

Safe and secure at work

Fiji Papua New Guinea Solomon Islands Economic Empowerment

July 7, 2020

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) is helping companies in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands to pioneer measures that create safe working conditions for women.

Overwhelmingly, these companies are finding that introducing safe and respectful workplaces not only leads to greater opportunities for women to progress in their careers, but also has a positive impact on overall business performance.

The right to be safe cannot be measured by money. But making the business case demonstrates that ensuring women workers stay free from harm has financial as well as wellbeing benefits.

With support from Pacific Women and led by IFC and the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce, 15 of the largest companies in Solomon Islands – representing 6,000 employees – worked toward meeting the Waka Mere Commitment to Action. This included companies introducing policies to support respectful workplaces, free from bullying and harassment. At the beginning of the project, around one in three employees reported they did not feel comfortable or safe at work. After two years of participating in Waka Mere, this fell to one in 10. Additionally, 77 per cent of employees now believe that their company has adequate mechanisms in place to address worker grievances, up from 63 per cent at the start of the initiative.



Female staff member of SolTuna. Photo credit: International Finance Corporation (IFC).

In Papua New Guinea, IFC started the Business Coalition for Women and developed various Gender Smart workplace model policies, training programs and resources to promote safe and supportive working conditions for women.

Peter Callister, Sustainability Manager for New Britain Palm Oil Ltd, reflects on his company's experience with the Gender Smart safety training and resources offered through the Coalition: 'We have incorporated gender into our safety management systems and processes. We selected key personnel who were involved in the identification of specific risks to women and have developed strategies necessary to mitigate these risks. Importantly, as a business, we have learned the importance of incorporating women's safety into our activities and it is now a KPI [Key Performance Indicator] requirement.'

The Business Case for Workplace Responses to Domestic and Sexual Violence in Fiji, developed under the IFC's WINvest Fiji project, found that violence is costing employers almost 10 days of work per employee each year. It recommended organisations develop standardised workplace responses and train teams to help affected employees. Following the publication of the report, IFC launched a program to support companies to introduce anti-harassment and domestic and sexual violence workplace policies.

Back in Solomon Islands, employers are already experiencing positive results from implementing policies that support employees who experience violence at home.

Freda Fa'aitoa, Human Resources Manager for Bank South Pacific, explained how these actions are helping women to keep their jobs and benefit the company's productivity and bottom line: 'Employees have started to disclose incidents of violence, receive structured support, and be able to carry on with their jobs. This has helped us increase productivity and save associated medical, security and new recruitment costs. In fact, we have already recouped the costs of implementing the policy and we recently saved two jobs of employees affected by violence. In the past, we would have terminated their employment as we would not have known why they were absent, seemingly without cause.'