

Increasing the Representation of Women in Business Leadership in Papua New Guinea



During its fourth funding phase (Phase IV, 2020-2026), the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative has worked with the Business Coalition for Women, Kumul Consolidated Holdings, and the Papua New Guinea Institute of Directors to support more women to step into senior leadership positions, particularly in state-owned enterprises, in Papua New Guinea.

BACKGROUND

Increasing the representation of women in business leadership has been shown to increase company performance and profitability. Diversity in leadership also contributes to better understanding of, and response to, consumer needs and potential opportunities for growth. However, women in Papua New Guinea (PNG) continue to be underrepresented in business leadership roles which, in turn, constrains private sector development and economic growth.

Research published by the Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI) in 2021 benchmarked the representation of women as chief executive officers, board directors, and board chairs across 50 organizations in Papua New Guinea. It found that women were underrepresented in business leadership, with women holding just 4% of board chair positions, compared to the regional average of 11%, and 5% of chief executive officers positions, compared to the regional

average of 13%¹. Updated data published by PSDI in 2024 showed modest progress, with women holding 7% of board chair positions and 9% of chief executive officer positions,² but found that PNG still lagged the Pacific averages.

“It is so important to be able to benchmark and monitor progress around women’s representation in business leadership positions. We are pleased to see the improvements for Papua New Guinea in 2024, but we know there is a long way to go. BCFW is working to make sure the gap continues to narrow, including through our long-running partnership with PSDI to train and develop women leaders.”

Evonne Kennedy, Executive Director,
Business Coalition for Women.

Recognizing the need for more women in leadership, PSDI has conducted extensive research, advocated for women’s representation, and partnered with local organizations to develop and deliver women’s leadership training programs in PNG.



Launch of the PNGID SOE Director Module of the Directors Development Program.

1 PSDI. 2021. *Leadership Matters: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific*. <https://www.pacificpsdi.org/assets/Uploads/PSDI-LeadershipMatters-Web3.pdf>

2 PSDI. 2024. *Leadership Matters 2024: Benchmarking Women in Business Leadership in the Pacific*. <https://www.pacificpsdi.org/assets/Uploads/PSDI-Leadership-Matters-2024-2.pdf>

PSDI PARTNERS AND ACTIVITIES

Business Coalition for Women

The Business Coalition for Women (BCFW) is a member-based organization that supports professional women and women-owned businesses through advocacy, advice, and education. In late 2019, PSDI worked with the BCFW to design and deliver a pilot Women's Business Leadership Program to 22 participants from 12 companies and organizations.

Building on the success of this program, PSDI supported BCFW to develop a more comprehensive Senior Executive Women's Program for women in senior leadership positions. The 6-day program is delivered over 3 months through interactive case studies and industry guest speakers. The course includes modules on risk management and resilience, financial management, organizational culture and leadership styles, governance, and communications strategy. During the program, participants are supported to develop a professional development action plan to help guide their future career progression.

"More women in leadership means a diversity of representation, and that filters to a diversity in our solutions."

Sharlene Gawai, Assistant Project Officer,
Business Coalition for Women.

Papua New Guinea Institute of Directors

The Papua New Guinea Institute of Directors (PNGID), the national professional body for company directors in PNG, aims to promote good governance, provide director education, and improve board effectiveness in PNG. In 2020, PNGID promoted a target to increase the representation of women on boards in PNG to 30%. To achieve this goal, PNGID approached PSDI for support to strengthen its director development program.

"When you get to senior management, you're sitting at the leadership table and you look around, there's maybe two females there at the most. And that's an incorrect reflection of the people that are doing the work... That mismatch is why it's important to have women [in senior leadership]."

Sharon Kupp-Tengdui, Former President,
Papua New Guinea Institute of Directors.

PSDI worked closely with PNGID to update its director development curriculum to include modules on diversity, inclusion, and board performance. PSDI also provided train-the-trainer support to PNGID and co-facilitated the first sessions using the new materials, which were run in June 2023. The program expanded in 2025 when PSDI supported the design of a dedicated 1-day module on state-owned enterprise (SOE) leadership. The new SOE module builds on the foundation of the director program by applying governance principles to real-world SOE scenarios, equipping participants to navigate the complex ethical and strategic challenges faced by SOE boards.

"We know the impact that increasing representation of women in senior leadership positions can have, not just for gender equality, but also for the profitability and operations of businesses and other organizations. That is why PNGID is proud to be working to get more women into board positions, including through our work with PSDI on Director Development Training."

Megan Taureka-Andrew, Former Chief Executive Officer,
Papua New Guinea Institute of Directors.



PNG Leadership Matters Event, Stanley Hotel.
Left to right: Evonne Kennedy (BCFW), Sarah Boxall
(Report Author PSDI), Megan Taureka-Andrew (PNGID).

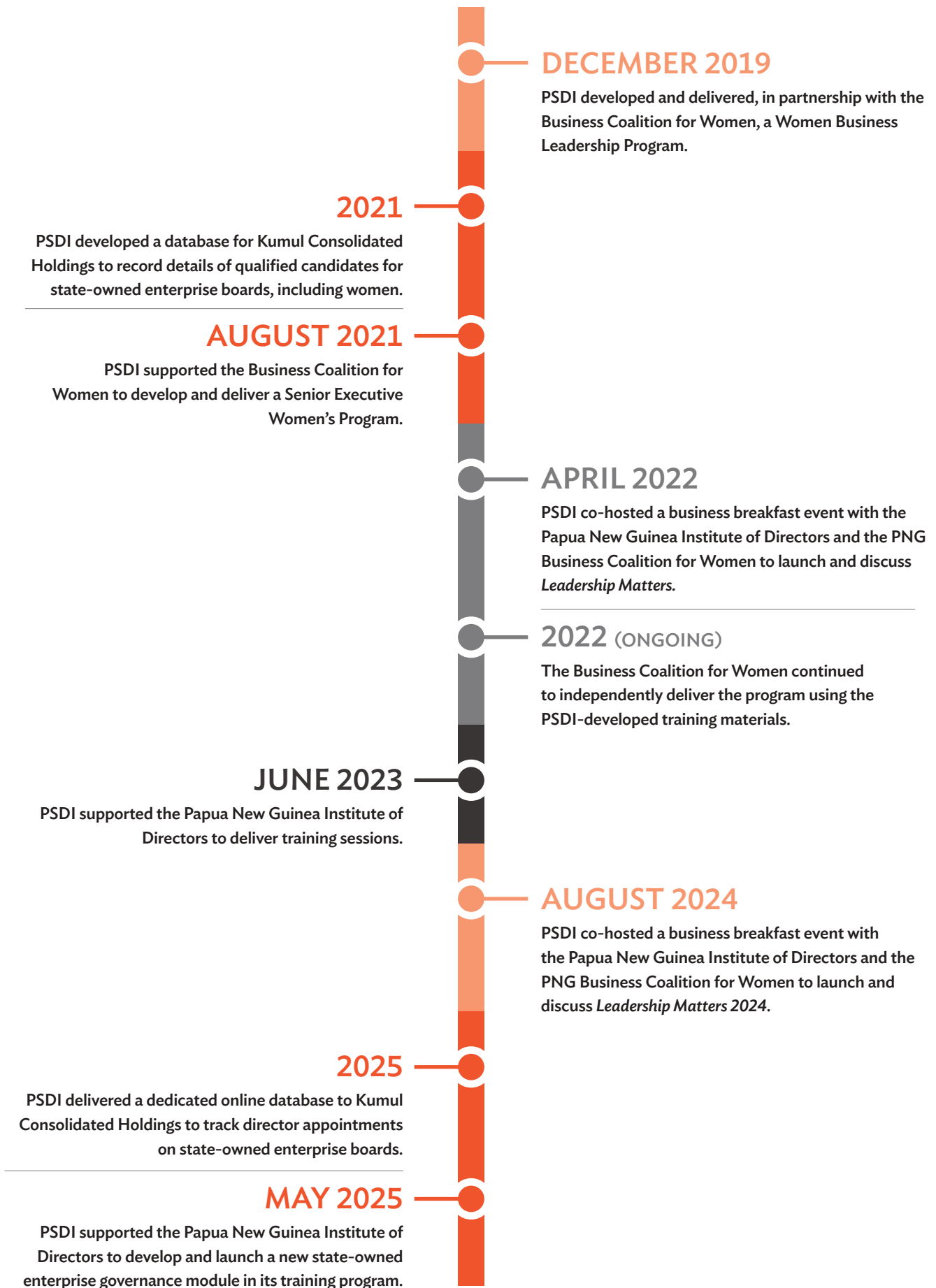
Kumul Consolidated Holdings

Kumul Consolidated Holdings (KCH) serves as the holding company for nine of PNG's SOEs, providing management oversight to improve their commercial performance and service delivery. Recognizing the governance and commercial benefits of diverse boards, KCH also adopted a target in 2021 of 30% women on SOE boards, where women have historically been significantly underrepresented in PNG.

PSDI has been working with KCH since 2021 to identify strategies and opportunities to grow the pool of potential women board candidates. This has included supporting three cohorts of aspiring women directors from KCH to undertake the PNGID's director development training course. PSDI is also planning to support a fourth cohort in 2026.

PSDI worked with KCH to develop a database that collated details of qualified and suitable candidates for boards, including women, and tracked progress towards the 30% target. Given its utility, PSDI supported the development of specifications to develop this database into an online information management system. The online database includes information on current and previous KCH directors (male and female) across all boards and assists KCH to track director appointments.

TIMELINE OF PSDI'S KEY ACTIVITIES



OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

PSDI's partnerships with BCFW, PNGID, and KCH are delivering tangible results—most notably an increase in qualified candidates for leadership positions and strengthened capacity of local organizations to deliver gender-inclusive leadership programs.



Increased representation of women in senior leadership positions

KCH has graduated 65 women from the PNGID director development program. Many of these graduates have gone on to secure appointments, including landmark achievements such as the first woman board member at PNG Ports and the first woman Chair of the National Development Bank.³

“We’ve actually been improving and increasing in terms of numbers every year. We’re getting more women. Not because we want to meet the numbers, but because this program is really, really helping. It’s because women now feel that they’re confident to put their hand up.”

Lyanne Saun, Manager of Corporate Governance, Kumul Consolidated Holdings.

Upon completion of the program, graduates' names are added to both KCH and PNGID director databases, which helps provide pathways to board roles. The share of women on KCH's state-owned enterprise boards has increased from 2% in 2021 to 27% in December 2025 (12 of the 44 occupied board seats), marking a significant shift in the governance of PNG's SOEs. Of the 12 current women directors, six had graduated from the director development program.

“We are already seeing results from our intervention in this area. Since the program began in 2021, women's representation on SOE boards has grown. This is real progress, bringing us closer to our target of a representation of 30% of women on SOE boards.”

Dr David Kavanamur, Managing Director, Kumul Consolidated Holdings.



Increased confidence and skills of women business leaders

“Women come through a competitive process, just like all the men. But not a lot of women apply [for jobs] through the public process, that's why we have this program. Since they are in the database, we can reach out to ask, 'would you be okay to be considered for this board?'”

Lyanne Saun, Manager of Corporate Governance, Kumul Consolidated Holdings.

Lyanne Saun said that this approach is leading to more women saying yes to board opportunities.

An independent evaluation of the BCFW program in 2024 found that participants have shown improved knowledge, skills, and confidence, as well as expanded professional networks.

For example, one participant explained that they had started applying new tools from the BCFW course to their role, such as using risk analysis principles to inform their decision making. Another participant said, “it has given me the confidence to face the challenges head-on. Anything is possible.”⁴

“I learnt so much from this program, particularly from the following modules: Leadership styles & Organisational cultures, Governance, Support Systems and Communications. I also had the opportunity to connect and network with other women from organisations.”⁵

A participant of the Business Coalition for Women's Senior Executive Women's Program.

3 PSDI. 2025. *Evaluation Report: Economic Empowerment of Women – Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, Phase IV*. <https://pacificpsdi.org/news-and-insights/evaluations/read/evaluation-economic-empowerment-of-women-focus-area-phase-iv>

4 Business Coalition for Women. *Evaluation – Senior Executive Women's Program*. Unpublished

5 BCFW. 2025. *2025 Senior Executive Women's Program Flyer*. <https://www.pngbcfw.org/media/pages/training-events/women-in-leadership/senior-executive-program/56a9285e5f-1736313130/sewp-flyer-2025.pdf>



New gender-inclusive organizational practices

KCH has implemented an independent assessment process for board appointments that promotes merit-based, transparent appointments and is using the new online database to track gender disaggregated data on board appointments. These practice changes are creating inclusive pathways to leadership positions on SOE boards.⁶



Improved organizational capacity

PSDI's approach focused on building lasting local capacity. As a result, both BCFW and PNGID now independently deliver and expand the leadership training programs.

Following the successful pilot Senior Executive Women's Program in 2021, BCFW began using the PSDI-developed training materials to deliver the training program. As of January 2026, BCFW has successfully rolled out 20 cohorts to an additional 309 women and the course continues to receive strong demand, with four more cohorts planned for 2026.

Similarly, PSDI's early co-facilitation and train-the-trainer support strengthened PNGID's organizational confidence and delivery capability. PNGID has continued to independently deliver and expand the program using the PSDI-supported curriculum and training materials.

“Apart from the amazing work that PSDI did for the review of our curriculum, and including a module on more diversity, for me, personally, it's just been opening that door to getting capacity for the office.”

Sharon Kupp-Tengui, Former President, Papua New Guinea Institute of Directors.



Strengthened coordination and advocacy for women's leadership

PSDI has strengthened alignment and shared commitment across KCH and PNGID, which are both key organizations influencing board appointments in Papua New Guinea. PSDI played a coordinating role that resulted in an informal network of organizations working to improve the representation of women in leadership. KCH is creating demand by setting targets for women's representation on state-owned enterprise boards while PNGID is strengthening the supply of qualified women leaders through leadership training.

“The program aligned 100% with us, in terms of what we had documented on paper that we wanted to achieve as it related to women at the board level. While we haven't gotten there yet, I'm glad to say that the cohort of women that have come through from KCH and the work that PSDI does with KCH has further supported our push so that we're not doing it alone. PSDI have now been able to get KCH to sort of champion 'we want 30% of women on boards on SOE boards'.”

Sharon Kupp-Tengui, Former President, Papua New Guinea Institute of Directors.



Program materials developed by PSDI for BCFW.

6 PSDI. 2025. *Evaluation: Economic Empowerment of Women Focus Area Phase IV*. <https://pacificpsdi.org/news-and-insights/evaluations/read/evaluation-economic-empowerment-of-women-focus-area-phase-iv>

Box 1: Expanding Women’s Leadership Across the Pacific and Facilitating Cross-country Learning: Solomon Islands

Building on the success of the Papua New Guinea Senior Executive Women in Leadership Program (SEWLP), PSDI supported the Institute of Solomon Islands Accountants, Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce, and the Solomon Islands Women in Business Association to develop a Solomon Islands SEWLP, which was first delivered in Honiara in July 2023.

The Solomon Islands organizations then collaborated to form a new joint entity—the Women’s Executive Leadership of Solomon Islands (WELSI)—which was launched in October 2024. WELSI is designed to support professional and businesswomen to advance into executive leadership by raising awareness of key leadership issues and providing tools, networks, and guidance to help them navigate their career pathways.

WELSI has now assumed responsibility for the continued delivery of the SEWLP in Solomon Islands, and since July 2023, the program has been delivered five times to 63 participants.

In May 2025, PSDI also worked with the Solomon Islands–Australia Partnership for Governance to support seven women leaders from Solomon Islands to travel to Port Moresby to participate in the PNGID Director Development Training Program. The 3-day program included the launch of a dedicated new module focused on state-owned enterprise (SOE) leadership.

After the program, the women reported feelings of increased confidence and said the program had strengthened their skills and networks.

“I feel like this training has... added value to me, and I am prepared to take another role, probably a step higher.”

Yvonne Ogaoga, a lawyer and graduate of the program.

Participants also shared their plans to take these tools back to Solomon Islands to strengthen the institutions they lead, and champion more women in leadership in the SOE sector and beyond.

“What I’m working towards... going forward after this program is to be part of smaller boards and also utilizing the skills that I got in the executive management team, the organization, that I work in currently.”

Needy Taingeia, Director of Strategic Planning, Solomon Islands Ministry of Police, National Security, and Correctional Services and graduate of the program.



Participants of PNGID’s Pilot State-Owned Enterprise Module in the Director Development Program.

Box 2: Expanding the Senior Executive Women in Leadership Program model across the Pacific: Fiji

PSDI worked with the Fiji Institute of Chartered Accountants to develop a Senior Executive Women in Leadership Program (SEWLP) for Fiji, and supported the training of two Fiji-based trainers to implement the program. The Fiji SEWLP aimed to support women to build confidence, expand their skills and knowledge of business operations, and establish networks with other women in senior positions in the private sector.

The first cohort of the program was held over 2 weeks in August 2024. The Fiji Institute of Chartered Accountants has delivered the training to 67 women across three cohorts, including in Suva and Fiji's Western Division.

Program graduate Naina Ragigia shared how the course helped her recognize her existing and transferrable skills, stating that “[the course] gave us that self-realization. We are good managers in our own way. You’re managing yourself, you’re managing your family. If you’re doing things right at home in that space ... you could apply that [and] do whatever you want.”

She also shared how the course has helped her strengthen her networks.

“One of the things I learned is building of support networks. First of all, you have to create a space with an inner circle and allow people into the inner circle that bring you positive energy... During this class, I found we had that safe space, we could talk freely [and] you could express yourself,”

Naina Ragigia, a graduate of the program.



LESSONS LEARNED



Strong local ownership strengthens sustainability and scale.

PSDI's flexible and demand-driven approach allowed partners to draw on technical support as needed to progress their own objectives and extend their delivery capacity. By co-designing training programs at the request of BCFW and PNGID and adopting a train-the-trainer approach, PSDI strengthened local ownership and commitment from implementing partners. This has enabled BCFW and PNGID to continue delivering additional training cohorts to over 300 women independently of PSDI support.



Playing a coordinating role can connect established organizations into an informal network with greater collective results.

PNGID, KCH, and BCFW initially worked separately, but PSDI played a coordinating role that resulted in them working together as an informal network. PSDI supported PNGID to strengthen the quality of director training and build supply of women leaders while simultaneously supporting KCH to create demand by setting targets and sponsoring women to undertake the trainings. This coordination avoided duplication, improved knowledge sharing, and ensured training was directly connected to board appointment pathways.



Research and consultations are essential for designing context-specific and successful training programs.

By conducting extensive research and consultations, PSDI developed tailored and local solutions that worked in the context of PNG. PSDI's use of benchmarking data through the Leadership Matters reports not only provided a strong evidence base to guide reform efforts, but also helped spark policy dialogue and track progress over time.



Long-term engagement is required to shift entrenched norms.

The increase in women's leadership representation from 2% to 27% on SOE boards over 5 years highlights that change takes time. PSDI's sustained engagement, from undertaking research and advocacy to implementing training programs and developing databases to track progress, created ongoing momentum and enabled this gradual shift.

CONCLUSION


By advocating for inclusive reform, strengthening the capacity of local institutions, developing targeted training, and supporting the achievement of targets, PSDI is helping to build a strong pipeline of qualified and confident women business leaders. This work is resulting in more women in senior leadership in Papua New Guinea, and having more women at the decision-making table is known to enhance company performance and unlock stronger growth.




Launch of SOE module.

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