



Inquiry into Gender Equality Policies & Institutions, Gender- Based Violence and Sorcery Accusation Related Violence

Report to Parliament No.1

**Parliamentary Committee on
Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment**

October 2023

Chairman's Foreword

I am honoured to be the Chair of the first Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (PPC-GEWE) established by our 11th National Parliament. The PPC-GEWE builds on the work of the Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) which operated during the 10th Parliament and of which I was also proud to have been an active member. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chair of that Special Parliamentary Committee, Mr. Charles Abel, for his dedicated and passionate leadership, and equally thank the Members of that Committee, most particularly the Deputy Chairman, who is also the Deputy of the PPC-GEWE, the Hon. Allan Bird. The efforts of the Special Committee resulted in extremely frank discussions with all levels of government, private sector, and civil society. Through our inquiries, new light was shone on the inadequacies of our efforts. These were captured in the two reports tabled in Parliament on GBV in August 2021 and April 2022, which included over 70 recommendations for action. Our PPC-GEWE has used those two reports to guide our own inquiries and activities.

I would also like to thank our Prime Minister, the Hon. James Marape, and the Members of Parliament for approving the formation of the Special Committee during the 10th Parliament and then elevating the Committee to a Permanent Committee in this term. This act is a first and important step in demonstrating the Government's commitment and is a significant acknowledgement of the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment for the future of our country. It responds to our national Constitution's goals and directive principles, which enshrine equality as a foundational value of Papua New Guinea. The expanded terms of reference for the PPC-GEWE are an important step forward and I would like to thank Government for their forethought in taking this action. Further, unlike the last Committee, the PPC-GEWE not only has an expanded scope, which covers gender equality and women's empowerment as well as GBV, but it is also a permanent Committee. This is a very important decision and a bold step forward in our collective efforts towards achieving gender equality, women's empowerment and ending GBV in the longer-term. It also supports the advancement of our country's commitments on the international stage.

I also thank the current Members of the PPC-GEWE, most of whom volunteered to be members of this Committee. It is a privilege and honour for me to Chair this important Committee of Parliament, and to have oversight over these long outstanding national goals and expected outcomes for our country.

As all who know me will be aware, I have long been a champion of the rights of the women and girls of our country. I strongly believe that without empowering the women and girls of PNG to actively, equally and safely participate in all aspects of public and private life, we will never properly harness the full potential of our country's abundant human resources and ensure inclusive and sustainable development for all our people. Global research concludes that higher levels of gender equality result in happier adolescents, whereas the greater the gender inequality in a society, the less likely girls are to survive to a full life. Higher levels of female education and literacy, lower rates of child mortality, and the inclusion of more women in political leadership positions, results in flow on benefits for the economy and society more broadly. The more bargaining power women have at home, the healthier their children are. The more women are educated, the more bargaining power they have in the home, and the more they can safely and meaningfully drive their own destinies. Women are almost twice as likely to participate in the labour markets of nations with high levels of economic freedom, than in those with low levels.

Women and vulnerable genders are left behind to the detriment of all and the true gain of none. The opportunity gender parity presents is real, not only for the advancement of human rights, not only for the economic destiny of Papua New Guinea, in fact, for the future of everyone, everywhere.

Our National Constitution, the founding document which guides the actions of every single person in our country – including every government, Minister and parliamentarian – makes very clear that equality between women and men is a core value and goal of this nation. This value must be protected and promoted by all of us. The Directive Principles that frame the Constitution demand that every person is and has to be free from “domination or oppression so that each man or woman will have the opportunity to develop as a whole person in relationship with others”.

The second directly principle calls “for all citizens to have an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, the development of our country”. To that end, the Directive Principles recognise that “Obstacles to educational and other opportunities which face women at present should be removed, and insofar as it is within the power of the Government to do so, the difficulties facing women who wish to involve themselves in the affairs of the nation should be reduced.”

It is the Committee’s role to use our powers to achieve the goals set out in the Constitution and we in the PPC-GEWE take the Constitution as our guiding light. The Constitution, and its values of equality, lead the work of the Committee. Our Constitution aims to ensure that women can meaningfully participate in the development of our country, without fear, and with every opportunity to exercise and enjoy their constitutional rights. This is the goal to which our Committee aspires. Our Constitution guided our efforts during the Committee’s first hearings from 24-26 May 2023 and the second hearings on 18-19 July 2023, where we heard the testimonies of those in government, private sector and civil society to better understand why our country continues to struggle with ever increasing rates of violence against women and girls.

I am still shocked when I recall some of the testimony that we heard from our expert official witnesses. Officials from the National Department of Health shared data with us which showed an alarming rise in the number of people presenting at health services for cases related to violence, including intimate partner violence and sorcery accusation related violence. They advised that the data is “only the ‘tip of the iceberg’; a catastrophic human rights violation alarming for a country not at war”. If not addressed, they suggested that cases of violence presenting at health services around the country could exceed more than 100,000 a year within only a few more years, stressing our already overburdened health system and overloading our justice services.

Following on from this testimony, we also heard from the police who provided similarly alarming testimony. Even recognizing that cases of GBV and SARV are grossly under-reported across the country, they advised that from January 2021 to April 2023, there were 30,028 cases reported to FSVUs across the country; from these only 1,304 arrests (4%) were made; and there were a mere 156 convictions (8 of which were SARV cases). This means that only 0.5% of all reported cases result in a conviction. This amounts to approximately 75 cases resulting in convictions every year, or just over 3 convictions per province per year. That is a staggeringly low conviction rate, considering the violence that we all know is going on in the country.

It is explained by the data on police ratios however, which show that are currently insufficient police officers per head of population in most provinces. A review of the 2022 RPNGC Annual Report shows that ratios vary between 1 officer per 714 people in the NCD/Central Divisional Command to 1 officer per 4,282 people in the Highlands Eastern-End Divisional Command. Of the total number of RPNGC officers, there are currently only 114 RPNGC officers staffing the Family and Sexual Violence Units (FSVUs), who are dedicated to assisting thousands of GBV and SARV survivors every year.

Violence is increasing for everyone in PNG. Worryingly, 70% of young people – both male and female – are saying they are violent in their relationships. With such high rates of harm, we are all aware that there will be no easy or quick fix for addressing the violence against our women and girls. Nonetheless,

we must all do better; no matter who we are, we must all commit to doing everything in our personal power to act for change.

Our hearing report contains 29 new recommendations. These new recommendations should be read in conjunction with the recommendations made by the Special Parliamentary Committee on GBV in their previous two reports from 2021 and 2022. While all recommendations warrant action, there are a handful which I am compelled to draw to the urgent attention of the highest levels of the Government.

Firstly, it is absolutely imperative that all levels of Government work together now and with a sense of resolve to develop, fund and implement workforce development strategies to increase the recruitment of properly trained and capacitated (i) health service workers and (ii) police officers (Recommendation 8). Every province must have an appropriate ratio of health staff and police officers to citizens. Services must be staffed with trained and experienced staff who have the support, resources and willingness to meet the needs of their population, most especially survivors of and those at risk of becoming victims to, gender-based violence. Without sufficient health workers and police officers, GBV and SARV survivors will continue to suffer and grow in number, without proper crisis response services and without access to justice.

Secondly, at an institutional level, it is beyond urgent that the National Government properly staff and resource the National GBV Secretariat, which was supposed to be established in 2017 to drive the implementation of the National GBV Strategy (Recommendation 12). Without a central unit with the skills, funding and leadership to drive this agenda, implementation of the Strategy will continue to languish. At the provincial level, it is also critical that Provincial Governors and Administrators urgently endorse locally contextualized Provincial GBV Strategies and establish properly resourced Provincial GBV Secretariats (Recommendation 14). In our decentralized system of government, our sub-national government structures must take on more responsibility for addressing GBV and SARV.

Thirdly, while it is essential that we strengthen our crisis response and justice services for GBV and SARV survivors, in the longer-term we must proactively build our society so that people no longer rely on violence as a means to an end. At the most fundamental level, we must invest more resources in rolling out GBV and SARV prevention and behaviour change strategies (Recommendations 27). We simply cannot accept violence as a way of resolving conflict anymore. It is not Christian; it is not constitutional; it is also neither a cultural nor a traditional practice. It is not who we want to be as a nation.

Our recommendations on prevention and behaviour change places particular importance on young people and the education system in our country. At school, our girls need to be safe, and ensured pathways to the highest levels of education. We also need to prioritize initiatives to educate children and youth people through the school system on the importance of respectful relationships and the need to use words, not violence, to manage disagreements and conflict. We also want more resources investment in working with young people, both in and out of the school system. Our country is a country of youth and yet our youth are lost. Unemployment in youth has skyrocketed – they have lost hope and they have lost role models. Youth are our next generation of parents and of leaders; they must be the ones who ensure that the PNG of our future has a zero-tolerance for violence as a means of problem solving. We must be role models to them or this circle of violence will never end.

For real prevention and behaviour change to take place in our country, the National Government must lead and take responsibility for investing in and inspiring the change needed. As the largest employer and the largest contractor in the country, the Government can also use its economic power to lift the status of women and girls and to change the trajectory of their lives. By integrating zero-tolerance for

GBV amongst its employees, its programs and its contractors, the Government can extend the constitutional values of gender equality and put an end to GBV (Recommendation 28). One concrete measure, already successfully trialled in the National Capital District, is to ensure that (i) the contractual obligations of government employees, programs and contractors include specific expectations for zero-tolerance of GBV, and (ii) these contractual obligations are monitored, evaluated and publicly shared. For example, all government employees should be required in their contracts of employment to agree to not being violent in their place of work, home and community. Moreover, they should commit to behave as leaders and role models in their communities in this regard. Those who do not uphold this obligation should be terminated. The same goes for government contractors: all should be required contractually to establish GBV and gender equality policies and strategies within their companies, and again, those who do not uphold this contractual obligation should no longer be permitted the privilege of serving government.

From the national level, the subnational and district level must follow – and through all agencies. We are asking the entire country to stop the GBV and to promote gender equality, but we must also start with ourselves – if we start with the Government, the public will follow suit. The private sector, for the most part, is already leading in this respect. As Government, we must benefit those corporate leaders who are striving to uphold the Constitution and the laws of our country, and those who are working tirelessly to end GBV. We know they are committed to our nation and our people, but they have also seen that the price of GBV and violence is unprecedented for their businesses. The value added by implementing gender equality policies serves to benefit their business goals and bottom line. So, the Government must learn from and work with private sector, as a partner, as we must learn from and work with the CSOs, front line experts and the international community.

I call on the Government and all agencies at every single level of operation to read all of our recommendations and action them. Being the change, we want to see in this country is incumbent upon us as Government leaders. To uphold the Constitution of our country - to show the Founders of our country who believed profoundly in the principles of equality that we will follow in their footsteps and stop our nation from falling behind the rest of the world in this regard. We are currently 161 out of 162 nations in terms of equality - it does not have to be this way. We have the power - all we need is the will. We have no time to lose. We must all start now.

To conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the special role of civil society in playing their part in our national efforts to address GBV and SARV to date. A number of CSO representatives participated in our May 2023 hearings and provided us with great insights into the specific challenges women and girls are facing. We heard how hard they are trying to work at the ground level to give help survivors access services and get justice, but we also heard about the many obstacles they face. We know there are many more people working in communities across the country, tirelessly trying to stem the tide of violence and ease the pain of survivors, many of whom feel abandoned by their own governments because of a lack of support and care. For the record, I wish to express the thanks of a grateful nation – they are doing God’s work.



Hon Powes Parkop, LLB, LL.M, MP
Chairman – Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Parliamentary Committee
& Governor for National Capital District