



**BANK OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

**GOVERNOR'S SPEECH**  
**PNG BORDER AGENCIES' WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE**  
**DELIVERED BY THE GOVERNOR, MS. ELIZABETH GENIA, AAICD**  
**25 JUNE 2024**

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for the kind invitation to participate in this important conference. I am heartened by the increasing number of opportunities for PNG organisations to get together to collaborate and share their experiences with critical issues. This conference is one such shining example.

And Gender Equity and Social Inclusion, GESI, is certainly one of the most critical issues all organisations face.

Let's put this very clearly. Unless everyone in the workplace receives fair treatment, regardless of gender, or any other differences, staff morale will be low. Without motivated staff, who are happy to do their jobs properly, an organisation cannot operate effectively or achieve its strategic objectives.

Certainly, our experience in the Bank of Papua New Guinea tells us that if we are to attract and retain the best staff, money is not the main motivator. More meaningful to staff is having a positive atmosphere. We need to foster a diverse, dynamic and collaborative working environment, where achievements are acknowledged.

Today I would like to share BPNG's journey towards achieving gender balance.

Ten years ago the Bank had 43 senior management positions, defined as department heads and unit managers. Women held 9 of those positions, which represented 21 percent of the workforce. At that time, the executive, which included the governor, the deputy governor, and 3 of the 4 assistant governors were men.

The Department of Personnel Management's work to develop the PNG Government's Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) Policy has been instrumental in creating a



fairer mindset within the national public service. I acknowledge their guidance and support.

In 2019 the Bank took its first steps towards implementing a comprehensive GESI policy. Determining what the critical issues were, and settling on an effective set of guidelines, involved an organisation-wide effort.

Staff and management at all levels participated in an online survey as the first phase of building a comprehensive Organisational Gender Assessment.

The survey helped gauge general attitudes to, and knowledge of, GESI issues. The findings were insightful, honest and sometimes uncomfortable. They formed a strong basis for focus group discussions, which all helped us to gain a better understanding of the implications of the results.

In December 2019 the Bank launched its GESI Policy and its Implementation Strategy 2020-2022.

The implementation strategy aimed to embed GESI principles and practices deep into the Bank's culture and bring gender equity considerations to the forefront of planning and decision-making.

I am very proud to say that I was assistant governor responsible for corporate affairs at the time and this successful project was conducted under my sponsorship.

By the end of 2020 the percentage of women in management positions in the Bank had increased to 29 percent. Yes, the executive positions – governor, deputy governor, and 3 out of the 4 assistant governors – were still held by men. But we were starting to see suitably qualified women appointed to management roles, even in the technical areas traditionally held by men.

And now, in 2024?

Since the adoption of the GESI principles and practices, there has been a gradual, yet distinct, shift towards gender equality, starting from the executive level. I am extremely proud and humble to be the first woman appointed Governor of the Bank of Papua New



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Guinea, leading a management complement that is now 30 percent women. 21 of the 70 management roles in the Bank are currently held by women.

Yes, we need to factor in that the number of management positions has increased from 55 in 2020, to 70 in the current organisation structure, reflecting several new responsibilities assigned to BPNG. However, the percentage of female managers has also increased, at a slighter higher rate than the increase in the number of management positions. We're travelling on the right track.

The Bank also engages external specialists from time to time to provide high level advice to executive management and the board. A number of these specialists are women.

The gender gap is gradually closing.

We need the gap to close. But we need to guard against the cynical view we do hear from time to time. GESI is not about promoting women at all costs. It is certainly not about women-only reverse discrimination.

In fact, there are plenty of examples where men have been discriminated against because the role they aspire to has been dominated by women and the workplace culture has been that men could not do the job as well. Think about how many executive assistants are men.

GESI is about providing fairness of opportunity. It is about ensuring even-handed respectful treatment of all staff.

With this in mind, another critical success factor for the Bank's GESI implementation has been the structure and support provided by the team of 'GESI Focal Points'. These are staff members, both male and female, representing each group and department in the Bank.

The Focal Points have received specialist training, which we call the 3Rs. They can recognise whether a staff member is faced with an issue – discrimination, workplace harassment or bullying, gender-based violence or family sexual violence. The Focal Points can respond by asking the staff if they need help. And if so, they can refer the staff member to appropriate help and support.



The appointment of male volunteers as GESI Male Advocates underlines the Bank's commitment to closing the gender gap. The advocates, who participate in specialist training for the role, are change communications leaders, actively engaging their colleagues to increase awareness, understanding, acceptance and adoption of changes, in line with GESI principles. Men, leading other men, to help close the gender gap.

BPNG established a GESI Advisory Committee. Its role is to provide overall guidance, leadership and direction, including approving and endorsing work plans and budgets for the GESI programs within the Bank.

Our aim was always to embed the GESI philosophy deep into the core culture of BPNG. To do this we needed to have committed support from executive management, right through to junior staff. The Advisory Committee includes Assistant Governor-level executives and other senior officers.

The Bank established a support structure, "Pathway to Safety", which is available to all staff.

Pathway to Safety is a network of resources, ready to help anyone who has experienced, or is experiencing, family sexual violence or gender-based violence or other situations that prevent gender equity and social inclusion. The Pathway to Safety has been developed so all our people know what to do, who to ask and where to go if they need help.

The Pathway starts with the Bank. One of the key initiatives of the GESI activities now in place is the GESI Help Desk. The Help Desk provides support to staff, including referrals to other organisations who can give specific assistance or professional counselling.

And it is working. Let me give you an example.

One of our female staff had been married for 10 years. She and her husband had 3 children together, all under 8. The husband turned out to be a violent and controlling man. She was frequently beaten, was deprived of her rights, and was not allowed to



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have friends. He controlled where and when she was at all times, including a strict drop off and pick up from work.

She found out he was also involved with another woman and had 2 children with her. But our woman was so down-trodden, she believed she could do nothing about her situation. She lived in fear.

The Bank's GESI team recognised she was in trouble and activated the various resources available through the Pathway to Safety. In this case the process started with counselling sessions for both husband and wife.

When counselling did not result in any positive behaviour changes on the part of the husband, mediation took place. The marriage was dissolved. The woman is now safe with her children. Without the burden of fear hanging over her, and with the ongoing support of BPNG, she is doing well at work, and has managed to buy her own property.

Such a good news story.

The movement towards closing the gender gap in PNG is much wider than what is happening within the Bank. In fact, BPNG's long-held focus on financial inclusion has in many ways been the real catalyst for gender equity.

For many years the Bank has been working towards achieving financial inclusion. The ultimate goal of financial inclusion is for all Papua New Guineans, no matter who they are or where they live, to have access to basic financial services.

The issue of gender equity in the context of financial services was clearly demonstrated in 2017, when BPNG and with the support of the program's partners, launched the GESI Policy for Microfinance Financial Institutions.

Implementing this policy started off with awareness building and training for the staff of the partner institutions. At the time these institutions employed more than 600 staff, serving over 415,000 customers, from 46 branches, across 13 provinces.



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This training and awareness led to a better understanding of women's financial issues, which has helped many thousands of women around the country over the years since then.

BPNG remains one of the drivers of financial inclusion, now a national strategic priority, coordinated through the Centre for Excellence in Financial Inclusion, CEFI.

One of the key objectives for financial inclusion is to boost the number of women who have access to financial services, such as by owning savings accounts and loans. Closing the gender gap to where women represent 50 percent of new account holders is a stated aim in the current National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2023-2027.

Are the desired results being achieved? Yes, we are definitely seeing progress.

In 2015 women owned 461,091 deposit accounts. By the end of the third quarter of 2023, that number had topped 1,465,600, an increase of nearly 320 percent in less than 8 years.

To put that into context, the total number of deposit accounts in 2023 was 3,955,482, so the desired 50 percent female account ownership was not quite achieved by that time. But it is well on target to meet the objective of 50 percent of new accounts to be owned by women by the conclusion of the current program. We are definitely seeing the achievement of gender equity and social inclusion in those numbers.

What of the future?

The business sector in PNG will continue to seek out women to fill senior positions. Already we are seeing financial institutions, including commercial banks, insurance companies, and savings & loan societies appointing suitably qualified women to executive roles.

Government policy highlights bridging the gender gap as a priority. For example, PNG Vision 2050, the far-reaching blueprint for sustainable growth and development in PNG, states objectives to promote gender equality, empower women and girls, and eliminate gender disparity at all levels.



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The momentum is building to bridge the gap.

Glass ceilings no longer hold women back.

Prejudice against women holding positions traditionally held by men is breaking down.

Tokenism is on the way out.

Education is becoming just as available to females as well as males. Government and business are motivated to make the changes.

We are starting to see positive results.

For example, this year BPNG is 7th in the world for gender balance in central banks. We have moved up the international ranking from 24th last year, as reported in the recently released OMFIF Gender Balance Index 2024.

But there's still a very long way to go, not only for BPNG, but for all PNG organisations. Very few have completely closed the gender gap.

Now it's up to us, not only as women in leadership positions, but also as individuals who believe gender equity and balance are key components of a better and more sustainable future.

I look forward to working with you all to share our experiences and to learn from each other.

Thank you.