitments; and
- the culture of government decision-making is often encountered as foreign and rigid.

The driving forces leading rural women to be involved in government decision-making are:

- All the rural women involved have a passion, a driving reason to be involved, which is borne from their care, responsibility and concern of themselves, their families, their communities, and in general, people and their surroundings; and
- All the rural women involved value and believe in themselves. This confidence is characteristically associated with the rural women's proactive attitude to instigate action and an understanding that they uniquely contribute to action and to the decision-making process.

Confidence is to be considered foundational to change the status quo. Figure 3 demonstrates the importance of the personal forces as a main contributing factor to women's involvement in government decision-making. With the personal factor of self confidence and belief being both driving and impeding forces. This consistency indicates to have more and different women's involvement in government decision-making, rural women's self-belief and confidence is central.

Figure 3 outlines the interdependent and connected nature of all driving and impeding forces. For example culture and resources impact on rural women's confidence and personal forces, as well as rural women's confidence impacting on resource availability and the decision-making culture.

This broader, dynamic understanding of impeding and driving forces is critical when developing and implementing solutions to create change to increase rural women's involvement in government decision-making.

CREATING CHANGE - DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS USING THE FRAMEWORK

Developing solutions to create change must be borne from the framework that clarifies the reason why rural women currently do and do not become involved in government decision- making. The solutions mirror the complexity of the situation by focusing on personal, interpersonal, and cultural aspects of change.

The structure of this section will:

- firstly, review the impediments and drivers to rural women’s involvement in government decision-making;
- secondly, identify a set of principles to guide solutions or strategies to create successful change; and
- thirdly, identify specific solutions to create change.

The Framework Bringing Together Impeding and Driving Forces.

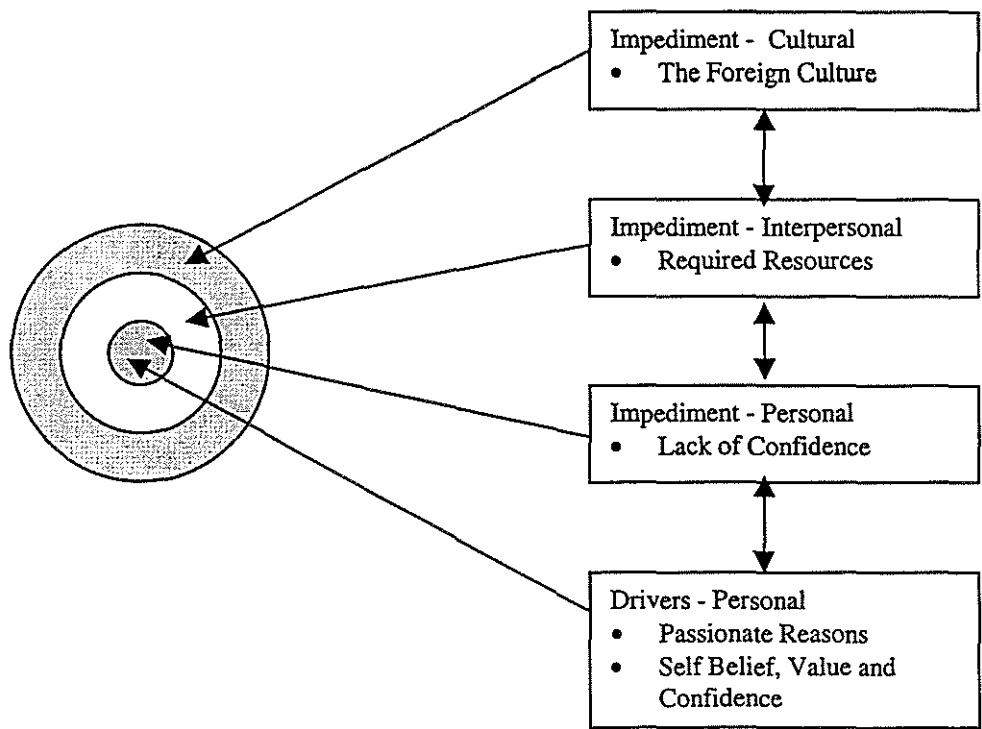


Figure 4. The framework bringing together impeding and driving forces impacting on rural women’s involvement in government decision-making.

The impeding and driving forces that have lead to the rural women’s current low level of involvement is best understood in the Framework illustrated in Figure 4. This framework

identifies personal, interpersonal and cultural reasons leading to the status quo of low involvement of rural women. A critical feature of this framework is that there is interdependency on all three levels of contributing forces, whereby a change in one level will impact on all other levels.

The drivers leading rural women to become involved in government decision-making stem from the Personal forces. These include rural women's passionate reason(s) to help provide a better future, and their self belief, value and confidence.

The Impediments however stem from all three Personal, Interpersonal, and Cultural factors. This repetitive finding of self confidence being a driving and impeding force indicates that rural women's self confidence is central to future change strategies. The Interpersonal - Relationship impeding forces focus on the required resources, which compete with rural women's current responsibilities and commitments. Resources required are critical to women's empowering decision and action to be involved. The Cultural forces focusing on the foreign culture of government decision-making impacts on the personal confidence-self belief forces, as many women do not identify with the government decision-making system. This cultural force further impacts on the interpersonal force of resources where the system is often seen as too inflexible to accommodate and include in the decision-making role, rural women's current, diverse responsibilities and commitments.

A Set of Principles to Guide Change Strategies and Solutions

Rural women interviewed outlined principles to guide the implementation of change strategies and solutions by governments and officers. These principles will ensure the success of change strategies. The intent of these principles is to ensure that future action is cognisant of, and includes ways to alleviate potential impediments so many rural women have the opportunity to be involved in change strategies.

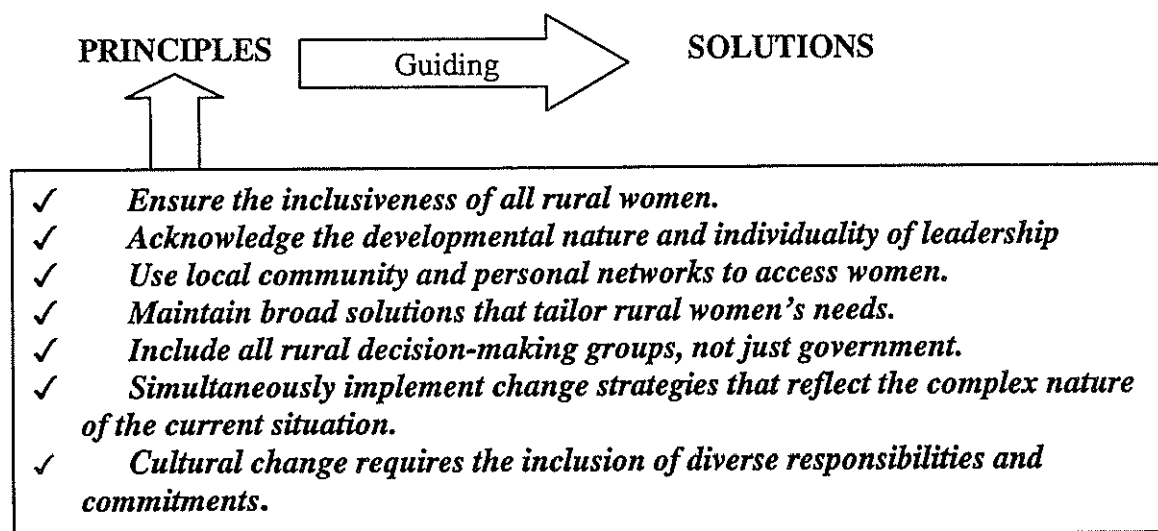


Figure 5. An overview of the principles guiding change strategies and solutions.

An elaboration of each of the principles outlined in Figure 5 is given below.

- ✓ **Ensure the inclusiveness of all rural women.**
 - ❑ Ensure that the diversity of rural women's individual circumstances is included in planning and developing change strategies (refer to the methodology section of this report).
 - ❑ Acknowledge there is no set or specific rural women's issue(s). Instead acknowledge the diversity in rural women's interests.
 - ❑ When implementing change strategies acknowledge rural women's current impediments, such as resources required to be involved. Ensure those activities fit in the rural woman's life and responsibilities, and not the other way around. This may have consequences such as providing creches, and having activities at her home town.
 - ❑ Minimise the resource demands for rural women to be involved in change strategies and in government decision-making.
 - ❑ Ensure that change strategies that intend to facilitate rural women's involvement do not exclude inadvertently other rural women's entry in government decision-making.
 - ❑ Develop more and different opportunities and forums for rural women to be involved.
 - ❑ Ensure the government decision-making role fits in the lives of rural women and not the other way around.

- ☐ Include change strategies that target the 30 to 49 year old rural women who are least involved and the women who feel overburdened.
- ☐ Provide access to activities and involvement to be sourced from rural women's homes or their local community.
- ☐ Use information and communication technologies so communication and information can be sourced from rural women's homes or local communities. This will minimise resources and increase flexibility for rural women to be involved. (see Appendix 2 for an index of rural community's availability of information and communication technology services).

- ✓ **Acknowledge the developmental nature and individuality of leadership**
 - ☐ Acknowledge confidence is a developmental process, and not an on-off quality. Although a certain threshold is required of women to be involved in social action and government decision-making. Include this concept in change strategies.
 - ☐ Provide solutions and training for rural women prior and during their government decision-making role.
 - ☐ Change strategies acknowledge the personal and developmental nature of passion and empowerment.
 - ☐ Provide opportunities for rural women to explore their OWN leadership potential and expertise, instead of providing people or prescribing them one leadership model. Acknowledge the diversity in the government decision-making role and affirm individual women's strengths and differences to the entire process of being a government decision-maker. This will provide a context for the importance of diversity in government decision-making.
 - ☐ Acknowledge rural women's diverse decision-making expertise and skills in their current involvement in business, community and family roles. Extend these expertises to the government decision-making arena.
 - ☐ Communicate how being involved in government decision-making can be beneficial to rural community's, families and themselves.

- ✓ **Use local community and personal networks to access women.**
 - ☐ Use local community networks when implementing change strategies to address rural women's needs, and to organise events. This process will ensure their success. Possible contact using local community networks can be introduced through Women in Agriculture, Rural, Regional, and Remote Women's Network (including it's online presence), Women's Policy Development Office, Local Governments, Telecentres, and Agriculture Leadership participants.
 - ☐ Foster collegial support among rural women before and during involvement in government decision-making.

- ✓ **Maintain broad solutions that tailor rural women's needs.**
 - ☐ Develop solutions that are not exclusive to women, but tailored to women's needs.
 - ☐ No inclusion of quota systems or token positions in change strategies. Instead include a wide array of cultural change strategies such as variety of tenure membership,

review of criteria, increase decision-making forums, and increase access to communication and information.

- ✓ **Include all rural decision-making groups, not just government.**
- ❑ Extend solutions to include other important decision-making forums in rural areas - Agropolitics, Associations, Boards, Western Australian Municipal Association, and Local Governments.

- ✓ **Simultaneously implement change strategies that reflect the complex nature of the current situation.**
- ❑ Provide many opportunities for rural women to develop their personal-leadership, and self empowerment qualities.
- ❑ Extend rural women's current community, business, and family decision-making expertises to the government arena.
- ❑ Address personal drivers in a broader context given the interdependent nature of personal, interpersonal, and cultural impediments.
- ❑ Simultaneously address personal impediments at the same time as addressing interpersonal and cultural impediments. This will allow rural women to fit the new decision-making role within their current commitments and responsibilities.

- ✓ **Cultural change requires the inclusion of people with diverse responsibilities and commitments.**
- ❑ The people responsible for government decision-making promote and instigate action. Chief Executive Officers and Ministers are in prime influential positions to initiate cultural change.
- ❑ Promote the values of government decision-making. These include diversity, openness, and inclusiveness.
- ❑ Review the entry into decision-making forums by focussing on entry criteria. This criterion includes general community involvement and general decision-making qualities, such as communication skills, ability to perspective take, and listening skills and expression.
- ❑ Review membership of decision-making forums to minimise commitments and provide flexibility in the decision-making role, so that people with different commitments and responsibilities can be involved. This includes having variability in committee membership terms or tenures so that some positions have a one year term with a possible one year extension.
- ❑ Review the method by which government decision-making can occur so that online processes and forums are included. This mandates reviewing standing orders to include online voting. Ensure that opportunities for people who have many and different commitments and responsibilities can be involved into government decision-making.
- ❑ Instigate annual reviews reporting on actions and results in change strategies that are intended to increase rural women's involvement in government decision-making. Ensure these change strategies mirror the complex nature identified in Figure 4.

Specific Solutions to Create Change

Using the principles in the previous section, the rural women provide a number of specific solutions to increase rural women’s involvement in government decision-making. Figure 6 clearly identifies that each solution can have a multi layered, dynamic effect on the impeding and drivers forces maintaining the status quo.

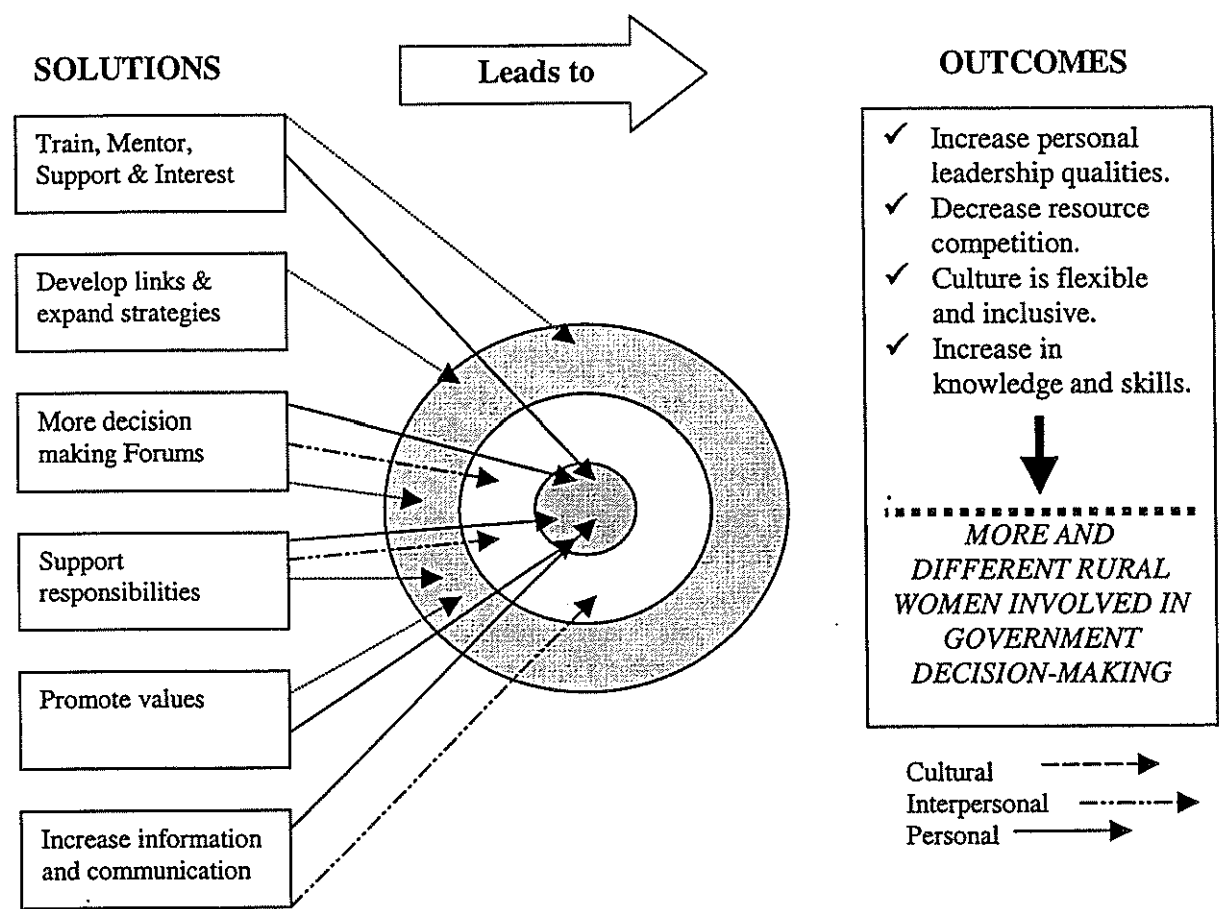


Figure 6. Specific solutions creating change.

1. Train, support, mentor, and increase interest

This solution originates from the personal driving and impeding forces. The intent that rural women:

- gain relevant knowledge and skills;
- develop their own leadership qualities;
- gain confidence in their abilities, expertise, and expression in government decision-making; and

- act on future plans, concerns, and needs. An elaboration of this intention is given below.

The interviewed women identified a number of ways that rural women could benefit from learning skills, and knowledge specifically related to government decision-making.

These include, rural women:

- attaining skills and knowledge relevant to a decision-maker such as techniques to express concerns and present solutions, negotiation and influencing skills, debating skills, and standing orders;
- understanding and becoming familiar with government decision-making; and
- through the experience of being involved in decision-making forums.

Developing women's latent leadership qualities through training, workshops, and specific leadership programs, in particular involves:

- encouraging rural women to take risks and encounter new experiences;
- providing information and exploring women's own leadership potential and expertise;
- developing women's confidence;
- developing women's personal attitudes to believe in themselves, their capabilities, their insights, their passion, and their integrity; and
- encouraging rural women to express and act on the ideas, concerns and issues they are passionate about.

The interviewed women who were involved in Agriculture Western Australia's Rural Leadership Program, strongly endorsed its personal and community value. Strongly recommended by these women was to continue this Leadership program and to introduce and support local community empowerment-leadership workshops, training, and programs that primarily target rural women. The intent of introducing local leadership programs is to make this valuable opportunity accessible to all rural women (and men), and to ensure that many and different rural women can be involved in government decision-making. In essence these leadership programs will develop human resources essential for government decision-making. Furthermore these leadership programs will provide local collegial support for rural women.

The opportunity for women to be mentored and supported when they are involved in government decision-making was a necessary element for women to continue their learning and persevere with taking risks and challenging times. These mentors include men and women who are involved in or have been involved in government decision-making.

As outlined by the Principles section of this report, many rural women acknowledged that these training and development opportunities are to be made available to rural men, at the same time as primarily targeting rural women.

The rural women expressed that these personal drivers be addressed within a broader context of the culture of government decision-making, given the interdependency of the

impeding forces. In particular, it was expressed that the government decision-making culture:

- communicate the value of diversity and openness in government decision-making, with a focus on rural women's experience, knowledge, and skills as necessary for rural decision-making forums; and
- develops more and different forums for women to express their passionate ideas, concerns, and issues. This involvement and experience will increase rural women's confidence.

Through the development of rural women's leadership, confidence, and empowerment will more and different rural women to become involved in government decision-making.

2. Develop links with other organisations and expand change strategies.

The women expressed that for maximum effect all change actions include and link in with other decision-making organisations. These include:

- other rural decision-making groups such as agropolitics, local governments, Western Australian Municipal Association, The Western Australian Farmer's Federation, Pastoralists and Graziers, Growers Boards and Associations; and
- link community and state government decision-making forums so those rural women have a clear path or opportunity for entry.

It is important that any established paths does not exclude rural women from entering government decision-making, if they have not been previously affiliated or linked with a particular organisation. Furthermore, change strategies ensure that rural women's government decision-making role does not become overbearing, but instead have the outcome of more and different rural women becoming involved. This mandates the importance of local community Leadership programs to prepare and encourage different rural women to be involved and fill in vacant committee positions. This will lessen the demands on rural women who are already involved in government decision-making. This link to the previous solution demonstrates all change strategies are inextricably linked, mirroring the complex and dynamic nature of impeding and driving forces.

3. Have more and diverse decision-making forums

As acknowledged previously creating change strategies in a broader context involves targeting strategies to increase opportunities and flexibility to be involved in government decision-making, where women and people from diverse background and commitments can be involved. To achieve this flexibility the following solutions are provided:

- have more and diverse decision-making forums for women to express their ideas, concerns, and issues. These forums include online meetings, surveys, weekend workshops, day meetings-forums, and rotating location of meetings;
- review decision-making standing orders to embrace online meetings, for example to enable legal voting in a teleconference situation;
- have less decision-making commitments such as shorter committee tenure for some committee members. Given many rural women's current commitments and unpredictable future commitments, shorter tenures will increase the likelihood that

more rural women can include government decision-making role in their current schedule of commitments and responsibilities; and

- create and promote a variety of ways that decisions can be made in addition to face-to-face hourly meetings. The intent being that the culture of decision-making is open and inclusive, involving many different rural people.

Rural women ultimately wanted change strategies and policies to be opened up to rural men (where appropriate), whilst at the same time addressing rural women's unique needs. Many of the interviewed women strongly opposed token women being placed on committees. They felt this discredited the value of women's voices and women, in general. Instead the above change strategies provide more opportunities for rural men and rural women to be involved, with the focus on addressing and targeting rural women, but not mandating their involvement through token positions on committees.

The outcome of more and diverse decision-making forums is to

- create flexibility and opportunities for rural women to be involved;
- minimise the resources for rural women to be involved; and
- to include more and different rural women to be involved.

4. Support women's current responsibilities and commitments.

Rural women involvement in government decision-making requires the impediments of resources to be addressed so more rural women can add their new role to their current commitments. Developing ways to minimise the resource demands includes:

- have more and diverse forums to be involved;
- have less decision-making commitments such as shorter committee tenure, for example have a one year tenure with a possible one year extension;
- rotate meetings at different rural locations,
- provide resource support;
- have support and encouragement to be a decision-maker - including collegial, family, community, government, and mentoring support; and
- through using information and communication technologies so that communication and information can be sourced from home or the local community. This will minimise resource demands and create new opportunities for involvement.

With the above suggestions, many rural women may find the threshold of becoming involved in government decision-making manageable and are able to fit it in their life, with their current commitments and responsibilities. These change strategies, which ultimately are the responsibility of government, if implemented, sends, a strong affirming message to rural women that the government decision-making culture is including and valuing them.

5. Promote values of government decision-making

Ultimately the people responsible for government decision-making will oversee and instigate change that originates from the cultural impediments. These people being Ministers and Chief Executive Officers of Government. Although the rural women

interviewed expressed that creating solutions to address the cultural impediment was difficult, the necessary ingredient for cultural change centres on communication and flexibility to involve people from many different backgrounds. Change strategies include:

- communicate to the public that government decision-making values diversity and openness and includes people with diverse opinions and innovative ideas;
- communicate to rural women that their experience, knowledge, and skills are a valuable asset in government decision-making forums;
- have support and encouragement to be a decision-maker - including collegial, family, community, government, and mentoring support;
- have less decision-making commitments such as shorter committee tenure which accommodates people's current commitments and responsibilities, for example have a one year tenure with a possible one year extension;
- review the criteria for committee membership where it focuses less on prior experience, and more on the person's desire to be involved, community knowledge, communication skills, and the diversity of committee members.
- have more and diverse forums to be involved in and make decisions such as online meetings, surveys, and weekend workshops instead of frequent hourly meetings; and
- provide support and mentors, including men and women mentors, who are already in the decision-making system;

As mentioned previously rural women expressed their opposition for token women being placed on committees, and ultimately wanted change strategies to be opened up to rural men (where appropriate), whilst at the same time addressing rural women's unique needs.

These cultural originating solutions are critical as they have an impact and direct effect on alleviating interpersonal and personal impeding forces. When many rural women develop their personal leadership qualities and decide to be involved in government decision-making, interpersonal and cultural impediments are to be removed to ensure the ultimate success of change strategies.

6. Increase information and communications

Information and communication technologies are a tool that can increase rural women's access to information and greater capacity to communicate with people – two fundamental functions of a decision-maker. Information and communications technologies include the internet, email, fax, videoconferencing, teleconferencing, and the telephone. These technologies minimise the resource demands currently required to communicate and access information. Furthermore these technologies create new opportunities for rural women to be involved.

Information and communication technologies facilitate the decision-maker's role by their ability to:

- transfer of information
- increase communication between people; and

- most importantly do the above without people being in the same room or in geographical proximity, (see impediments section of this report).

Furthermore, using information and communications technologies can increase rural women's involvement in decision-making by:

- fitting in with rural women's life;
- providing additional opportunities;
- facilitating representation and advocacy on all levels; and
- gives women a voice in a global environment.

As one of the women succinctly explained,

"I think the technology is there as a tool it is not there of itself it is a means to an end. It is a case of well what are we doing that the technology can help us do better. So one of those things is obviously exchanging information."

The decision-making means or activities that information and communication technologies can be used include:

- Meetings by facilitating interactive meetings, greater access to meetings, fit meetings in with women's responsibilities, training needs and experience, send out and access agendas and minutes, and record of minutes;
- Seeking information passively and actively, greater access, and speedy and anonymous;
- Communicate with politicians, Ministers, officers, and people that one represents through email, internet, surveys, and web pages;
- Develop synergy with community groups and organisations to build bridges with other rural communities and people; develop synergies and support, ideas, resources, and opportunities and maintain networks; and
- Self empowerment and personal development opportunities through online training and education.

Ways metropolitan people and government officers can increase the use of information and communications technologies for rural women is to:

- Be clear of the decision-making or change strategy purpose and then ensure the technology follows;
- Be aware and access online rural communities or online discussion groups;
- Be aware of the diverse technologies available and their strengths and weaknesses;
- Be aware of local rural services in information and communication technologies;
- Encourage self and other to use technology tools where appropriate
- Encourage and implement innovative idea, particularly with funding applications; and
- Be aware of rural women's current commitments and responsibilities when implementing solutions.

With the advent and increasing capabilities of the internet and online technologies it is important that the following actions are taken to fully realise and open decision-making opportunities for rural women. These actions are:

- create, formalise, and promote how information and communication technologies can be used to increase the number and type of decision-making forums;
- develop and access online rural communities in government decision-making forums. These include Progress Rural (www.progressrural.wa.gov.au) and the Rural, Regional, and Remote Women's Network (www.rrr.online.wa.gov.au) Online communities; and
- review decision-making standing orders to embrace online meetings, for example to enable legal voting in a teleconference or online situation.

In developing information and communication technology solutions ensure that

- The local rural infrastructure is considered
- That rural women have support and training in the technology, particularly from the purpose and benefits they can receive from their use; and
- Acknowledge that information and communication technologies will facilitate the broad change strategies, but not solve the total impediments related to women's involvement in government decision-making. As outlined by one of the rural women *"People need to believe in themselves, and be self-empowered before the use of technology can be truly optimised."*

Conclusion

In summary, the effective solution to create change involves the implementation of a package of solutions based on as set of principles (see Figure 7).

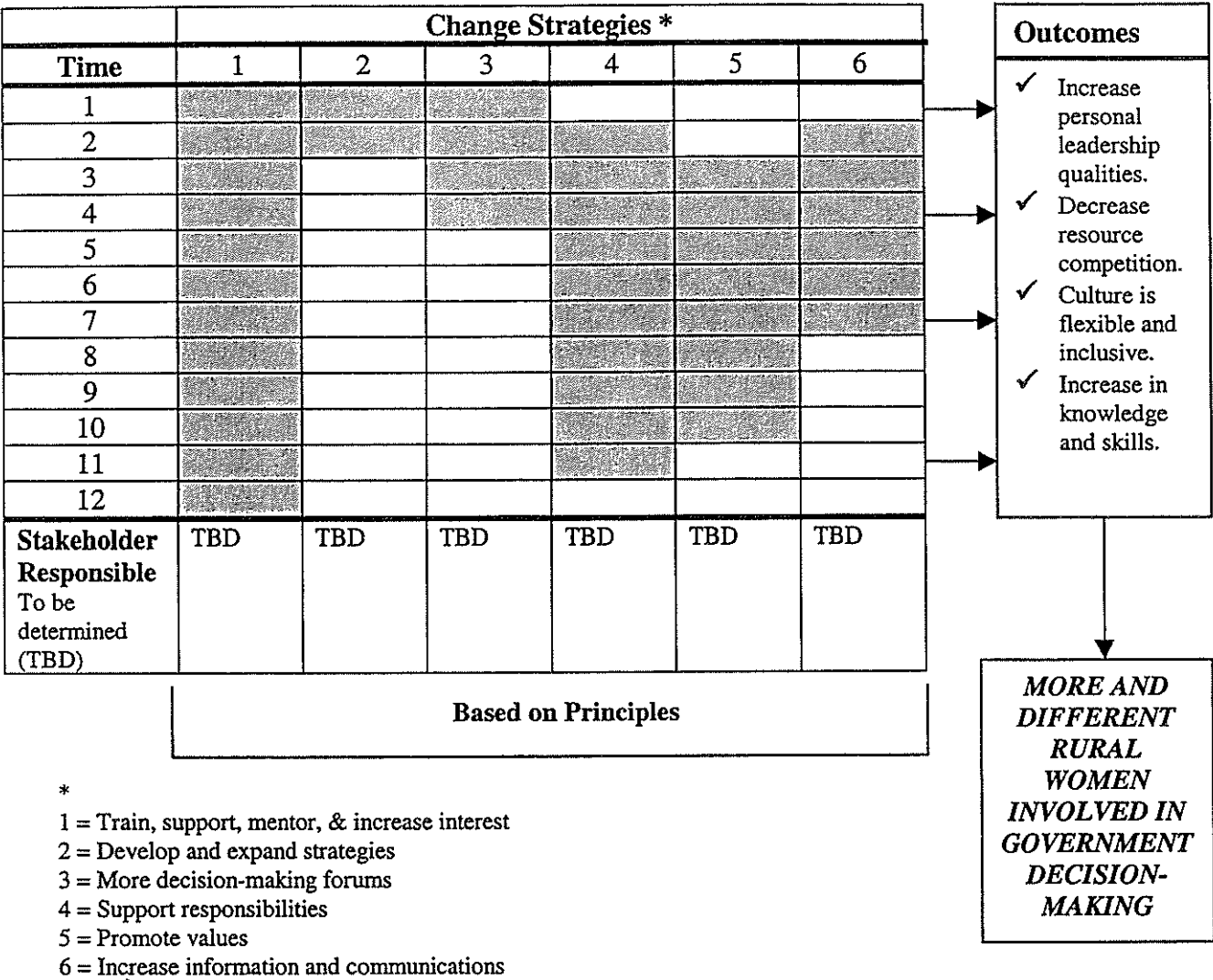


Figure 7. An implementation plan based on change strategies and principles.

Although the solutions originate from a personal, interpersonal or cultural source, their impact is dynamic and broad. Figure 7 identifies an implementation plan to increase rural women’s involvement in government decision-making. Although this plan will depend on the human and financial resources provided, the time sequence and source of responsibility provides flexibility to accommodate for shortfalls in resources. In essence Table 7 depicts the criticalness of addressing rural women’s involvement in government decision-making as a complex issue requiring a multitude of diverse change strategies. It is optimal that with these change strategies underpin with principles, the desired outcome

– more and different rural women will be involved in government decision-making – will be achieved.

In summary a package of change strategies underpinned by principles to increase personal leadership qualities, decrease resource competition, ensure the culture is flexible and inclusive, increase rural women’s knowledge and skills; and increase access to information and communication will together increase rural women’s involvement in government decision-making.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this report was to identify why rural women's involvement in government decision-making is of a low level despite the concerted government action, and to furthermore provide solutions to inform action.

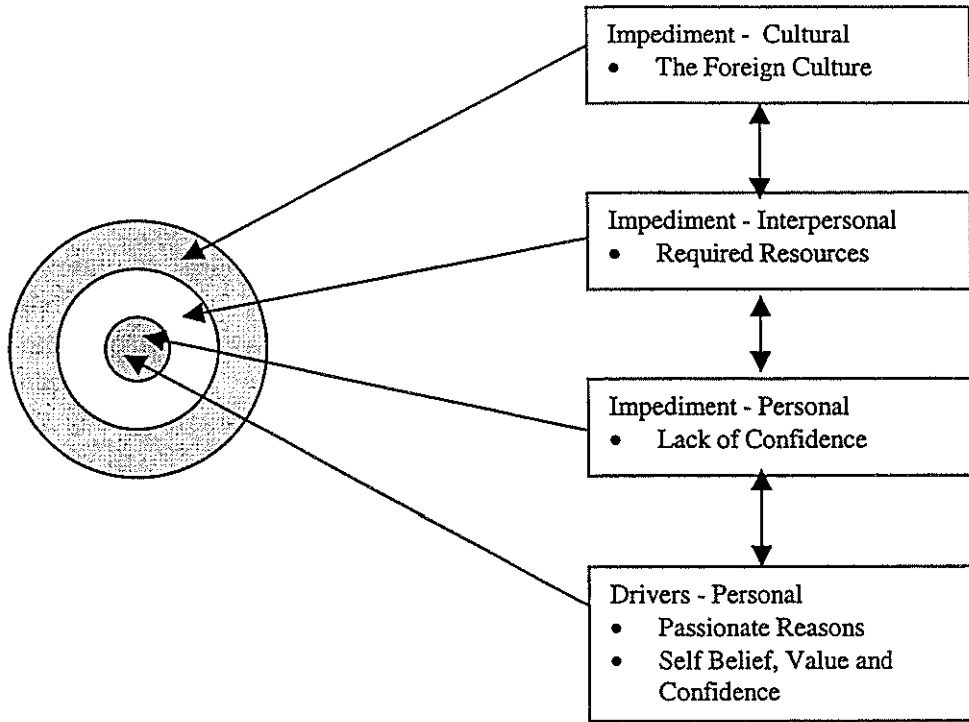


Figure 8. The framework bringing together the interdependent impeding and driving forces impacting on rural women's involvement in government decision-making.

Findings from rural women leader's interviews indicate that the impeding and driving forces are best understood in a framework that illustrates the broad, complex, dynamic and interdependent nature of the current situation (see Figure 8).

Effective solutions are to mirror this framework and be guided by a set of principles. Specific solutions include:

1. Train, support, mentor, and increase interest
2. Develop links with other organisations and expand change strategies.
3. Have more and diverse decision-making forums
4. Support women's current responsibilities and commitments.
5. Promote values of government decision-making
6. Increase information and communications

These solutions are to be guided by the following principles:

- Ensure the inclusiveness of all rural women.
- Acknowledge the developmental nature and individuality of leadership
- Use local community and personal networks to access women.
- Maintain broad solutions that tailor rural women's needs.
- Include all rural decision-making groups, not just government.
- Simultaneously implement change strategies that reflect the complex nature of the current situation.
- Cultural change requires the inclusion of people with diverse responsibilities and commitments.

Information and communication technologies can be an effective tool that facilitates the above six solutions as they can:

- increase communication and the transfer of information, without the need of geographical proximity;
- enable tasks and activities to fit in the rural women's life, with her current responsibilities;
- provide additional opportunities, both for involvement in government decision-making, and personal, economic, and professional developments;
- facilitate representation and advocacy on all levels; and
- give women a voice in a global environment.

In summary, an effective solution to create change involves the implementation of a package of solutions based on a set of principles.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Rural Women’s Perception of What Makes a Good Decision-Maker.

Time Period	Quality
No.1. Priority - All the time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowing the people.• Building relationships.
Before the meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Doing homework• Prior experience
During meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion• Diversity of people• Able to take on new perspective• Not hung up on own view
After meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Right outcome• Feedback to people.

Table 4. Rural women’s perception of what makes a good decision-Maker.

**Appendix 2. Index Of Rural Community's Availability Of Information And
Communication Technology Services.**

Rural Community	Video Conferencing *	Westlink Reception Sites	Telecentres
Contact details:	Anthony Dean Office of Information and Communications Department of Commerce and Trade 08 9327 5666	Jessica Perera Westlink West Perth 9222 5192	Brett Sabien Regional Development Department of Commerce and Trade 08 9327 5666
Albany	✓	✓	
Augusta		✓	✓
Australind		✓	
Beacon		✓	✓
Beverly		✓	✓
Blackstone		✓	
Boddington		✓	
Boulder		✓	
Boyup Brook		✓	✓
Bremer Bay		✓	✓
Bridgetown		✓	✓
Brookton		✓	
Broome	✓	✓	✓
Bruce Rock		✓	✓
Bunbury	✓	✓	
Busselton		✓	
Carnarvon	✓	✓	
Cascade		✓	
Collie		✓	
Coorow		✓	
Corrigin		✓	✓
Cosmo Newberry		✓	
Cue		✓	
Cunderdin		✓	
Dalwallinu		✓	
Darkan		✓	
Denham		✓	
Denmark		✓	✓
Derby	✓	✓	
Dongara		✓	
Dowerin		✓	
Dumbleyung		✓	

Contd.

Rural Community	Video Conferencing *	Westlink Reception Sites	Telecentres
Eneabba		✓	
Esperance	✓	✓	
Exmouth	✓	✓	✓
Fitzroy Crossing		✓	
Frankland		✓	
Gabbim		✓	
Geraldton	✓	✓	
Gin Gin		✓	
Gnowangerup		✓	
Goomalling		✓	
Greenbushes		✓	✓
Halls Creek		✓	✓
Harvey		✓	
Hopetoun		✓	✓
Hyden		✓	✓
Jameson		✓	
Jerramungup		✓	
Jurien		✓	
Kalbarri		✓	
Kalgoorlie	✓	✓	
Kambalda		✓	
Karratha	✓	✓	
Katanning	✓	✓	✓
Kellerberrin		✓	
Kiwirrkurra		✓	
Kojonup		✓	
Kondinin		✓	✓
Koorda		✓	
Kulin		✓	✓
Kulumburu		✓	
Kununoppin		✓	
Kununurra	✓	✓	✓
La Grange		✓	
Lake Grace		✓	✓
Lancelin		✓	
Latham		✓	
Laverton		✓	

Contd.

Rural Community	Video Conferencing *	Westlink Reception Sites	Telecentres
Leeman		✓	✓
Leinster		✓	
Leonora		✓	
Looma		✓	
Mandurah	✓	✓	
Manjimup		✓	
Marble Bar		✓	
Margaret River		✓	
Meekatharra		✓	✓
Menzies		✓	
Merredin	✓	✓	✓
Midland		✓	
Mingenew		✓	✓
Moora	✓	✓	✓
Morawa		✓	✓
Mount Barker		✓	
Mukinbudin		✓	✓
Mullewa		✓	
Murchison		✓	
Nannup		✓	✓
Narembeen		✓	✓
Narrogin	✓	✓	
Newdegate		✓	✓
Newman		✓	
Norseman		✓	
Northam	✓	✓	
Northampton		✓	
Northcliffe		✓	✓
Nullagine		✓	
One Arm Point		✓	
Ongerup		✓	✓
Onslow		✓	
Paraburdoo		✓	
Pemberton		✓	✓
Perenjori		✓	✓
Pinjarra		✓	
Pingelly		✓	
Port Hedland	✓	✓	

Contd.

Rural Community	Video Conferencing *	Westlink Reception Sites	Telecentres
Pundulmurra		✓	
Punmu		✓	
Quairading		✓	✓
Ravensthorpe		✓	✓
Roebourne		✓	
Sandstone		✓	
South Hedland		✓	
South Stirling		✓	
Southern Avon			✓
Southern Cross		✓	✓
Tambellup		✓	✓
Tammin		✓	
Three Springs		✓	
Tjirrkarli		✓	
Tjukurla		✓	
Toodyay		✓	✓
Tom Price		✓	
Varley		✓	✓
Walpole		✓	✓
Warana		✓	
Wandering		✓	✓
Warakurna		✓	
Warburton		✓	
Wellstead		✓	✓
West Arthur		✓	✓
Wiluna		✓	
Williams		✓	✓
Wingellina		✓	
Wongan Hills		✓	✓
Wyalkatchem		✓	✓
Wyndham		✓	✓
Yalgoo		✓	✓
Yealering		✓	
York		✓	✓

Contd.

Rural Community	Video Conferencing *	Westlink Reception Sites	Telecentres
Additional Information - Linking sites if relevant	<p>Perth: West Perth TAFE, Perth Agriculture WA, South Perth Curtin Univ. Murdoch Univ. TAFE, Midland</p> <p>Interstate: TAFE, Adelaide CITEC Coporate TV, Brisbane Parliament House, Canberra Administrative Appeals Tribunal, Darwin Australian Video Conferencing Centre, Melbourne & Sydney</p>		

* Note contact telecommunications provider regarding teleconferencing services.