

Helping women into work helps us all

PNG is working hard to grow and develop sustainably, but a large part of the solution, our women, are not being sufficiently engaged. As a result, the country is missing a crucial social and economic opportunity. To improve workforce gender diversity, PNG must invest in women's education, get more women into parliament and challenge the stereotypes that discourage women from paid work, business and leadership.

Gender diversity is not only fair and right in the workforce, it's a good thing. It's good for women, good for families, good for business and good for the economy.

According to the International Labor Office, businesses with a gender-diverse workforce are more profitable and productive, show higher levels of innovation and attract and retain better talent compared to those that are not. They also report improvements in their bottom line of 5 to 20%.¹

There are significant economic gains to be had as well. An analysis by the World Economic Forum found that if countries with high workforce inequality closed the gender gap, they could increase GDP by up to 35%. The study also suggests these countries would see men's wages increase as overall economic productivity lifts.²

Closing the gender gap in countries with high workforce inequality could increase their GDP by up to **35%**



PNG has high gender inequality in its workforce. Although participation is roughly equal, the type of work that men and women do is not. Men are twice as likely than women to hold a formal, salaried job. Women, on the other hand, are three times more likely than men to do non-paid 'informal' work such as food cultivation, gardening and domestic duties.³

This imbalance creates significant real-world consequences. It leaves women with limited financial, economic and political power and vulnerable to poverty and domestic violence. And it prevents PNG from realising the tremendous social and economic contribution that women can make.

To harness the power of a gender-balanced workforce, PNG must address the key barriers holding women back: educational disadvantage, lack of access to decision-making and stereotypes that discourage participation in formal work.

Invest in better education for girls and women

Gender inequality begins early in PNG and increases as children progress through their education. Boys generally have better access to primary schools. Girls are disadvantaged because they perform a greater share of domestic duties, such as childminding and household chores. They are also at greater risk of sexual violence if they attend school, particularly if they have to travel far to get there. As a result, boys make up 53% of primary students and girls 47%.⁴ In higher education, the gap widens further with men comprising 63% of enrolments and women only 37%. This lack of higher-level skills is a major barrier for women seeking to enter formal work.

To address this bias, PNG has an opportunity to learn from countries that have successfully tackled this issue. For instance, building schools that were closer to children's homes was crucial to the success of Indonesia's education reform program. In countries such as Angola, Cameroon and Malawi, teachers undergo gender sensitivity training to encourage girls to participate in class and study science and mathematics. A UNICEF study also showed that having female teachers can help girls, and even their parents, feel comfortable to attend school in areas where sexual violence is prevalent.

To be sure, improving education outcomes for women and girls requires significant investment. Yet, the social and economic benefits make it more than worthwhile. Quality education contributes to both women's economic empowerment and national economic growth. In fact, improvements in education account for about half of economic growth in OECD countries in the past 50 years.

Women account for only **37%** of higher education enrolments in PNG



Get more women into parliament

There are only five countries in the world that have no women in their parliament: Yemen, Qatar, Micronesia, Vanuatu and PNG. Only seven women have ever been elected to PNG's parliament since independence in 1975. In a country where 48% of its population are females, this lack of representation is an obstacle not just to gender equality but also inclusive growth. Having women decision-makers helps bring a greater diversity of views and perspectives, putting the parliament in a better position to enact laws and policies that champion gender diversity and social inclusion.

PNG needs to consider how it will address this glaring inequality. One option is to set targets, which is an efficient mechanism to accelerate change and restore balance. This was the core of the Equality and Participation Bill proposed in 2011, which recommended 22 reserved seats for women. However, the Bill was not passed. Around the world, targets have become an effective tool to ensure greater gender diversity. In 1991, Argentina became the first country in the world to require its political parties to field a minimum quota of women candidates. Since then, many others have followed suit. In fact, half of the countries of the world today use some type of electoral quota for their parliament.⁵

Address stereotypes that discourage women from formal work, business and leadership

Stereotypes have a powerful impact on behaviour and are a major barrier to women entering the formal workforce. Alongside education and politics, the business sector has a critical role to play in changing attitudes about women and work.

Companies need to hire, develop and retain more women, and should seriously consider gender targets, particularly for leadership roles. Empowering women in the workplace by creating safe working environments, gender-smart policies and women-specific training opportunities is also critical. Women should be encouraged to participate in sectors they have not traditionally worked, such as mining, manufacturing, energy and construction. And they should be encouraged to learn skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The women of PNG, like its men, work hard for their families and their future. But the nature of that work is out of balance. By supporting women through better education, sharing political power and proactive business policies, PNG can reap the social and economic rewards that we know a gender-diverse workforce can deliver. So, what are we waiting for?

How companies can empower women in the workplace



Gender targets particularly for leadership roles



Safe working environments



Gender-smart policies



Women-specific training opportunities

- 1 International Labour Organization, 2019. The business case for change, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_700953.pdf
- 2 World Economic Forum, 2018. When more women join the workforce, everyone benefits. Here's why, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/12/economic-gains-from-gender-inclusion-even-greater-than-you-thought/>
- 3 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2019. Country gender assessment of agriculture and the rural sector in Papua New Guinea, <http://www.fao.org/3/ca6308en/ca6308en.pdf>
- 4 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2019. Country gender assessment of agriculture and the rural sector in Papua New Guinea, <http://www.fao.org/3/ca6308en/ca6308en.pdf>
- 5 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Gender quotas database, <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/quotas>

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