



GENDER-SMART BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

CASE STUDY: NCS DRIVES WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA



IFC

International
Finance Corporation
WORLD BANK GROUP

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Project Overview

There are few places in the world with greater need—and opportunity—to promote gender-smart solutions for business than Papua New Guinea. Women participate in the formal sector at less than half the rate of men¹ and hold fewer than 3 percent of seats in Parliament. More than two-thirds of women may have faced physical or sexual violence in their lifetimes.² *The Economist* ranked Papua New Guinea near the bottom of the world in terms of women's economic opportunity, at 125 out of 128 countries.³

These hurdles also make it difficult for companies to acquire, develop, and retain the talent they need to thrive. NCS Holdings Inc. partnered with International Finance Corporation to take on these challenges. By identifying and addressing barriers to women's employment that originate in and outside the workplace, NCS is strengthening its workforce and successfully establishing itself as an employer of choice for women in Papua New Guinea.

Project Objectives

NCS, part of Anitua Group, is a camp-management and catering company that serves the country's growing mining sector. It employs over 1,500 people across Papua New Guinea, often in very remote

¹ World Bank (2012). *Papua New Guinea: Country Gender Assessment, 2011–2012*. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/16513>

² Darko, E.; Smith, W.; Walker, D. (2015). *Gender Violence in Papua New Guinea*, The Overseas Development Institute. Available at: <http://www.odi.org/publications/9887-gender-violence-papua-new-guinea>

³ The Economist Intelligence Unit (2012). "Women's Economic Opportunity 2012." Available at: http://www.eiu.com/public/thankyou_download.aspx?activity=download&campaignid=weoindex2012

locations, making it hard to attract and retain top talent. This situation makes maximizing the skills and productivity of its female employees particularly important to NCS. As a result, the company partnered with IFC to:

- Gather and analyze internal data from quantitative surveys and detailed focus group discussions;
- Benchmark results with other key players in Papua New Guinea and in the sector globally; and
- Design targeted approaches to advance gender equality within the company.

Challenges

When the partnership started, NCS was considered a progressive employer, but widespread assumptions about women's roles at work and women's obligations outside of work limited gender equality in practice. Specific challenges included:

- *Gendered hiring and assignment*: While women make up half of NCS's workforce, staff expressed concerns that certain assignments were dominated by one gender. For instance, at one site, all warehouse staff were men, while all purchasing staff were women. Women also did not typically take night shifts.
- *Gender pay gap*: In part due to the gendered division of labor that limited overtime and bonus opportunities, female staff members perceived themselves as receiving lower wages than men.

- *Women's leadership gap*: While NCS's policy of promoting staff from within generally favored female employees, the most senior roles were often filled with external recruits, who were likely to be men, exacerbating a lack of women's representation in top management. While 46 percent of staff at middle management were female, the figure dropped to 28 percent for upper management and 11 percent for top management. NCS also had no female board members.
- *Gender-based violence*: GBV, even outside the workplace, hurts women's ability to contribute at work.

How Were Gender Gaps Addressed?

In a country with some of the world's most unequal-gender outcomes, NCS has largely succeeded in delivering a counter-cultural message and living by it. Specific actions NCS took included the following:

- *Reviewing key policies*: With IFC, NCS is reviewing key personnel policies on sexual harassment, grievance procedures, recruitment, and performance evaluation.
- *Analyzing pay gaps*: Acknowledging men and women's different perceptions about equal pay, NCS is analyzing pay by gender to identify any gap not explained by education and experience. It is furthermore looking at male and female employment across job types to avoid "siloeing" women in traditional roles.

- *Supporting emerging women leaders:* NCS, working with the IFC-sponsored Business Coalition for Women (BCFW), nominated 10 high-potential female employees for a certificate leadership course, building their skills to assume higher level responsibilities. Within half a year of finishing the three course modules, six participants were promoted to management roles. NCS is sending more participants to the course, establishing an alumni network, and offering special corporate assignments to further prepare participants for career advancement.
- *Tackling GBV:* NCS established a GBV response and support program for its own employees while also working with other stakeholders to raise awareness and combat GBV in Papua New Guinea through lobbying industry partners, public media campaigns, and leadership roles in the BCFW.

- *Diversity in senior management:* In the year since the diagnostic, NCS has continued its strong track record of promoting women, awarding 12 of 24 promotions to women, bringing diverse and innovative insights into management at NCS.
- *Increased employee engagement:* Employees are aware of and value gender initiatives, with 88 percent of male survey respondents agreeing that gender equality was important for NCS to remain competitive.
- *Retaining working parents:* NCS also achieved a remarkable 100 percent retention rate for women one year following their return from maternity leave, a first for any of the 100-plus companies that have undergone EDGE diagnostics globally.
- *Active GBV Response:* Tackling GBV helped NCS reduce the average of 11 days for every employee lost to GBV.⁴ Female participants also noted that there has been a significant change in how men approach women after the introduction of the program—they treated them with more respect. NCS has also been successful in supporting GBV survivors and dealing with perpetrators.
- *Positive media:* NCS was repeatedly profiled in a favorable light for its initiatives to invest in women, with anti-GBV efforts particularly recognized.

⁴ Darko, E.; Smith, W.; Walker, D. (2015). *Gender Violence in Papua New Guinea*, The Overseas Development Institute. Available at: <http://www.odi.org/publications/9887-gender-violence-papua-new-guinea>

Benefits

NCS's investment in gender-smart solutions has had numerous business benefits.

- *A strong talent pipeline:* Management training produced a pipeline of staff, who were both talented and well trained. In addition to the promotions to date, all trainees' managers agreed that the participants showed improved problem-solving skills and came across as more confident and assertive. Ninety percent also reported that trainees increasingly coached junior staff.

GENDER-SMART SOLUTIONS IN ACTION

NCS's gender-smart business solutions have had real human impact. In particular, participants were able to put their knowledge into action through improved communication skills. In the words of one leadership-course participant, "There were issues between a member of staff and a supervisor. They couldn't come up with a resolution. I had to get information first. I had to hear the points of view of the staff and have patience. I had the confidence and courage to talk to the staff and supervisor. I was able to solve the problem." Another participant shared an experience in creative problem-solving. She said she noticed the heavy workload of the mechanics department of a school, so she suggested contacting the authorities. As a result, the school introduced apprentices—who helped ease the workload and received valuable workplace experience in return.

- *Business Development:* NCS's proactive stance on GBV has elevated its reputation, helping it edge out competitors in public sector contracts in recognition for its progressive stance on gender equality.

About IFC

Recognizing that equality of economic opportunity between women and men drives productivity, profitability, and performance, IFC helps clients realize gender-smart solutions to their business challenges. We work with clients to better manage talent in their workforces and supply chains and to design products that tap the earning potential of the women's market. Our motivating force is the knowledge that when companies and people—no matter their gender—can reach their full potential, families, communities, and economies can achieve sustainable growth and prosperity.

What NCS says

NCS has the reputation of being an employer of choice, especially for PNG women, and our [Ending Violence Against Women] program is cementing this reputation.

John Gethin-Jones
Managing Director, NCS

Gender equality is important for this company to remain competitive in the market.

NCS Staff Member

I am happy with the gender equality program and the opportunity to share ideas.

NCS Staff Member

[My] employee has learned a lot of new ideas and this course has shown itself to be hugely relevant for her career development.

NCS Manager

[My employee] appears to have more confidence in her role since the completion of her course....The most notable improvement is with her confidence and communication.

NCS Manager

What IFC says about the partnership

The challenges women face at work have more than one origin, so they require more than one type of solution. NCS recognizes this and is working to implement a cross-cutting program to advance women's leadership.

Amy Luinstra
Gender Program Manager, IFC, East Asia Pacific

At NCS, the agenda of combating gender-based violence and developing women leaders starts from the top, with unequivocal support of the CEO who is both personally committed and sees the business case for it.

Gavin Murray
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