

Youth**Action**Net®

CASE STUDY SERIES

Equal Playing Field:

*Fighting Gender Inequality with
Youth as the Change Agents*

A partnership between:



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

School of Foreign Service
Global Human Development Program



Introduction

This is one of a series of case studies produced by students enrolled in the Global Human Development Program at Georgetown University through its partnership with the International Youth Foundation (IYF). Students enrolled in a course exploring the role of social enterprises and social entrepreneurs were paired with young leaders of social ventures identified through the IYF's YouthActionNet® program. The students were given the assignment of analyzing the venture's assets, successful methodologies, and opportunities for investment to increase impact. Through this experiential learning process, the student consultants gained hands-on experience and exposure to the needs of social enterprises. The ventures, too, benefited from student insights into their strengths, areas for growth, and recommendations for enhancing their impact and sustainability. The Georgetown practicum is part of YouthActionNet's larger efforts to partner with institutions of higher learning around the globe to integrate social change into the academic experience and career interests of students.

International Youth Foundation

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) invests in the extraordinary potential of young people. Founded in 1990, IYF builds and maintains a worldwide community of businesses, governments, and civil society organizations committed to empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. IYF programs are catalysts of change that help young people obtain a quality education, gain employability skills, make healthy choices, and improve their communities.

www.iyfnet.org

YouthActionNet®

Since 2001, YouthActionNet, a program of the International Youth Foundation, has provided founders of social ventures, ages 18 to 29, with the training, networking, coaching, funding, and advocacy opportunities they need to strengthen and scale their impact. These young social entrepreneurs have pioneered innovative solutions to critical local and global challenges, resulting in increased civic engagement, improved health, education reform, economic opportunity, environmental protection, and more inclusive societies. Our work is carried out through a network of 23 national and regional youth leadership institutes that collectively support over 1,350 young social entrepreneurs globally.

www.youthactionnet.org

Global Human Development Program at Georgetown University

The Global Human Development Program of Georgetown University is home to one of the world's premier master's degree programs in international development. An innovative, academically rigorous skills-based graduate program, the Master of Global Human Development degree prepares the next generation of development professionals to work with public sector agencies, private businesses, and non-profit organizations that advance development. Through coursework, extracurricular activity, and practical fieldwork experiences, our graduates develop the insights, skills, and experiences necessary to become leaders in development and make a difference in our global community.

<https://ghd.georgetown.edu>

INTRODUCTION

Meet Jacqueline Joseph, Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Equal Playing Field (EPF)

Jacqueline “Jacqui” Joseph was born in the rural town of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea (PNG). At the time, her town was in the midst of a civil war known as the Bougainville Conflict. The conflict, considered the largest conflict in Oceania since World War II, had an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 casualties. Although Jacqui grew up in a loving home with her parents and siblings, the war had a profound impact on her community. Many people, especially women, were vulnerable and susceptible to violence. One afternoon, as Jacqui and her friends were playing next to a tree, they saw an ambulance pass by that was filled with women who had their hair shaved off. A nearby man remarked, “this is what happens when women are naughty.” Disturbed by what she had seen, Jacqui later asked her mother, a high school teacher, why someone would do such a thing. Her mother explained that this was a way for men to shame women. Although Jacqui was only five years old at the time, this moment stayed with her and helped direct her passion of ending violence against women.



At the age of seven, Jacqui and her family moved to the capital city of Port Moresby, where she and her siblings would have greater educational opportunities. School empowered Jacqui and she started to believe that she, a girl in a patriarchal society, could change the world. Jacqui later earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Political Science with a minor in Public Policy Management from the University of Papua New Guinea, and went on to work at the Asian Development Bank and worked on community projects that supported literacy development among young people in her local community.

In 2011, Jacqui met Adam Everill at the Global Changemakers Forum in Delhi, India. Adam, an Australian national, had an interest in public health and social issues that affected communities particularly in Papua New Guinea. They quickly bonded over their shared love of how sports such as rugby could be used as a tool to ending gender-based violence. The same year, determined in their vision to use sport as a vehicle for violence prevention, Jacqui and Adam co-founded the Rugby League Against Violence (RLAV). Through RLAV, they led the delivery of sports-based violence prevention education programs and initiatives to hundreds of children in Papua New Guinea. In 2015, RLAV was changed to Equal Playing Field (EPF) to better reflect the overall goal and vision of the organization, which is to bring people together and promote respectful relationships.

Equal Playing Field is creating a safe space where young boys and girls critically think about relationships.

The Problem

Papua New Guinea is one of the most dangerous places in the world for women. According to Human Rights Watch, an estimated 70 percent of women in Papua New Guinea experience rape or assault in their lifetime.¹ Family and sexual violence are pervasive, with two-thirds of women reporting being beaten by their partners. A 2016 report released by the international medical aid organization Médecins Sans Frontières /Doctors Without Borders (MSF), highlighted that, “in Papua New Guinea, women and children endure shockingly high levels of family and sexual violence, with rates of abuse estimated to be some of the highest in the world outside a conflict zone.”²

Eighty percent of Papua New Guinea’s 7.9 million inhabitants live in rural areas with little-to-no access to basic facilities, including medical services.³ The difficulties of receiving medical attention and treatment leave many women with little choice but to return home to their abusers, continuing the cycle of abuse.⁴ Based on the MSF report, and through her direct experience, a managing nurse with an MSF project in Tari, Papua New Guinea underscored that the nation is “a patrilineal society, where women’s beliefs and values aren’t equal to men. The mentality here is that the men are in charge — really, whatever the man asks, the woman has to submit.”⁵

The brutal reality of gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea has caught the attention of many around the world. In 2016, UN Women launched a behavior change campaign called *SANAP WANTAIM: The New Normal*. The campaign brings together men and boys with women and girls as partners and allies, empowers women and girls to stand up for themselves, and equips the community with knowledge of how to identify and respond to violence.⁶ While campaigns and initiatives such as SANAP WANTAIM are key in raising awareness of gender-based violence and inequality, more needs to be done.

The Solution

In a country where more than 800 languages are spoken, Equal Playing Field uses the shared love of sport to bring people together. EPF is founded on the belief that violence against women is preventable and that frank and open discussions about gender equality and respectful relationships during adolescence have the power to stop violence before it starts. Grounded in this belief, EPF uses sports of all kinds to engage youth in deeper dialogues to think more critically about the importance of respectful relationships. “We believe that education is more effective when you speak to young people in a language they understand,” underscores Jacqui.

EPF’s model represents an innovative approach to the ongoing epidemic of gender-based violence. The organization focuses on four key programs:

¹ “World Report 2016: Papua New Guinea.” *Human Rights Watch*, 27 Jan. 2016, www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/papua-new-guinea.

² *Return to Abuser, Gaps in Services and a Failure to Protect Survivors of Family and Sexual Violence in Papua New Guinea*. Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016, <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/sites/usa/files/msf-pngreport-def-lr.pdf>.

³ “Papua New Guinea Country Profile.” *BBC News*, BBC, 7 Aug. 2017, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15436981.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Alfred, Charlotte. “The Shocking Reality Of The Sexual Violence Epidemic In Papua New Guinea.” *The Huffington Post*, TheHuffingtonPost.com, 5 Mar. 2016, www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/papua-new-guinea-sexual-violence_us_56d9fcare4b0ffe6f8e974f2.

⁶ “SANAP WANTAIM.” *UN Women | Asia and the Pacific*, asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/png/sanap-wantaim.

1. EPF Academy: A robust six-month training and capacity building program for volunteers.
2. EPF4S: An eight-week curriculum that combines respectful relationship education with skills development and games for 12-16 year-old boys and girls.
3. Action Groups: An advocacy initiative that promotes shared leadership to help boys and girls formulate activities to address inequities they find in the school and community.
4. Teacher Trainings: Capacity building trainings for teachers, community members and groups to ensure continuity beyond the 8-week EPF school program.

The program is showing promising results. For instance, in the Capital District after the program implementation:

- 84% of students said that boys and girls played together
- 75% of students said there was less violence
- 87% of students wanted to become agents of change in their country and community

These numbers reflect shifting mindsets and the possibility of changing existing cultural norms within safe environments where participants are invited to think critically and engage in meaningful discussions.

Operational Model

Equal Playing Field is a Women and Child's Rights organization that delivers a whole-of-community approach to primary violence prevention. Led by Jacqui and Adam, the team includes 16 full-time staff, nine part-time staff members, and 20 volunteer positions on six-month assignments. EPF is also governed by six board members, many of whom are Papua New Guineans. As the fundamental focus of Equal Playing Field is to promote gender equality, the organization also strives to create and maintain fairness at all levels of the organization. EPF is proud that women comprise half of its board and 60% of its staff.

EPF was founded in 2011 as Rugby League Against Violence. Since then, EPF has grown and developed into a fully operational not-for-profit organization, registered with the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission (ACNC) in Australia and with the Investment Promotion Authority (IPA) in Papua New Guinea.⁷ EPF works in Port Moresby and the Autonomous Regions of Bougainville.

In 2015 EPF secured its largest donor, the Australian Aid Program, with funding of 4 million PGK (roughly \$1.5 million USD) over three years. The funding mainly supports the EPF4S program and is administered in partnership with Plan International Australia. UNICEF has also partnered with EPF and funds EPF4S in the North, Central, and South regions of Bougainville, with an allocation of 1.2 million PGK per year.

⁷ "Australia Supports Equal Playing Field school program in PNG" *Australian High Commission*, png.embassy.gov.au/pmsb/576.html.

KEY ASSETS AND SUCCESSFUL METHODOLOGIES

Equal Playing Field's model to combat gender violence with children at the center of the conversation is unique. Several organizations, including initiatives by the United Nations and Doctors Without Borders, combat gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea. However, their work focuses on dispatching services and addressing the issue at a later stage—when notions of gender inequality and violence have already been ingrained. Equal Playing Field, conversely, aims to change ways of thinking by impacting the mindsets of youth at an early age.

A Fearless Leader and Role Model

With the majority of women in Papua New Guinea experiencing rape or assault in their lifetime, leading a charge against gender-based violence is an incredibly difficult task. It is not made easier by systemic discrimination that has institutionalized cultural and socio-economic barriers for women to achieving leadership roles. Since Papua New Guinea gained independence in 1975, only seven women have been elected to Parliament. In 2017, the gender disparity was reinforced—for the first time in 20 years, not a single woman secured one of the national parliament's 111 seats.⁸

Women face many obstacles to accessing the resources and support needed to be successful in their work. However, an empowered female populace can bring about greater benefits for their communities. Jacqui's presence—not only as the Chief Executive Officer of Equal Playing Field, but specifically as a dedicated, young, local woman—reminds women and girls that they are strong and capable and offers them hope for their own futures. Her leadership and direction in a male-dominated society sends a positive message to young girls and boys alike—that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men.

Engaging Youth as Change Agents

The cornerstone of Equal Playing Field's approach is to catalyze youth to be change agents. EPF achieves this in two ways: training and empowering youth volunteers, and engaging children at an early age. Prior to EPF's work in this area, little was being done for primary prevention starting from adolescence. EPF believes that violence can be mitigated through candid discussions about gender equality during adolescence, and schools are ideal sites for respectful relationship programs and implementing a bottom-up approach. By bringing boys and girls together and directly addressing the issue at a pivotal time in adolescent years, EPF is not only educating young people about safe and respectful relationships, but is also aiming to inspire and empower the next generation to promote gender equality.

In addition, by training young men and women through the EPF Academy, volunteers are not just being prepared to work with children, but are also acquiring key life skills in leadership, teamwork, and critical thinking. Young women develop confidence and learn approaches to stand up for themselves and young men are taught to respond to situations in a progressive manner and view their female peers positively. Volunteers become leaders and advocates for peace and gender equality in their communities as they not only use their skills to engage with students, but also apply their

⁸ "What's next for Women in PNG Politics?" *East Asia Forum*, 16 Sept. 2017, www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/09/16/whats-next-for-women-in-png-politics/.

knowledge in their homes and neighborhoods. This ripple effect contributes to the broader fight against gender-based violence, extending beyond EPF's core target audience.

Multi-Dimensional Methodology in Effecting Change

EPF Academy

EPF Academy is a six-month training and capacity building program for young men and women (under the age of 35) interested in becoming volunteers for the EPF4S School Projects. This extensive training includes a range of workshops, ongoing mentoring, and 80+ hours of supervised practice. The EPF Academy was established in 2014, and has trained over 120 volunteer facilitators who have worked with over 7200 students and 100 teachers in 52 primary schools. An internal monitoring and evaluation report shows that volunteers and staff have built a solid network. This is supported by a high retention rate of volunteers and their attendance rate of three days a week, on average, throughout the 2016 campaign.

EPF4S Schools Projects

Volunteers who have undergone the extensive six-month EPF Academy training are then equipped to deliver the EPF4S curriculum, an eight-week respectful relationship education project conducted in schools. The curriculum, which is separated into weekly modules, is designed to promote gender equality by challenging assumptions and behaviors that enable violence against women. Module themes focus on topics including understanding different types of violence and abuse, developing support networks and knowing where to seek help, developing empathy for others, seeking consent from others, and other issues. During the program, 12-to-16-year-old boys and girls take part in a mixed gender sports competition that combines respectful relationship education with skills development and games. Each week, the teams rotate between competing in recreational matches in which they refine their on-field skills, and participating in one-hour educational sessions on different topics relating to respect and relationships.

Capacity Building of Schools and Communities

EPF works with partner schools and communities to deliver a package of services which includes teacher trainings, training workshops for community members, child protection assessments, and child safeguarding practices. In addition, following the successful implementation of Equal Playing Field's school programs, participating schools have reported improved relationships between their male and female students, improved grades, and increased outreach to family support centers.

By engaging youth as change agents, Equal Playing Field can help to alter Papua New Guinea's existing cultural norms and create a new normal where there is equity among the genders.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTMENT

EPF has developed key strategic features which have propelled the organization into a successful early-prevention program. Strengthening the continuity in service delivery, engaging key stakeholders, and diversifying the organization's funding streams will further ensure EPF's provision of a comprehensive and contextualized women's violence prevention program model.

Strengthening Continuity in Service Delivery

When confronting gender violence, it is important to develop a strategy that is not merely prescriptive, but also addresses the root causes of the problem. EPF's model has been effective in contributing to informal changes in students' behaviors and developing their understanding of violence prevention. It has also helped students, both boys and girls, to build skills that support respectful behavior and positive interactions with one another. While EPF has been effective at contributing to changes among students and volunteers, it has been less effective at contributing to changes among teachers and schools.

Social and cultural norms in Papua New Guinea are such that violence against women is viewed as justified. As a result, for EPF to achieve its goal, the organization must continue to strengthen its initiative beyond the eight-week EPF4S program by engaging staff, volunteers, and community partners to continually work with the school systems. This will reinforce the capacity building of schools and communities and will bolster students' capability to engage in better relationships.

This companion program could be implemented in two ways: an after-school youth development course which is offered throughout the week and/or an in-school approach where the program is incorporated into the school curriculum. In both methods, the key feature of the program is that students will continually participate in the program, from grade 6 or 7 through grade 12, and will be receiving the EPF curriculum on youth empowerment and gender violence prevention over an extended period of time.

Engaging Key Stakeholders

An overwhelming number of reports and studies on gender violence agree that violence against women is a developmental impediment that costs communities and countries millions of dollars. The government of Papua New Guinea has publicly spoken out against violence against women and has passed laws on the issue, yet there has been a failure to enforce such laws. As part of EPF's approach to contribute to changes in policies, EPF has established a partnership with the Ministry of Education to deepen its advocacy to create systematic change with local teachers and schools. In addition, by arming government officials and local community leaders with resources and information that highlight the economic value and significance of empowering women in a community, EPF can establish itself as a thought leader and levy greater impact.

While there are several organizations, nationally and globally, addressing gender-based violence in PNG, they rarely work in tandem. For EPF to effect change on a larger scale, it is essential for the organization to build key relationships and connections with those who are leading similar initiatives in the region. In doing so, EPF can further deepen its impact and establish greater visibility for its mission.

Diversifying the Revenue Stream

Equal Playing Field is largely dependent on funding from the Australian Aid Agency, which has funded the EPF program for a three-year period. In order to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the project, EPF should expand its funding model.

In order to diversify its funding sources, EPF could approach local governments where the school programs are based, and also leverage local private sector companies for support. EPF can appeal to local companies by providing them with a source of trained and educated potential staff. In going through the EPF Academy, volunteers, who are mostly college students, undergo extensive training in critical thinking, managing difficult conversations, leading youth development, and several other competencies. These volunteers are not only equipped to lead programs for youth, but are also trained in soft skills which will make them more productive and effective employees.

CONCLUSION

Over the last 50 years, the international community, through its multilateral institutions, has pushed forward the agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment. Since then, much progress has been made throughout the world, but millions of women and girls are still victims of violence. In Papua New Guinea, the dream of gender equality remains far from reality. Jacqui Joseph, Adam Everill, and their team are leading the fight to end violence against women by addressing the issue with a preventive approach rather than attempting to lead interventions after negative perceptions have already been ingrained. Working with youth in school settings through sports, and with the support of a well-trained volunteer cohort is proving to be a recipe for success. As Equal Playing Field evolves and expands its reach to engage more youth, it will increasingly be able to influence mindsets and engage young people to think critically about respectful and positive relationships and impact societal attitudes toward women in Papua New Guinea.

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT EQUAL PLAYING FIELD

- [Equal Playing Field Website](#)
- [Equal Playing Field Facebook Page](#)
- [Jacqui Joseph LinkedIn Profile](#)
- [YouthActionNet Fellow Profile of Jacqui Joseph](#)
- Video: [Using Sports to Promote Gender Equality with Fellow Jacqui Joseph](#)
- Video: [Interview with Jacqui Joseph and Adam Everill](#)
- Blog: [Can Youth Kick Gender Equality in PNG?](#)

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