



PNG BAN
PNG Business Advocacy Network

Papua New Guinea Women's Business Agenda

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Papua New Guinea Business Advocacy Network

'A vibrant and premier coalition of professional, business and community membership organisations and individuals supporting businesswomen in Papua New Guinea, dedicated to promoting policy reforms that ensure sustainable economic and social development.'



This material has been prepared within the project financed by the United States Department of State through the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE). The information contained in this Women's Business Agenda (WBA) for Papua New Guinea reflects the views of the Papua New Guinean businesspeople who participated in the WBA meetings held in Port Moresby in 2020-2021. The views, opinions, and recommendations expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of CIPE or of the United States Department of State. CIPE's principal role in the WBA process was to provide technical assistance and international best practice to the local business community with organizing the initiative and with compiling and producing the final report.

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Executive Summary

Increasing women's participation in the economy leads to better living standards for her, for her family, for business, and national economic growth

When women are educated and employed, businesses see growth, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increases to boost the economy resulting in better development outcomes (OECD,2012). From the 1990s to 2006, the increased numbers of women employed in developed countries accounted for more global economic growth than that of China in recent years (The Economist, 2006).

Women making up 49% of Papua New Guinea's (PNG) population ¹ have equally high labour force participation through employment, entrepreneurship and mostly subsistence agriculture rated among the highest in the world².

Yet, the fact of women's robust economic participation in PNG cannot dispel the harshness of the conditions under which most women work. PNG continues to be ranked in the medium human development category with a United Nations ranking of 0.555 ranking of 155 out of 189 economies in 2020 (UNDP,2020). PNG continues to rank in the lowest category of the 2019 Gender Inequality Index (0.725), ranking 161 out of 162 countries globally (UNDP, 2020). Evidently so in PNG, most girls and women receive fewer years of education than boys; face grave threats of physical and sexual violence from the men in their households and communities (2/3 women facing some form of violence); and rarely have the means to acquire real property, take out loans to support their enterprises, or direct their livelihoods into a position of relative independence or prosperity (World Bank, et al. 2012.). Although women have equal opportunities to participate in their family farm, own their own business or have formal employment, nearly all are overwhelmed by societal inequality and security concerns which prevents their full active economic participation.

It is imperative that policy makers in PNG should work to enhance women's equal economic participation and consequent contribution to economic growth. If more women in PNG can own Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) the GDP alone is expected to increase by an additional 2 percent (%) than that of 2014 GDP (CEFI, 2018).

The four priority agendas by the Business Advocacy Network calls for policy action into:

Leadership: PNG does not have political representation of women in parliament to influence policy and legislative reform to enable greater economic participation. There is also a lack of women's representation at senior executive levels in both the public and private sector. Women should be provided the platform to advocate for policy reform based on the realities of how it affects them.

Access to Finance: Many women particularly the rural majority being largely illiterate face barriers in accessing finance through banks and other formal financial institutions. Bank products should be contextually receptive to meeting the needs of women. Having initiatives such as gender desks in banks or child friendly facilities and incentives such as free service fees can potentially bolster confidence and trust access to finance Having access to financial institutions enable women to open bank accounts and have greater access to products including loans as capital for business start-up and growth.

¹ Population, female (% of total population) in Papua New Guinea was reported at 48.94 % in 2020, according to the World Bank collection of development indicators, compiled from officially recognized sources. Papua New Guinea - Population, female (% of total) - actual values, historical data, forecasts and projections were sourced from the [World Bank](#) on February of 2022.

² World Bank. World Development Indicators 2011.

Women’s Empowerment: In PNG a large rural majority of women participate in the informal economy as entrepreneurs and mostly subsistence agriculture. More opportunities and incentives through policy need to be provided to encourage women to transition and enable greater participation in the formal spaces of the labour market, through registered business. Such opportunities are not yet widely understood and explored among policymakers or women. The Women’s Business Agenda (WBA) advocates for women’s rights to justice, health, education, and for those living with disability.

Access to Services: Policy and legislation in PNG need to be inclusive to women and marginalised groups including people with disabilities. It is important that policy and legislation advocate for the full realisation of women’s rights which includes access to basic services.

The PNG Business Advocacy Network (PNG BAN) does not intend to duplicate or supersede efforts that have already progressed in these defined policy areas addressing issues that are familiar to many but lack attention. This advocacy on the economic participation of women in PNG can assist policymakers, government officials, private-sector actors, and donors in identifying opportunities for future reforms that enable greater economic participation of women in PNG.

The WBA, advocates for priority issues identified by the PNG BAN to increase women’s participation with the proposed recommendations:

Issues	Recommendations
<p>Lack of participation of women in politics, policy and decision making to create an enabling policy environment for women in business</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Special Parliamentary Committee to be established ○ Office of Development of Women to be elevated to Prime Minister’s office and resourced to provide policy briefing to the Special Parliamentary Committee on women’s representation in Parliament ○ Office of Development of Women to develop strategies for Government to mainstream gender through policies such as the GESI Policy. ○ Policy and legislation development and reforms must require the deliberate participation of women.
<p>Lack of access to finance to participate in business</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review the National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2016–2020 beyond 2021. ○ Establish a Steering Committee with Public and Private sector representation as a Governance mechanism that ensures accountability of Working Groups implementing the National Financial Inclusion Strategy.
<p>Inadequate empowerment for participation of women in the formal economy</p>	<p>Government policy makers to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reviews to the National Informal Economy Policy 2011-2015. ○ Alignment of the National Inclusion Strategy beyond 2021 to a current National Informal Economy Policy 2011-2015. ○ Clear strategies that ensure women’s economic participation in the formal economy. ○ Build Data repository of women engaged in the informal sector. ○ Stronger Consumer protection through legislation long term.
<p>Poor access of women to inclusive services including health, social welfare, justice, education, that limit women’s participation in business</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Midterm strategic review of the National Policy on Disability 2015 – 2025. ○ Midterm strategic review of the Papua New Guinea National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender Based Violence 2016-2025. ○ Long term development of an Organic Law on gender equality.

1.0 Introduction

The PNG BAN is a coalition of 60 business and civil society leaders from diverse backgrounds working together to advocate for regulatory reforms that promote women's participation in the economy using a WBA as a guide to selected priority areas for reform. In February 2020, the PNG BAN announced its first Women Steering Committee (SC) as the leading body to oversee efforts to develop a WBA in PNG. The goal of the WBA is to enhance the opportunities available for women in business and provide a more inclusive representation of women's economic interests through advocacy. Women in the SC represent a variety of organizations, including the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) sector, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well the youth and persons with disabilities (PWD) communities.

The WBA is a guiding document the PNG BAN utilises to engage government and other stakeholders on issues affecting women's social and economic participation in PNG. The WBA will help policy makers in government, business leaders, and other stakeholders to prioritise action in a national effort to address key issues affecting women's social and economic participation in PNG. The issues presented in the WBA have been identified in a rigorous consultation process through an inaugural women's forum where women from all levels of leadership and economic participation in PNG were able to contribute to greater understanding of issues that affect them. The final priority issues for the first iteration of the WBA were determined by discussion and voted by the PNG BAN. The issues identified in the WBA were then substantiated through an independent research process that aims to provide credible evidence-based policy dialogue between government, businesses, and other stakeholders.

This report presents the identified priority issues affecting women's social and economic participation in PNG for what will be the first WBA blueprint for PNG and will be built upon in years to follow. The first WBA for PNG provides recommendations into four priority areas of advocacy for women's social and economic participation in PNG:

1. **Leadership:** There is a lack of an enabling environment for participation of women in politics, policy and decision making to create an enabling policy environment for women in business.
2. **Access to Finance:** There is a lack of access to finance available to women to participate in business.
3. **Women's Empowerment:** Women are not adequately empowered to participate in the formal economy
4. **Access to Services:** Poor access of women to inclusive services including health, social welfare, justice, education, that limit women's participation in business.

This report presents recommendations of strategic policy action that can be taken as a national effort to close the gap in the four priority areas to enhance the dimensions of women's social and economic participation in PNG. Recommendations in this report have been identified through rigorous consultation between the SC and technical experts both in the country and within the region and largely informed by evidence of successful regional and global actions to address women's participation and contributions to economic growth and development.

2.0 Methodology

The WBA is developed to assist PNG policymakers, government officials, private-sector actors, and donors in identifying opportunities for future reforms for the greater engagement of women’s economic participation in PNG.

The first WBA in PNG is a product of a wide consultation process initiated through a national-level PNG Women’s Forum held on the 6-7 November 2019, with representatives attending from all 22 provinces across the country. In the Women’s Forum³ over 150 women entrepreneurs, CBO’s advocating for women in the economy, representatives from private sector organisations and development partners participated in identifying issues that formed barriers to their participation in business. From the forum several issues were identified. These issues were then presented to the PNG BAN to identify which issues could be prioritised in the first women’s business agenda. When the PNG BAN established the SC, these issues were then further defined by the SC members into four major issues to be prioritised for advocacy through the first WBA.

The SC then formed a Technical Working Group (TWG) of identified experts under each of the identified issues that were able to validate relevant policy actions to recommended under the WBA. These recommendations were then further defined through Key Informant Interviews (KII) to capture a process on initiating policy reform under the specific recommendations. Six (6) KIIs were conducted to provide guidance on how the policy reform is to be achieved.

The following issues and recommendations were then presented for further validation with the PNG BAN and recorded to form the basis of formulating women’s business agendas for the country.



2019 CIPE PNG Women’s Forum

³ The PNG Women’s Forum was sponsored by CIPE and the U.S. Embassy Port Moresby, and supported by development partners in PNG and corporate entities from the private sector.

3.0 Issues

3.1 Lack of participation of women in politics, policy and decision making to create an enabling policy environment for women in business



Coalition for Women Make Change advocacy meet at Mongol Village, Kavieng, New Ireland Province, a UNWomen Program. Photo courtesy of Ms. Ruth Watlen

PNG has struggled with participation of women in politics, to have equal representation at the highest level to directly influence policy and legislation, that create an enabling environment for women's participation in business. Since independence PNG has led ten elections, only seven of these elections had women represented. Women representation in parliament was on average one, from a consistently elected seat held by Dame Carol Kidu. Dame Carol Kidu, a member of the PNG BAN, has fought hard as a women's advocate to ensure basic rights for women of PNG, including basic education, health, social justice, and welfare. She has also used the political platform to advocate on harmful cultural views and practices like bride price. All of which are some important building blocks to enabling environment for women to participate in business. Before retirement in 2012, as former Opposition Leader and Minister for Community Development, Dame Carol Kidu was the driving force behind attempts to encourage women's representation in Parliament at the highest level of decision making in the country through the lobby for the Equality and Participation Bill before the 2012 election, to have 22 women representatives in parliament. Although the proposal did not get sufficient political support when first presented to Parliament, PNG through the persistency and participation of one female amended the Constitution to include 22 women reserved seats in parliament. Following this advancement, the Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Governments 1995 (OLPLLG) was also amended to allow woman representatives to be part of the provincial assembly (Section 10e), and two women appointed at the local level (Section 29d), however it is evident that women are also struggling to be elected at the lowest level of political representation. In the last Local Level Government (LLG) election (2013) only 1.4 percent of women were elected as ward councilors and LLG Presidents out of the total of 6,910 wards and 319 LLGs.

Although women's representation in the policy and legislative process in PNG may be a hopeful assumption as we approach the 2022 elections, if there is a footprint left by one women, PNG remains hopeful that more women in parliament persistently driving for equality in rights of women together can create an environment that is free for safe and equal participation of women in all spheres of life as

entrepreneurs, and active contributors to nation building through fair contributions to the formal economy of the country. Apart from women's legislations Dame Carol Kidu also drove a number of legislative reforms including the repeal of the Child Welfare Act, changes to the Criminal Code on rape and sexual assault, and new legislation on child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, Lukautim Pikinini Act as examples of the trajectory of women in politics if well supported.

The Government of PNG needs to take necessary steps as an entire Government approach to ensure the deliberate participation of women. In 2019, then Prime Minister Peter O'Neil through the NEC advised the Governor General to direct the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission (CLRC) through the review of the Organic Law on National and Local Level Government elections (OLPLLGE) to investigate a reference on the representation of women and special interest groups in Parliament. It is not clear how NEC has deliberated on the recommendations put forward by the review and whether the outcomes of this review will enable women's representation as the 2022 election approaches. However, reform proposals submitted to CLRC to have reserved elected seats representing regions in PNG can be revisited by current Governments to ensure women who are represented in parliament are able to actively participate in policy making and ensuring gender mainstreaming in Government institutions through the Governments Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Policy currently under revision in 2021 to have greater inclusivity of gender and disability.

3.2 Lack of access to finance to participate in business

The challenges women in PNG face to accessing finance is still yet to be fully understood. In 2018, the Bank of Papua New Guinea (BPNG) estimated that approximately 75% of the population does not have access to financial services, which is inclusive of women who live in rural and remote communities, and informal workers that remain unbanked (CEFI, 2018). This is despite having the only women's bank in the Pacific and one of only six women's banks in the world established in 2014 that offer banking services for women only.

Identified barriers by BPNG that continue to limit the access of the average Papua New Guinean woman to financial services that are to be addressed through the Micro, Small to Medium Enterprises 2021-2025 which include:

1. Women are less educated than men, which makes it harder for them to understand materials which promote and explain financial services.

In PNG fewer women speak English than men, and many more men than women can communicate easily in English, having received more education than women. Marketing for financial services, policy documents, and customer service materials by financial institutions all tend to be written in English. Women, therefore, tend to be aware of basic financial services, such as savings, but have limited awareness of more advanced services such as loans and insurance offered through financial institutions.

The low levels of literacy in English as the main language of communication in the financial services is a barrier for many women in rural PNG to access finance through banks and other financial institutions. The lack of community awareness by banks and financial institutions on their products and services in local language e.g., Tok Pisin or using other digital media platforms all contribute to barriers in women accessing finance through formal standard financial systems.

The lower rates of women completing basic education at primary school levels is a barrier to the knowledge and awareness women need to make more informed financial choices. Limited knowledge

and understanding of women on financial systems and products again is a barrier to women's access to finance.

Further the lack of basic financial education prevents women from being able to document their financial footprint through financial charters of income and expenditure as is a requirement of the Banks and financial institutions to provide access to business loans.

All the above identified barriers have impact on women's access to finance as women remain as not bankable in the eyes of financial institutions. Even if women wanted to borrow, meet the basic criteria which includes basic identification through documentation, financial records, financial footprints in formal financial systems, women are seen as not bankable in the eyes of financial institutions. More frequently, women cannot borrow because they do not meet the basic criteria outlined above.

Under the Micro, Small to Medium Enterprises Policy 2021-2025, implementing agencies including BPNG, SME Corporation, Centre for Excellence in Financial Inclusion (CEFI), National Training Council, Department of Commerce and Industry, and the Education Department are called to collaborative work towards the integration of entrepreneurship into formal education curriculum and learning, training programs certification and accreditations.

2. Women earn very small and irregular income, have low assets, have high household and community burden, and are dictated by social expectations in the kind of work they are involved in creating perception that “money is men’s business”.

In PNG 85% of women are more likely to be engaged in informal, vulnerable, or unpaid work. Vulnerable work is often characterized by inadequate earnings, low productivity and difficult conditions of work that undermine workers' fundamental rights. This is influenced by lower levels of education for women combined with societal expectations about what kind of activities women should engage in. Interviews of women from diverse backgrounds in PNG by the Australian Centre for International Agriculture (ACIAR) -funded Identifying opportunities and constraints for rural women's engagements in small-scale agricultural enterprises in PNG project identified the following challenges in societal expectations on the roles of women. Women highlighted a range of societal, community and cultural attitudes and norms that deterred them from initially moving into business and which at times threatened the financial viability of their businesses.

As an example, the coffee industry in PNG is quite large in the Highlands, with an estimated 400,000 smallholders growing coffee and nearly three million people reliant on income from it. Historically, coffee has been considered a men's crop, since it is planted on land belonging to men, and consequently men tend to monopolise the income from its sale. This is true even today, despite women doing a substantial amount of the labour in the coffee value chain including. Women's role in coffee production is usually in the least skilled, most labour intensive, and time-consuming aspects of the work, such as harvesting, washing, and processing. Men take the tasks requiring some knowledge of coffee technology, such as planting, shading, fencing, and pruning. Above all, men control the planning of the production process and the sale of coffee. Men leading in the coffee industry which earns substantially more money compared to sale other cash crops which women lead in, provides men the household decision making powers. Women tend to take lead roles in commercial gardening and selling of fresh produce, largely because the income from this is much lower than that from coffee and they are not seen to be in direct competition in the income they earn with men leading who are expected to earn more.

Research in the coffee growing communities of Ungai Bena and Goroka Districts of Eastern Highlands

Province found that almost 70 per cent of women had their own income, women have fewer means of earning than men. The lack of secure, regular income combined with the perception that money is “men’s business” because they earn more money than women means that women do not see a need for formal financial services even when they are able to access them. Banks are perceived as only for those with large amounts of money and for the formal working population who earn regular income. A large number of people in the rural population when asked about banks many will respond “em blo moni man tasol” translated is only for men with money. The lack of money becomes the reason for not opening bank accounts.

3. Women are less able to access financial services through both physical and digital means

Women are affected by the lack of nearby access to formal financial services. Younger women are expected to stay close to home to perform household duties. Women with families have more duties around the home so have less time to travel to banks and agents and to stand in long lines at the bank. The costs and risks of travelling for women to access formal banking services is seen to be much higher. The geographical difficulty in PNG to access the nearest bank branch or bank agent may be between 4 to 5 hours. The longer bank lines for women become a security threat to women who have to travel long distances to return back home. Therefore, Banks need further gender considerations for women and their accessibility to formal banking services that does not place them in harm’s way.

Digital financial services might offer a solution to this issue, but women are also at a disadvantage when it comes to digital access. While 50% of the population own a mobile phone in PNG, only 16% of women have one. Women also had very limited knowledge of digital banking services and products, which would enable them to transact from the safety of their homes. In PNG 30% of women own phones that are gifted to them, 35% of owners cannot make a call and 51% of owners cannot send SMS. The low access to mediums of technology like mobile phones, combined with poor digital literacy limits the opportunity to drive women’s financial inclusion through digital channels such as mobile money (PFIP, 2020). This also limits access to financial services for women available through mobile money or the internet. The high costs of mobiles services also impact the digital accessibility of women to financial services. According to a Development Policy Blog by Amanda HA Watson, the Digicel network has 92% of the telecommunications network with highest usage because of its geographical coverage into the rural areas and more reliable to meet communication needs despite it being ten times more expensive than Bmobile/Telikom networks. Although the new sea cable into PNG is infrastructure that is anticipated to reduce internet prices, prices remain unchanged. For women earning little income and with a high number of priorities to support her family, accessing digital financial services is costly. Under the Micro, Small to Medium Enterprises policy 2021-2025, implementing agencies including Government of PNG and Private sector have a key priority to increase Information and Communications Technology (ICT) coverage and penetration and the Department of Commerce and Industry is to play a policy advocacy role to address the access and affordability of ICT services that a required for business. However how this is to be achieved remains unclear in the policy.

4. Lack of trust in banks and the fear of requirements such as identification

Many banks in PNG charge account opening, maintenance, and withdrawal fees. Women see their savings depleted by these charges without understanding why and begin to lose trust. As previously discussed, materials which promote and explain financial services are commonly written in English. Women, therefore, commonly get their information from friends and family. When they have negative experiences, like “losing” their money, they are quick to tell people. Banks and other financial service

providers are not currently engaging in community-level awareness and education campaigns to counter these negative viewpoints.

An extremely high proportion of women from reported feeling uncomfortable while using financial services. Research has suggested that this may stem from a feeling that staff are impatient. FSPs are losing out by not taking the time to educate their female customers; women reported abandoning products after sign-up due to a lack of understanding of how to use them. The Managing Director for the CEFI) Saliya J Ranasinghe says “Banks need to work harder to build trust in products and services with emphasis placed on building relationships with the bank which starts with growth from opening an account to access and repayment of loans.”



PNG WBA Technical Working Group Workshop, June 2021

The MiBank Hibiscus card in PNG Women’s Micro Bank Limited (WMBL) that has a customer base of over 41,000 women illustrates how different products look when they are designed for women. The account offers high interest, targeted savings, and offers flexible loan repayment for irregular earners. Onboarding involves training of women on how to use the product. WMBL’s chief executive officer, Gunanidhi Das, has highlighted numerous success stories of women “market mama’s” using savings as a steppingstone for loan applications. Gunanidhi Das, considers women to be “better repayers of loans than men, and women

are more likely to share their benefits with other family members”. The women’s micro bank products do not charge fees on their products for women, this is a first step in building trust as they guarantee there are no hidden costs, and it is an affordable service for women. The women’s Micro bank also conducts community awareness to women in rural PNG about their products and services.

Building trust is important because a study by the Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme (PFIP) in 2019 showed that PNG women often have to hide money from their husbands and other male family members. The PFIP study found, that women in PNG are 29% less likely than men to have bank accounts, a gender gap that is the largest in the South Pacific. Ensuring that women feel safe and secure in opening and maintaining bank accounts will also help increase women’s awareness of the banking options available to them.

5. There is a lack of coordination between the different organizations working in this area

This is a particular issue because, as seen from the reasons above, women’s financial exclusion is caused by intersecting inequalities. While there is great work being done by different organizations, efforts remain disjointed and greater impact could be achieved through a more joined-up approach. Policy implementation and monitoring has not been very effective due to the lack of coordination among the different Departments and State agencies that are identified as implementing agencies under the SME policy. However, the SME Policy identifies that identifies (9.2.1) that the Department of Trade, Commerce, and Industry is the central coordinating agency of the government who must manage and

govern the SME Policy 2016 and SME Development Master Plan 2016-2030. Implementation by the SME Corporation as the lead agency on a day-to-day basis must work with the Department.

The policy requires (9.3.2) that the Ministry for Commerce and Industry should create extensive coordination and networking mechanisms with all Ministries and Agencies and the private sector for monitoring and evaluation of the SME policy and Master plan. The achievement of the intended milestones and goals of the SME Policy 2016 and the SME Development Master Plan 2016-2030 is very much dependent on the clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in the development of the SME sector. Clear roles and responsibilities prevent duplication and inefficient use of scarce resources that can be utilised for maximum benefits (9.3). The coordination structure under the policy (9.10) will have Government representation at the National Executive Council (NEC) as the head of the structure with the Prime Minister as the Chairperson and head of the SME Council which follows as a body under the NEC. The coordinating structure explains how SME constraints will be addressed through sub committees coordinated through the SME Corporation that reports to the Ministry of Trade, Commerce and Industry that reports to the SME Council. The constraints to be addressed by the coordinating body include:

- Access to credit finance
- Entrepreneurship training and capacity building
- Access to technology
- Access to business or commercial land
- Business and Physical infrastructure
- Access to markets and market information
- Business enabling and regularity framework

Currently these subcommittees have not been formed and the structure is not functional to coordinate all the issues that women and men face in participation in business. This needs to be strengthened through the Government.

6. Lack of information on banking products and services

Many women in PNG get financial information from community discussion rather than through formal means of acquiring information. This self-acquired knowledge or social proof, including influence from peers or the community, influence women to view financial services as high risk and unsuited to meeting their needs. Thus, women also favour saving through more informal means than through banks (PFIP,2020).

The financial ecosystem for women in PNG is one with very little information and knowledge of viable financial products, lack of services tailored to increase trust and meeting needs of women in financial institutions. The lack of accessibility and timely financial services in institutions, lack of protection in the regulatory environment that leave women vulnerable and increase distrust in formal institutions. The lack of power from fear of abuse by husbands supported by cultural norms limits women from utilising formal financial services. Therefore, most women in PNG continue to be engaged in the informal sector (Kopel, 2017; Kopel et al, 2017). Women in PNG contribute largely to the agriculture sector where they are responsible for more than 80 percent of food production and market selling in the informal economy (Kopel et al, 2017) however they continue to face barriers in access to start up finance (MDF, 2020).

However, there are advances in banking products offered through the Women's Micro Bank and through institutions like the CEFI that promote women's access to various banking products that suit

our everyday market mama. PNG is fortunate to be one out of 6 countries in the world with a women's bank, which is a big achievement in access to finance. Despite all these advances the demand does not meet the supply and we have to ask, why? There is an obvious gap in communicating of these services and banking products available to a largely illiterate population of women in the country.

There needs to be confidence built for women to be able to access these services. Chairman of the SME Corporation in PNG, Mr. John Pora has indicated that confidence for banks and financial organisations to provide access to finance through services and products is built on a financial footprint and credibility of financial capacity based on security and assets for confidence to be built. Having a financial footprint through displays of financial records, simple charts of accounts, records including expenditure receipts and tax payments, provides credibility for banks to provide access to banking services and products such as business loans. Building a reputation with banks and financial institutions is very important as validated by CEFI Managing Director Saliya J Ranasinghe. Women need financial education and information on how to consciously build a financial footprint and financial profile with banks and financial institutions.

3.3 Inadequate empowerment and participation of women in the informal economy transferring to formal economy

Understanding that 80% of women in PNG participate in the informal economy, it is important to create a financial environment that empowers women to transition into the formal economy. Greater access to formal standard financial services and products can enable more women to participate in the formal economy. The definition of the informal sector is often interpreted as positively contributing to the economy even if not measurable or negatively as those evading tax, or under privileged without access to social security, legal protection, and benefits of formal employment such as superannuation (Kopel, 2017). In PNG the Government has recognised the contributions of the informal sector to the economy and refer to sector as the informal economy. Legislation and policy development have reflected this change and have taken approaches to positively promote contributions of the larger population and particularly women to the informal economy (Kopel, 2017). The most visible part informal economy being the production and selling of fresh food through open markets (Kopel et al, 2017). The current policy environment promotes financial inclusion and participation through *the National Policy for the Informal Economy 2011–2015* and advocates for all citizens, rural and urban, to participate in the informal economy. The legislative environment through *the Informal Sector Development and Control Act, 2004* promotes informal economic activities in a safe and healthy environment (Kopel, 2017). However, there is a gap in the policy and legislative environment that enables a safe, healthy, and inclusive environment for women in marketplaces, where most of the activities in the informal economy are conducted (Kopel, 2021). A legislative environment that provides for social protection opportunities for women participating in the informal economy is also lacking (Kopel et al, 2017; Kopel 2021). However, there is a need for policy and legislative support to enable transition from the informal markets, selling of garden produce to small and medium enterprises.

Although there is some understanding of what underpins the capacity of women to engage in successful enterprises. It is not well understood how these women transition from subsistence production supplemented with modest income from small-scale local marketing of vegetables to managing larger-scale enterprises. What is known is that increasing women's income and the economic opportunities open to them is very difficult in a country such as PNG, where there are stark gender inequalities. The barriers identified for women through literature include⁴:

⁴ Final Report Identifying opportunities and constraints for rural women's engagement in small scale agricultural enterprises in Papua New Guinea. Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research. [Identifying opportunities and constraints for rural women's engagement in small-scale agricultural enterprises in Papua New Guinea - Final report \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.aciar.gov.au/~/media/Files/Publications/Identifying_opportunities_and_constraints_for_rural_women's_engagement_in_small-scale_agricultural_enterprises_in_Papua_New_Guinea_-_Final_report_(wordpress.com).pdf)

- Lower average education levels than men
- Higher levels of illiteracy than men
- Poorer health indicators than men
- Limited access to savings and credit
- Fewer economic opportunities than men
- Often occupy less remunerative roles than men
- Receive a disproportionately lower share of export cash income for their labour than men
- Experience very high rates of gender-based violence
- Heavy workloads
- Limited access to household income derived from export commodity crops
- Less likely than men to have access to agricultural extension training & advice
- Less likely than men to own a business or large asset

Despite the vast literature and reports on small-medium enterprises (SMEs) in PNG, there has been very limited detailed research on how women, particularly rural women, have made the transition to managing their own small/micro rural enterprises. Nor is there much information in literature on the barriers that make it difficult for other rural women to make this transition. Many of the reports and studies on SMEs in PNG are aid donor reports and often based on rapid assessments of women in business, focused largely on SMEs operating in the formal sector in urban/peri-urban areas. Moreover, they are not adequately reflective of the village socio-cultural context in which many small rural enterprises operated by women operate. Furthermore, whilst reports often recognise the high labour demands on women, few explore the socio-cultural context of these high labour demands and how they interact with women’s capacity to expand entrepreneurial activities. Therefore, there is limited knowledge and understanding of the barriers of women transitioning from informal to formal business.⁵

3.4 Poor access of women to inclusive services in health, social welfare, justice, education, that limits women’s participation in the economy

The social well-being of women is important to enable greater economic participation of women in contributing to the GDP and overall inclusive and sustainable economic development. The financial empowerment of women can enable women to have access to other basic services for her and her family. Having an income source and bank account may seem inconsequential in terms of total economic autonomy that translates into greater access to services. But it could be a crucial first step in many other steps that are needed for the economic empowerment of PNG women for better access to services.



PNG BAN Key Informant Interviews with Linda Narakou, MSME Owner in Kavieng, New Ireland Province

Interviews of women from diverse backgrounds in PNG by the ACIAR-funded [Identifying opportunities and constraints for rural women’s engagements in small-scale agricultural enterprises in Papua New Guinea](#) project identified the

⁵ Ibid.

following indicators of outcomes of economic empowerment. Women interviewed grow fresh food to sell in local marketplaces, resell fresh food and store goods, trade fresh food to distant markets, run poultry businesses and guesthouses, experiment in floriculture, and buy and process coffee among a range of other enterprises. Although some challenges were highlighted in the conversations, many spoke of success in innovating and building up large enterprises when they had some initial income. Many spoke about how they could support their children to schools, afford medical services, build houses, and increase living standards with affordability of basic services. However, some have seen their businesses crumble, often because their financial successes were not bolstered by more broad-based forms of empowerment. Results from the Mama Lus Frut Scheme of women selling oil palm directly to the Oil Palm supplier, show how providing direct income for women increased financial independence. Providing income increased women's financial decision-making powers in the household and led to women's greater capacity to purchase household items, afford education and health care, involve in social activities in Church or fulfill customary obligations which earned them respect in the community. Women identified they now had more control over their labour, they were able to fund safe travel for themselves and that of their family and send their children to university.

Women were also able to purchase key assets and access store credit which improved opportunities for women to diversify their income sources through higher enterprises such as trade stores. Women participating in the scheme indicated that with economic empowerment with income they were able to save and 70% opened bank accounts through the mama card initiative. More women were now managing small enterprises and able to source financial training. These women were represented in committees such as the crop extension planning committee and other initiatives.

Financially empowered women can be able to make decisions to access services such as health services according to the National Demographic and Health Survey 2016-2018. However, this may not be the case for women with disabilities. Therefore, a priority focus to access services is inclusive access of women with disabilities is needed. Having basic income allows women to have access to basic services that improve living standards and empowers her to participate more in the economy as she diversifies her income through participation in higher enterprises.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 Lack of participation of women in politics, policy and decision making to create an enabling policy environment for women in business

Women must be encouraged to participate at all levels of election process to be better represented in Parliament, where they can contribute to policy and legislation at the highest levels of decision making. This includes being supported to vote in a free, safe, and transparent electoral process, to be nominated to contest and be elected through votes into Parliament where they can contribute to and influence policy, legislation, and the decision-making process.



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The main policy recommendation here is for the Government of Papua New Guinea through Parliament to deliberate on the outcomes of the review of the Organic Law on National and Local Level Government Elections conducted by the PNG Constitutional and Law Reform Commission in 2019-2020 which had reference to enquire into women's and special interest groups representation in Parliament. The anticipated outcome is for Government to appoint a special Parliamentary Committee to look into the

reference of women's representation in Parliament specifically to advise the Government on a constitutionally viable strategy into achieving the goal of women representation into Parliament in the next Government. The Parliamentary committee can be informed from lessons learnt from Governments of Rwanda with the first female majority in parliament in the world and regionally Samoa, having majority votes in Parliament to legislate for temporary special measures to ensure that women are represented in Parliament. This is a crucial step as PNG approaches the 2022 National Elections, to effect legislative process that can enable the representation of women temporarily through special legislative measures such as reserved seats for women, in the likely occurrence that women are not elected to Parliament through the National Election Process in 2022, as in the experience of the current Government.

Institutionally a strong recommendation is for the Office of the Development of Women that currently sits under the Department of Community Development and Religion, to be elevated into the Prime Minister's carriage and adequately resourced to be enabled this office to provide policy briefs to the special Parliamentary committee of viable legislative strategy to ensure women's representation is ensured in the next Government. The [Social Law and Order Sector \(SLOS\)](#) is another strategic advisory mechanism that can provide strategic advice to the special Parliamentary committee on constitutionally viable legislative strategies to ensure women's representation in Parliament, highlighting the benefits of streamlining gender across all sectors. The SLOS was established under the current Government, so we must be aware that the outcome of the 2022 elections affects the makeup of this entity. Further establishing institutional framework that supports the deliberate engagement of women Members of

Parliaments (MPs) is through mechanisms such as 50% gender composition of parliamentary committees performing all functions of the Committee which includes enquiring into the work of the National Government Departments and other Government related activities with a specific focus on the work of the Department of Personal Management (DPM) in its efforts to ensure GESI Policy is streamlined throughout its functions. Through representation in the committee's women MPs make decisions relating to respective regional and overarching national matters in accomplishment of Gender and women priorities in the Medium-Term Development Plans (MTDPs); working closely with the Minister for Community Development, Youth and Religion, DPM, and other Ministries to ensure all government programs and policies are GESI responsive. Women MPs can work with Provincial Project Evaluation Teams and the Office of Rural Development Teams to ensure that projects are inclusive of GESI principles before approval of release of Government (DSIP and PSIP) funds. This reflects that women are not in parliament to compete but complement the male dominated parliament to have a "voice" that is representative of women population to make sure that government policies and programs are gender and social inclusion sensitive and do not harm children. Women through the reserved elected seats can provide another level of administrative accountability to the Government system to ensure inclusivity of gender balance and social inclusion of marginalized groups.

More long term the Office of Development of Women (ODW) can provide a specific gender policy and strategy that can strengthen the process of women's participation in political, judicial, and leadership in all spheres. The overarching National Policy for Women and Gender Equality 2011-2015 is the basis of ODW's mandate. The policy is linked to PNG's other development plans, including Vision 2050, which provides a 40-year framework for improving the quality of life of PNG's people through better service delivery; the PNG Development Strategic Plan (2010-2030), which focuses on poverty; and the Medium-Term Development Plan (2010-2015), which is the overarching plan for economic and social development. The policy's objective is to facilitate the development and implementation of gender equality and women's advancement programs. Its specific objectives are to (1) realize government's commitment to gender equality by establishing the requisite policies, programs and structures; and (2) transform gender relationships in all aspects of work and government, including wider society. The policy identifies ten action areas, each with an implementation strategy: gender-based violence, health, HIV/AIDS, education and training, cultural norms and traditions, women's economic empowerment, fisheries, employment and conditions, decision making, political participation, agriculture, and environment.

The ODW can provide specific focus to ensure that all SME policies PNG, SME Master Plans, and informal sector legislations are reviewed to ensure greater consideration for women/gender participation and benefit. This will require the ODW to work closely with the Ministry and Department of Commerce and Industry to ensure gender is mainstreamed throughout its policies and practices. The ODW can coordinate policy inputs of women entrepreneurs through to the SME Corporation that directly reports to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to ensure that policies that affect women entrepreneurs support them in business. This may also begin with ensuring that there is a 1:1 ratio of men and women on the SME Corporation Board and the SME Council that can influence policy through the direct link of SME Corporation to the Government. There is a need for governance support to the SME Council that directly reports to the National Executive Council as the highest political level of governance. Women can also indirectly influence policy through participation at the Chamber of Commerce and Indigenous Business Council which must also have a 1:1 ratio of men and women board representation.

Further participation of women in political spheres that directly or indirectly influence policy through board representation must be supported by capacity building opportunities such as directorship training. Already various capacity building initiatives are and will be supported by development partners like the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through the Spotlight initiative, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and others.

4.2 Lack of access to finance to participate in business

Opening a bank account is just a start to ensure women can access formal financial services to participate in business. Women opening a bank account can contribute to a more formal economy as they use formal financial products and services. Most women in PNG participating in the informal economy space need to be empowered and supported to participate in more formal economy. The main recommendation to enable more women to access to finance is to review the National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2016–2020 beyond 2021. The strategy and action plan must be specific to provide a clear pathway that enables and provides incentives for women who open bank accounts will continue to use the account to access financial products such as loans to start up a more formal small business. Such initiatives and incentives already provided by the Women’s Micro Bank are effective products that enable women to transition. The implementation will be guided as per the strategy by CEFI and the Consultative Implementation & Monitoring Council (CIMC) who provide oversight to Working Groups that can address various areas to enable greater inclusive access to finance. The Working Groups include Digital Financial Services, Inclusive Insurance, Financial Education/Financial Literacy, Resource Sector Engagement, SME Finance, Financial Consumer Protection, and Informal & Agriculture Finance.

There is a strong recommendation from CEFI for the need for an overarching Governance Body as a SC that provides the link between Department of Treasury, Department of Community Development, Religion, and Youth as lead Government agencies, the function of CIMC as the Sub Committee established to assist, facilitate, promote and establish dialogue between relevant stakeholders as per the outdated National Informal Economy Policy 2011-2015 and CEFI as the coordinating entity endorsed by Government for Financial inclusion and literacy. The SC can be represented by the Relevant Government Departments e.g., Finance and Treasury, Bank of PNG, Industry bodies, ICCC, Financial entities, and Heads of Banks. This will ensure accountability to the implementation of the National Financial Inclusion Strategy through Working groups provides clearly outlined action plans to ensure inclusive access to financial services and financial literacy that enable women to participate economically.

4.3 Inadequate empowerment for participation of women in the formal economy

Empowerment is a product of financial inclusion, developed through financial literacy and financial capacity. Financial independence is but one component of ensuring women’s economic empowerment. Opening a bank account is just a start to ensure women can use bank accounts to access formal financial services. This initiates the participation of women in more formal economy as they use formal financial products and services. Most women in PNG participating in the informal economy space need to be empowered and supported to participate in the formal economy. The main recommendation to economically empower women is to review the National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2016–2020 beyond 2021. The strategy and action plan must be specific to provide a clear pathway that enables and provides incentives for women who open bank accounts to continue to use the account to access financial products such as loans to start up a more formal small business. Such initiatives and incentives already provided by the Women’s Micro Bank through the Hibiscus Women’s only Bank account are effective products that enable women to transition. The implementation will be guided as per the strategy by CEFI and the CIMC Informal Economy Committee to support the implement of the outdated National Informal Economy Policy 2011-2015. A major recommendation is to review the National Informal Economy Policy 2011-2015 to ensure that there are deliberate and detailed steps to achieving the Policy which aims to build capacity and confidence of women entrepreneurs to transition. The following iteration of the National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2016–2020, should establish some

strong steps in ensuring that women participating in the informal economy have the capacity to transition. This can begin with the development of a data repository of all women participating in the informal economy spaces in various areas of entrepreneurship e.g., in agriculture, food, artisanal trade, etc. Information collated in the data repository can be utilised for policy and strategic planning through the Working Groups of the National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2016–2020 for greater financial inclusion and empowerment of women in the economy.

Long-term to gain trust of women in the formal economy it is important for the Government to provide stronger consumer protection legislation, so women feel safe and confident to contribute to the more formal economy. Women knowing, they are protected by strong laws, will feel empowered to transition from informal to more formal business as their business grows.

“All women have power they just need to be provided support to enable them to realise their power” - Lady Winifred Kamit



Photo: CIPE 2020 Women’s Business Agenda Workshop - PNG

Community Focus:

Research into understanding the pathways rural women move along to the transition to operating small enterprises, and how their success is contingent on certain steps or opportunities being met or in place along the path before they can become successful in their endeavours was undertaken by the ACIAR. Research published in July 2021 has uncovered the following conclusions and recommendations supported from findings from the development of the WBA⁶:

1. Further Research is required

Documenting experiences among women will provide greater understanding of the needs and constraints for women who have been unable or unsuccessful in establishing viable small enterprises. Research provides valuable information for gender focused micro-enterprise development programs to improve the capacity of women to engage in micro/small scale enterprises. Research can aid in informing initiatives for women to help them develop or diversify their enterprises. These initiatives may include linking women to skills training providers and new markets, trialling village savings and loans groups, incorporating business development awareness activities and exploring downstream processing or other business opportunities with local commodity exporters (e.g., nurseries, spin-off businesses/procurements). Business Council Executive Director Douveri Henao expresses that there is a lot to learn from existing knowledge of what is working well for women in rural PNG such as the Mama Lus Frut Scheme (MLF) of PNG in West New Britain Province. From a poster presentation by the ACIAR in 2017, Kathie Tamba, a member of the Mama Lus Frut Scheme shared.



A street market with umbrellas

“Since I joined the Mama Lus Frut in 2004, I’ve experienced a big change in my life and my family’s (life). From the Mama Lus Frut income I was able to start a small trade store and a poultry business which is now growing. I am very happy because I now don’t need to ask assistance from my husband because I now have my own money from the lus frut to spend on my own priorities.”

Further research is required to identify successful pathways for income for rural women to then transition into micro/small scale enterprises. Some of the key research needs include understanding the decline of the producer-seller traditional model, the emergence of urban-based resellers, who are the new key marketplace actors, and the new types of land tenure that are facilitating the large-upscaling of production of food crops for distant markets. Further research is also required to identify the opportunities and disadvantages for women and communities associated with these marketplace changes and to understand the impacts on women as producers, buyers, and resellers and on village agricultural practices and food security.

This can be supported by many interested development partners including ADB, World Bank and bodies like the SME Corporation and the PNG Business Council. Findings from the research can inform PNG policy makers and national key stakeholders for support, such as DfCDR, Department of National Planning and Monitoring, the Department of Commerce and Industry and the Department of Agriculture and livestock.

2. Support and expansion of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs)

⁶ Ibid Final Report Identifying opportunities and constraints for rural women’s engagement in small scale agricultural enterprises in Papua New Guinea. Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research. [Identifying opportunities and constraints for rural women’s engagement in small-scale agricultural enterprises in Papua New Guinea - Final report \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.aciar.gov.au/research/identifying-opportunities-and-constraints-for-rural-women-s-engagement-in-small-scale-agricultural-enterprises-in-papua-new-guinea-final-report)

Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) has been successful throughout various communities in PNG being implemented by various NGO partners. They have provided a primary source of income that empowers participation of women especially rural women in establishing viable small enterprises. As an example, the CARE International and Coffee Industry Cooperation (CIC) have tried to integrate village savings and loans groups to agriculture development activities with adult literacy and numeracy training for women in Bena Eastern Highlands Province. Over 40% of the women being rural women save regularly but do so at home or through village micro savings and loans schemes. Such is also introduced by the World Wildlife Fund for some rural women in communities in remote Kutubu, Southern Highlands Province, where PNG's major extraction of oil and gas. Women mainly use the savings to meet medical costs into the Hospital in the major town, school fees, and other family priorities. Evaluations of the VSLA by CIC as a major coffee company in Eastern Highlands Province shows that such models provide benefits for women who have low income, low literacy, and who have limited access to the formal banking sector⁷. Such examples show that women need financial services but stick to informal methods of saving and borrowing that they are familiar with. This may be driven by various reasons including the low levels of formal education and financial literacy skills.⁸ Women in rural PNG having low literacy rates have difficulty in understanding banking products and services which limit the access of rural women to banking service. Therefore, there is a less demand for formal banking services, financial products, and services.

Industrial corporative groups such as the CIC and Oil Palm Corporations can support primary income sources for women in rural communities and provide pathways for transition into viable small enterprises. Whilst there are good examples of well-performing VSLA women's savings groups in coffee growing communities in Bena Eastern Highlands Province linked to more formal financial institutions the Women's Micro Bank and Nambawan Super Choice Scheme by CIC to strengthen future financial and personal security, this has to be replicated to other coffee, cocoa and oil palm growing areas of PNG. Expanding village savings and loans groups should be tried in communities where well established and functioning farming co-operatives or community/church/women's groups are present. Research has identified the power of working collectively and cohesively and the importance of governance in the success of saving and loans groups. The goal would be to improve financial literacy, individual savings, local agribusiness development and the governance and transparency of community-led organisations. Once VSLA groups are well established they should be linked to formal financial institutions and the CEFI in PNG as a pathway to transition.

3. Capacity Building of women

Despite women's greater access to credit for enterprise development or expansion, several women were unable to take full advantage of improved access to finances as they lacked the numeracy and literacy skills needed to advance or diversify their enterprises. It is important that partner organisations introduce measures to link female farmers operating or planning to start small-scale enterprises to wider networks that will assist them to further develop their business skills and/or to help advance and expand their business. Such measures could include facilitating collaboration and partnerships with organisations such as SME Corporation and CEFI, and formal financial institutions together which can also help women to link up with successful local female entrepreneurs for mentoring as a means of capacity building. Capacity building priorities are supported through the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise Policy 2021 to be supported through CEFI and SME Corporation through responsible lead agency responsible for entrepreneurship Training and Capacity Building that is not specified in the policy document yet.

4. Collaborative linkages that benefit women

Support collaboration between public/private extension providers and local commodity crop exporters to design and trial initiatives that meaningfully benefit women e.g., the Mama Lus Frut Scheme. The scheme has been very effective in advancing women's role and status in household commodity production and promoting greater gender equity in export commodity crop production. The women are directly involved in supplying oil palm to the supplier to earn direct income through an agreement with the company. Such linkages need to be supported through policy that engages public private support with local rural communities, such linkages can be coordinated and further supported through collaborative approaches between the SME Corporation and the Department of Commerce and Industry.

⁷ Koczberski, G., Sharp, T., Wesley J. and Ryan, S. 2019. *Village Savings and Loans Association: Eastern Highlands, Papua New Guinea. Preliminary Report*. Curtin University, Perth, Australia.

⁸ Ibid,

4.4 Poor access of women to inclusive services including health, social welfare, justice, education, that limit women's participation in business

Financially empowering women to earn their own income and make decisions on how to use earnings has socio economic and health benefits not only to herself but to her family. According to the National Demographic Health Survey (DHS) 2016-2018, 46% of currently married women with cash earnings decide independently on how their earnings are used. This is close to equivalent of shared decision making between husband and wife on husbands' earnings. Women having decision making control of their earnings and how earnings are used have greater autonomy to access health services. There are positive correlations between women's empowerment indices and demographic and health outcomes. Empowered women are more likely to see and use health services to meet their reproductive health goals including safe motherhood. Women who do not participate in any household decision making are less likely to receive antenatal care from a skilled provider (61%), delivery care from a skilled provider (42%), and postnatal checkup (34%) than women who participate in the three categories (78%, 60%, and 51% respectively). Women's empowerment also has a positive effect on children's survival. For example, under 5 mortality decreased from 65 deaths per 1000 live births in the last 10 years before the DHS, to 44% deaths per 1000 live births among women who participate in all decision making. Women from the Mama Lus Frut Scheme were able to access family planning awareness, access to conflict resolution advice from Justice services, receive livelihood skills training and resource management training.

Ensuring women's inclusive financial access and empowerment, will enable women to make better decisions to access other services including health as indicated. Therefore, a major priority for access to services is the empowerment of women. Recommendations for economic empowerment are provided in the preceding section.

However, the empowerment of women and ability to make decisions is challenged when women are also diagnosed with a disability. Therefore, a priority recommendation for access to services is the need to empower women living with disability. This main recommendation is to support a mid-term review of the [National Policy on Disability 2015 – 2025](#) is our national strategy and plan of action for the disability sector. Realistic strategies and action plans can be recalibrated from learnings of what has and has not worked well to ensure greater empowerment of women living with a disability who can access services.

Another proxy indicator for women's empowerment is the attitude towards wife beating. According to the National Demographic and Health Survey 70% men and 72% women believe that a husband is justified beating his wife in at least 1 of 5 specific situations. To empower women, gender-based violence and discrimination needs to be addressed. A strong recommendation is to review PNG's first [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender Based Violence](#) the Papua New Guinea National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender Based Violence 2016-2025. A recommendation is to undertake a strategic midterm review process. Realistic strategies and action plans can be recalibrated from learnings of what has and has not worked well to ensure greater empowerment of women facing GBV who can also access services.

Long term, legislative reform agendas are necessary to ensure greater access of women. A recommendation is for the development of an Organic Law on gender equality. Strong GEDSI related policies and legislation can empower women to access all basic services.

Private Sector Focus

The recommendations to identify necessary policy interventions needed to address the priority issues for the first WBA for women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion is to be achieved in PNG is guided by PoWER's Global Framework and Theory of Change, based on extensive research conducted by UNDAF and UNDP in collaboration with BPNG and CEFI (PFIP,2020) as the mandated Government bodies. Support to make working groups under CEFI functional is crucial as a coordinating platform for innovative solutions to issues around financial inclusion, particularly for women. CEFI emphasised the need for a stronger focus to make women more bankable to the financial institutions by building trust, to allow them to access finance among other programs that can be overseen by the working groups.

The guide includes four key approaches:

1. Develop an inclusive approach

Women's economic empowerment can only be addressed through an inclusive approach, for example: by strengthening implementation of policies to address gender based violence; providing access to markets for women in the arts and crafts industry; supporting women in business or supporting those that are business-trained in obtaining better access to finance; incorporating financial literacy training into livelihood support programmes to increase awareness and trust in financial products and services (whether formal or informal). The inclusive approach must also include those living with disabilities.

The first iteration of the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS), implemented in 2014-15, did not have a strong gender focus and did little to close the gender gap in financial inclusion. The second iteration of the NFIS in 2016 does address this gap, stating that women should constitute 50% of new accounts opened, but the policy offers limited guidance on how this target is to be achieved. The absence of a mechanism for collaboration and coordination between organisations working to address women's financial inclusion and economic empowerment hampers efforts to increase demand for financial services. This can be provided through the strengthening of working groups under CEFI which according to the NFIS have gender mainstreamed across and focus attention on women's access to financial services, greater gender balance in inclusive financial sector intermediaries (i.e. governance, management and staffing), and creating an enabling policy, regulatory and legislative environment that promotes and enhances the development of women-centric financial services. Gender programmatic efforts in PNG include financial literacy training, confidence-building to help increase women's agency and building women's business capabilities. However, these often run-in silos, and do not embrace partnership opportunities which adopt an inclusive approach to increasing awareness and understanding of financial services. As a result, collaboration is limited, and learnings are not shared. Therefore, women's demand for financial services remains unfulfilled and requires support.

2. Provide a Friendly Face of Finance

One of the major themes that emerged from PFIPs research was that women did not understand some financial products and felt put off by their perceived image of financial services (by men and for men, intimidating, risky). Efforts to address women's financial needs should support initiatives aimed specifically at making financial services more accessible to women. For example, services which offer simplified and dedicated customer service for onboarding and first-time use, and engaging women agents from local communities. Having a gender women's desk at all banks would reduce waiting time for women in long lines so they can get home in good time to continue with other duties. Having a gender desk can support information sharing of financial products that are suitable for women and meets the needs of women.

3. Support the development of a Masterplan

Support the development of a digital development ‘masterplan’, for the deployment of interventions to improve overall outcomes for women in Papua New Guinea, including extending the reach of non-financial interventions such as education, health, access to markets. This requires developing a roadmap of sequential interventions focused on generating / improving demand and supply of digital services. For example, digital literacy, low-cost handsets, socio culturally acceptable use cases for women and girls to adopt mobile internet, interoperable user interfaces and digital identity. The industry working group under CEFI as the Secretariat being an innovative group with a focus on expanding access and encourage market using ICT can facilitate the development of the digital development masterplan. The group can facilitate the development of payment systems that serve the low-income population sustainably in order to reduce the time and money that low-income earning people spend to conduct financial transactions. What makes the CEFI industrial group an important coordination platform to develop the masterplan is alignment with its expected outcomes which include:

- Alignment of Financial Inclusion Policy and the NFIS to Digital Financial Services in PNG
- Identify focus areas of interest to implement,
- Identify the Deliverables in the sectors in the area of interest to deliver Digital Financial Services in PNG
- Pursue PNG’s Financial Inclusion interest through Digital Financial Services

4. Provide Strategic Coordination

The PNG National Financial Inclusion and Financial Literacy Strategy identifies CEFI as the Government endorsed body to provide strategic coordination with the CIMC who are responsible to strategically coordinate technical working groups that are responsible for implementation of the strategy. CEFI and CIMC can work together to:

- Establish a forum for participants to share the learnings, and co-invest in research efforts for ecosystem development
- Incentivize the collection of gender disaggregated data, to support target setting and data tracking for Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) initiatives
- Develop mechanisms to create and sustain interest and engagement from partners in working groups
- Developing standardized impact measurement metrics and methods
- Facilitate investment through funding models designed to incentivize improved financial inclusion / social outcomes.

The action plan to achieve these can be accessed through the [PNG National Financial Inclusion and Financial Literacy Strategy](#).

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