

Starting or growing a business? How a Women's Business Resource Centre can help

Papua New Guinea Economic Empowerment

July 21, 2020

by Louisa Gibbs and Sian Rolls, Pacific Women

In the past two years, almost 200 women using the Women's Business Resource Centre (WBRC) in Papua New Guinea have reported an expansion in their business.^[1]

Rebekah Ilave is one of them, making her first five-figure sale this past June.

'Women need extra support not only to start businesses, but to challenge their own thinking about their pre-defined roles in society and the economy,' said Ms Ilave, owner of education technology company, Niunet PNG Limited and a member of the WBRC since 2018.

'[The WBRC] helps women entrepreneurs gain the emotional and mental support they need to attain their business goals,' she said.

The WBRC is an entrepreneurial hub assisting women to establish and strengthen their businesses, based in Papua New Guinea's capital of Port Moresby.

Since it was established by the Center for International Private Enterprise in November 2016, Pacific Women's support has enabled 3,668 women to participate in technical training and workshop events that are helping their businesses thrive. Members can also access quiet, secure office space, laptops and private meeting rooms.

'The [WBRC] helps women to find relevant training, experiment with business practices, to be connected to opportunities to market products and seek capital and be around like-minded women and men,' Ms Ilave explained.

Among its regular training sessions are ‘Finance Fridays’ and ‘Website Wednesdays’; entrepreneur masterclasses and mentoring; high-demand, free computer coding classes for girls aged 7–15 and their parents; plus e-learning programs for women who live outside Port Moresby. In 2019, the most popular sessions were on completing tax returns, trade opportunity excursions in Indonesia and making online purchases.



A girl at the child-minding facility at the Women’s Business Resource Centre (WBRC). Photo credit: WBRC.

It is also connecting with other initiatives that are supporting women’s economic empowerment. With the Business Coalition for Women, the WBRC hosted a session that successfully connected women-owned businesses with larger companies. Eleven members of are also participating in an accelerator program run by The Difference Incubator that provides support and tools to refine and grow existing businesses.

WBRC encourages an inclusive ‘entrepreneurial ecosystem’ and provides services such as child-care facilities, adult literacy classes and sign language interpreters during training. These inclusive approaches are making a tangible difference for members like Helen Gorogo. ‘It’s good. When I brought

[my son] ... I knew he would be taken care of, I was able to concentrate on the sessions that were being delivered at the WBRC.'

Alina Ruhukail also appreciates the WBRC. 'I don't have a babysitter at home. When I see session[s] I want to attend then I know I can always bring my kids along to use the babysitting services there... [My daughter] calls the centre "Mummy's office",' she said.

[1] Expansion of business included access to finance, rise in income and expansion of staff.