

Employment of Women in the Papua New Guinean Public Service

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Women make up half of the country's total population and play significant roles in work and public life in Papua New Guinea. However, women are still underrepresented in the overall public service, overrepresented at the lower levels and poorly represented at the top and middle-management levels. Although the importance of equal employment of women is enshrined in the National Constitution and other related documents, the successive governments have done very little to make this become a reality in the public service.

Introduction

The public service in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the largest employer in the formal sector with over 57,000 employees. This accounts for nearly 40 percent of the total workforce in the country. This sector consumes some 28 percent of the country's annual budget for salaries and remuneration alone with minimal productivity (Sause 1996). It is widely believed that this sector is dominated by men while women are underrepresented. Women are grossly underrepresented in the top and middle management levels but overrepresented at the lower levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy. Although the importance of male-female partnership in national development is explicitly stipulated in the National Constitution and other related documents, nothing substantial has been done since independence in 1975 to make this become reality in the public service. In fact, the state has failed to come up with a specific and systematic policy on equal representation and participation of women in the public service.

This article discusses several issues regarding the level of female representation and participation in the national public service. First, it briefly discusses the role of the public service in PNG. Next, it discusses the importance of equal employment of women therein. Third, it looks at the employment of women in the public service. Fourth, it examines the degree of female participation and advancement in the public sector. How representative

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of women in the public service? Are they as well represented as males? Fifth, the paper discusses some barriers that hinder women from active participation and advancement in the public service. The paper ends with a brief conclusion and offers some suggestions for improving the disadvantaged status of women in the public service.

Role of the Public Service

As in most democracies, the bureaucracy in PNG is one of the most important, resourceful, influential and powerful government institutions. Bureaucracy is important because, without it, the functioning of the government system would become very difficult. The bureaucracy is very resourceful because it possesses great power and information, and has qualified technical personnel at its disposal to interpret and understand government policies and decisions. It initiates policies and makes crucial, mandatory, and influential decisions which penetrate all aspects of society, and have considerable effect on all citizens.

The bureaucracy responds directly or indirectly to people's demands, needs, and aspirations when providing goods and services. It is an integral part of the decisionmaking structure of government. Hence, the bureaucracy is in a favorable position to act more quickly than the legislature on many issues. It is bureaucrats who are charged with effecting the acts of the legislature.

Traditionally, in democratic political systems, the legislature is the main policymaking body of the government. However, it can be argued that the legislature is losing that power to the bureaucracy which has been expanding and becoming more powerful. In addition, the bureaucracy acts as a policy adviser to the political executives and assists in the day-to-day running of the government. Saffu (1985) asserts that Papua New Guinean bureaucrats are the real initiators and selectors of policy who play dominant roles in the policymaking process.

Development depends largely on bureaucracy which makes sure that ideas and policies of government are efficiently implemented. It is the instrument which translates the government decrees, policies and programs into action. As Dwivedi (1986: 5-6) notes, "the role of bureaucracy in national development cannot be underemphasized ... all development programmes require considerable direct involvement and participation by the bureaucracy at all stages of their formulation and implementation."

To all intents and purposes, the bureaucracy is the heart of the government. In the eyes of society, it personifies what the government is and

what it does. Society's characterization of the government and the respect shown towards the political system are determined by how well the bureaucrats serve the needs of the citizens, and their attitudes toward them. As such, the bureaucracy is the major link between the citizens and the government (Payani 1994: 2).

Why Equal Employment in the Public Sector?

Senior and executive positions in the public sector are where substantial power, responsibility and authority lie. People occupying these positions play a crucial role in government policy and decisionmaking processes. In such positions, it is imperative that women should be equally and fairly represented as men. This ensures that women are adequately involved in governmental policy and decisionmaking processes. Subsequently, it is assumed that they would play a crucial role in applying women's perspectives to development planning and delivery of services. In other words, since women themselves know special problems and issues affecting women better than men, female officers would ensure that women's interests, concerns and specific needs are systematically addressed, incorporated and integrated into the government's decisions and policies.

Moreover, equal representation and participation of women in the public service is important because this is in line with the PNG's National Constitution and other related documents. The National Constitution specifically calls for fair and equal representation and participation of all Papua New Guineans in the decisionmaking and development processes of the country. According to the first goal of the National Constitution, "every person [is] to be dynamically involved in the process of freeing himself or herself from every form of 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 goal of the National Constitution calls for "all citizens to have an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, the development of our country." Under this goal the National Constitution calls for "an equal opportunity for every citizen to take part in the political, economic, social, religious and cultural life of the country." Subsection (5) of the second goal specifically calls for "equal participation by women citizens in all political, economic, social and religious activities."

Since the importance of equal representation and participation of women is firmly embedded in our National Constitution, it is important that this be realized in the public service. Failure to realize this in the public service is not only unfair but in complete disregard of the spirit of the National Constitution.

PNG is abundantly endowed with mineral resources, marine resources, rich reserves of forests, agricultural land and all the other resources that it needs to become an economic power in the Asia-Pacific region. To achieve this, and develop its resources effectively, PNG needs the partnership of skilled men and women in the development processes. According to Meg Taylor, a former Papua New Guinean ambassador to the United States, "PNG is like a *Kumul*" (*Post Courier*, 7 October 1993: 21). In this metaphorical statement, Ms. Taylor is saying that men and women must work as partners to develop the country. Women like men have inherent talents, ideas, abilities, capacities and virtues to enable them to contribute meaningfully towards the decisionmaking and development processes of the country. Without the active participation of women who make up almost 50 percent of the population,¹ the country will stagnate.

Women in the Public Service

Following independence, the national government has encouraged educated Papua New Guineans to enter the formal employment sector, particularly the public service to take over the jobs previously occupied by the departing colonial expatriate officers. To this end, the official policy of localization was introduced in the public service. Under this policy, many western educated Papua New Guinean women were appointed to significant decisionmaking positions. Most of these women had tertiary qualifications and post-tertiary training, and were from the island and coastal areas (Johnson 1985: 128). These areas had a much longer history of Western schooling than the inland and highland areas. Moreover, unlike the Highlands region, some coastal areas (such as Bougainville and Milne Bay) are matrilineal societies where women have had more power and greater access to modernity. They are accorded high esteem and their male relatives support them in their higher education pursuits.

By 1980, women comprised 23 percent of the total workforce in the public service. Higher education certainly has given them access to paid employment. However, relative to male employment, this figure is very low. Most of the women employees are concentrated in lower-level occupations such as secretarial and clerical services. Of the 23 percent of women in the public service, only five percent were occupying middle-management level positions (CC8 and above) (Turner 1990: 90). Also in 1980, only 1.5 percent of all women employees occupied executive positions (UNDP/ILO Report 1993).

Despite this, Papua New Guinea has produced some of the most distinguished career female public servants: Jean and Rose Kekedo and Felicia Dobunaba headed government departments; Josepha Kanawi headed the Law Reform Commission; Mina Siaguru was the Director of the

Commission for Higher Education; the late Margaret Nakikus was the Director of the National Planning Office; Winifred Kamit and Dawa Solomon were Public Service Commissioners; Meg Taylor and Lucy Bogari were the Papua New Guinean ambassadors to the United States and South Korea respectively; and the list goes on. There is no doubt that the achievements of these women are impressive and their elevation to the apex of the bureaucratic ladder was based on their academic achievements and professional experience rather than political patronage.

Since independence, more and more women have been entering the public service than before. A recent survey by Cecilia Nembou of the University of Papua New Guinea found that more than 1,000 Papua New Guinean women passed through the university since independence.² Moreover, these women have had no difficulty in getting a job upon graduation. Nembou believes, however, that "the fundamental concern for women graduates is not so much the matter of securing a job as it is the opportunity for promotion and a more meaningful participation in development" (*Post Courier*, 18 November 1993: 29). Bagasel (1991) asserted that since independence, there has been a slow but gradual increase in the employment and participation of women in the labor force, both in the private and public sectors. Some of them have advanced into the senior and middle management levels in both sectors.

How Representative is the Public Service?

At this juncture, it is appropriate to ask the question: how representative is the Papua New Guinean public service in relation to women, especially in the 1990s? Are women equally represented as men, especially at the executive and managerial levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy?

Table 1 compares the male-female employment in the selected central government departments and agencies as of 31 May 1995. These statistics clearly confirm the assertion that males still outnumber females in the public service employment. Although women outnumber men in the Department of Health, it must be stressed that the bulk of them (1,543) are concentrated in the CC1-CC5 salaried-level positions compared to 836 men in the same category. Their representation and participation in CC5-L8 salary level positions are much lower than men's. For instance, there are only ten females holding L1-L10 salaried level positions compared to 91 males in the Department of Health.

Similarly, in other central government departments and agencies the bulk of females are overrepresented at the lower level positions and underrepresented or poorly represented at the top levels.

Table 1. Male-Female Composition at all Levels (CC1-L8) in Selected Central Government Departments as of 31 May 1995

<i>Departments</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>% Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Agriculture and Livestock	522	103	4	.64	629
Fisheries and Marine Resource	173	39	11	4.93	223
Education*	11,145	4,490	3,600	18.72	19,235
Prime Minister and NEC	805	195	69	6.45	1,069
Village Services & Prov'l. Affairs	80	20	5	4.76	105
Information and Communication	201	57	32	11.03	290
Personnel Management	213	124	11	3.16	348
Public Service Commission	9	8	2	10.52	19
Transport	236	57	24	7.57	317
Works and Supply	1,377	186	10	.64	1,573
Judiciary Services	505	151	384	36.92	1,040
Defense	75	61	628	82.20	764
Correctional Services	1,441	148	260	14.06	1,849
Electoral Commission	29	24	4	7.02	57
Environment and Conservation	177	25	5	2.42	207
Finance and Planning	676	295	95	8.91	1,066
National Forest Authority	272	60	46	12.17	378
Foreign Affairs	124	46	85	33.33	255
Health	1,239	1,694	68	2.27	3,001
Home Affairs	82	58	37	20.90	177
Commerce and Industry	60	20	5	5.88	85
Attorney General	286	139	3	.70	428
Labor and Employment	151	65	7	3.14	223
Lands and Physical Planning	359	72	10	2.27	441
Mining and Petroleum	133	37	15	8.11	185
Energy and Development	59	17	5	6.17	81
Police	4,976	295	183	3.36	5,454
National Parliament	139	35	64	26.90	238

Source: Department of Personnel Management, Public Sector Training Project, 31 May 1995.

*All departments/provinces.

As can be seen in Table 2, women are poorly represented in managerial and executive salaried-level positions (CC8-L8). There are only 397 women compared to 3,972 men (10 percent) holding executive and managerial positions. Apart from Jean Kekedo, who was removed as the head of National Forest Authority in October 1995, currently there are only four women heading government departments or agencies: Aivu Tauvasa is the Managing Director of Investment Promotions Authority; Dr. Naomi Tulaha is the Chairperson of Commission for Higher Education; Dr. Mela Gena and Margaret Elias were appointed as head of Department of Home Affairs and Youth and Industrial Relations respectively by the Chan-Haiveta Government in early October 1995.

Table 2. Distribution by Salary Level of all Public Servants, both Provincial and National Levels as of 31 May 1995

<i>Salary Levels</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>% Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
L8	43	1	15	1.69	59
L7	20	0	3	0	23
L6	18	0	4	0	22
L5	107	0	13	0	120
L4	156	7	14	3.95	177
L3	197	11	19	4.85	227
L2	215	15	9	6.27	239
L1	555	50	36	7.80	641
CC10	1,058	107	88	8.54	1,253
CC9	1,603	196	135	10.13	1,934
CC8	1,408	163	122	9.63	1,693
CC7	1,798	260	164	11.70	2,222
CC6	3,914	564	334	11.72	4,812
CC5	6,031	1,960	694	22.57	8,685
CC4	7,053	3,498	1,860	28.18	12,411
CC3	5,319	2,133	1,696	23.32	9,148
CC2	2,851	1,126	670	24.23	4,647
CC1	5,123	1,872	2,550	19.61	9,545
Total	37,469	11,963	8,426		57,858

Source: Department of Personnel Management, Public Sector Training Project, Waigani 1995.

Barriers to Female Participation and Advancement in the Public Service

As indicated in the run-up to independence and thereafter, gender proved no handicap as demand for western educated females to work in the public service was great at that time. Those women with appropriate educational qualifications have had no difficulty in getting public service jobs, that is, securing a job in the public service has never been a problem for women. The problem has been one of promotion and advancement within the bureaucratic hierarchy.

Barriers to the advancement of women in the public service are manifold. One of the major barriers has been the under-achievement of females particularly at the tertiary institutions. For instance, according to Crossley (1988), of the 1,250 undergraduate students at the PNG University of Technology in 1990, only 14 percent were females. In the same year, females accounted for only 20 percent of all the undergraduates at the University of Papua New Guinea.

Furthermore, there has been a lack of provision of specific and systematic post-tertiary training opportunities for women in order to prepare them for

senior positions. Indeed, the provision of additional training and skills upgrading is relevant for promotion of women to senior positions within the public service. The UNDP/ILO Report (1993) strongly states that the training of women employees in the Papua New Guinean public service is one of the first steps which should be taken towards rectifying the low representation of women in positions of responsibility and authority in Papua New Guinea.

Another major barrier is the prevalence of negative male attitudes towards increasing women's access to resources and information in a significant way. Mandie (1985: 169) argues that "the persistence of stereotyped attitudes about women means that little confidence is put in women to perform well." Gibson (1993) argues that professional women do not enjoy the same privileges and opportunities as their male counterparts for career development. They are often overlooked because of traditional customs and practices that favor men for positions of leadership.

It is widely believed that sexual harassment in the work place is a reality in Papua New Guinea. Forms of sexual harassment range from asking for sexual favors in return for keeping a job to touching female officers, making sexually connotative comments and swearing at them. Victims of sexual harassment often feel insecure and lose confidence in themselves with adverse effect on their work performance.

Inferiority complexes and negative attitudes held by women about themselves can be seen as a major hindrance to their own advancement. Women are conditioned to believe that they are inferior, and not able to take up jobs that are traditionally male oriented. They seem to have low opinions of their own abilities, talents, and capabilities, and do not see themselves capable of competing with men for the same job. Bagasel (1991) believes that the lack of self-confidence and jealousies among women are major constraints that prevent them from advancing within the bureaucratic hierarchy. She believes that "women should have faith and confidence in other women as leaders and organisers. The lack of confidence in their own kind, at least in PNG, hinders the process of equal participation" (Bagasel 1991: 217).

Ms. Bungtabu Brown, former President of PNG National Council of Women, expresses a similar concern that "the saddest part is that women are women's worst enemies. Women encounter a lot of professional jealousies in their work, and positions, from other women" (*Post Courier*, 14 September 1989: 28). It is not surprising that such views are expressed more openly by women than by men.

Moreover, there is a lack of clear and specific government policies to encourage, promote and foster women into the top echelons of the administrative hierarchy; that is, successive governments since independence

have not had a specific and systematic policy geared towards the promotion of women to the top echelons of the public service.

Conclusion

This author is of the view that the equal representation and participation of women vis-à-vis men in the public service is crucial for national development. However, this article shows that women are underrepresented in the total public service, overrepresented in the lower levels and poorly represented at the top levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy. While access to public service jobs has been easy for women, problems such as lack of proper training, negative male attitude towards women, sexual harassment, inferiority complex, negative attitudes of women themselves, and lack of clear and specific government policies have hindered them from advancing within the bureaucratic hierarchy.

To ensure that more women are equally employed and afforded equal opportunities for advancement in the public service hierarchy, this paper suggests that policies such as equal employment opportunities (EEO) should be introduced in the public service. The policy would ensure that:

- (a) more women are involved in the policy formulating and decisionmaking processes of the public service;
- (b) more women are employed in the top and middle management positions;
- (c) a women's perspective permeates all areas of the public service;
- (d) the potential and ability of women are recognized, fully acknowledging the expertise they have;
- (e) more women are employed in all areas of the public service; and
- (f) there is a balanced representation of women from every tribe, province and region in the public service.

Second, there should be more training and education opportunities for women both within the country and overseas. The women, especially at the lower levels of the bureaucracy should be encouraged to undertake training, further studies, and additional work experiences, with a view to being promoted into middle and top-level positions.

Third, a strong policy against sexual harassment at all levels in the work place should be put in place for implementation. The policy should explicitly present guidelines and streamline disciplinary procedures to deal with offenders.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the establishment of a more representative bureaucracy, based on equality and partnership, requires both political and administrative leadership and commitment. Political executives and administrative officials must be committed to these goals, and should ensure that employment policies regarding the recruitment, training, and promotion of women and other disadvantaged groups are carried out and implemented effectively. Without support of the leaders and their commitment, government policies will remain ineffective and futile.

Endnotes

¹According to the 1990 National Population Census, the total population of PNG was 3.76 million: 1.98 males and 1.78 females. These statistics exclude North Solon on Province, because of political and law and order problems following the closure of the giant Panguna Copper Mine in 1988. (See Report on the 1990 National Population and Housing Census in Papua New Guinea, pp. 33-4.)

²Using a crude survey of 80 women graduates in Port Moresby, Dr. Nembou states that most women graduates are employed by the government. Approximately 41.25 percent of the graduates are employed in the central government departments: 27.5 percent in Education, 26.25 percent in nongovernmental organizations, and 5 percent in Health (*Post Courier*, 18 November 1993: 29).

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