

THURSDAY | MARCH 8, 2018

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We must always press for the progress of women and girls

Last week I sat down with women of my own age group in Zamboanga City to hear their experiences of the Zamboanga siege in 2013, which displaced them from their homes and threw their lives into turmoil. We sat in their new houses and I heard about how they had attended adult lessons to learn to read, write and count for the first time. Australia's aid program funded both the houses and the lessons.

The pride and empowerment that these women felt at being able to do something as simple as signing their name rather than marking a cross, underlined to me the importance of the gender performance target in Australia's aid program. Eighty percent of our programs, regardless of the sector, must address gender equality. We make sure that they do so.

Increasing the literacy of women and girls has a direct impact on their economic empowerment. Literate mothers are more likely to encourage their children to go to school and to stay at school longer. Their own job prospects and ability to support their family are also likely to improve.

This also happens to be an economically undervalued activity.

The private sector has an essential role to play in encouraging women to enter the workforce. Policies, practices and attitudes can have a significant impact on a woman's ability to take up paid work and to sustain employment through her childbearing years.

There is also a growing body of knowledge showing that gender diversity in the workplace leads to revenue and profitability gains. Fortune 500 companies with the highest proportion of women on their boards perform significantly better than those with lower proportions do. When more women work, economies grow.

Including women in senior positions also sends a powerful message to other women that they are valued and can progress in the organisation. I know this from personal experience with Australia for the first time having both a female Minister of Foreign Affairs and Departmental Secretary.

The resilient women I met in Zamboanga are taking steps to improve their own lives and that of their families. They provide an inspiring example for us all to take strides in the journey to self-empowerment and to do what we can to improve the equality of the women in our families and our businesses. They convinced me that you are never too old to learn. It is never too late to embrace change and to Press for Progress.

↓ WOMEN

The Philippine Star

Thursday, March 8, 2018

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WE MUST ALWAYS PRESS FOR THE
PROGRESS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

AMANDA GORELY

The theme of International Women's Day 2018 is "Press for Progress" highlighting the ongoing need to maintain pressure to achieve true gender equality. Australia's *Investing in Women* Initiative is focusing on gender equality in the workplace in four ASEAN countries, including the Philippines. We are working in collaboration with seven large Philippine companies who understand that investing in women is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do.

This week, two of these companies achieved a significant milestone. They obtained certification using the Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE) assessment tool. EDGE assesses companies on five criteria; equal pay for equivalent work, recruitment and promotion, leadership development, training and mentoring and flexible work culture. Ayala Land Inc. is the first Philippine real estate company to be certified, and Convergys Philippines is the first BPO in the country to achieve EDGE Assess Certification.

The Philippines ranks as the 10th most gender equal country in the 2017 Global Gender Gap Report, which reflects remarkable progress in closing the gender gap in education and health. However, this progress is not reflected in Filipina work force participation rates. While more Filipino women have college degrees than men, only 50 percent of women participate in the labor force compared to 77 percent of men. Gendered norms that view women predominantly as caregivers have been slow to change, with Filipino women providing 84 percent of childcare.