

# 'Sponsorship from the Leadership is a Focal Point for Diversity'

Engaging business leaders and managers is key to developing women's careers, says **Elizabeth Nieto**, senior vice president, global chief diversity and inclusion officer at MetLife.

MetLife has 60,000 employees in over 40 countries, and has four women on the board of directors. Women constitute about 48% of its workforce overall, and 25% of its leadership. "We make our leaders understand the value they bring by sponsoring the career development of women," says Nieto, who was in India recently.

MetLife's presence in India is through PNB MetLife, a joint venture between MetLife International Holdings, Punjab National Bank, Jammu & Kashmir Bank, M Pallonji and Company and other private investors, with MetLife and PNB being the majority shareholders. Excerpts from an interview with **Saumya Bhattacharya**.

## **How do you develop careers of women employees?**

We have a very selective group of women for 14 months in a programme where we try to discover what women want to do in their careers, and whether they have the skills and aspirations to do it. Our conversations have changed, and we have been able to stop women from leaving because they see a lot more opportunity for themselves.



## **How do you engage managers and leaders in developing women's careers?**

We spend a lot of time talking about the diversity and inclusion policy. We also talk about whether we have the right talent from the market; are we developing enough women internally? Moving the needle is not easy. A third of men totally get it; a third think it's a business opportunity and they will engage. A third will roll their eyes, and we don't want to work with them.

In diversity and inclusion, our focus is on sponsorship from the business leadership. It starts with challenging roles that have the right amount of support.

## **Why are women leaving the workforce?**

In developed markets, women at the senior level do not leave to go back home. They leave to be entrepreneurs, go to not-for-profit, and to smaller organisations.

In emerging markets, it is more about infrastructure. The women focus on: 'Am I getting enough excitement that I leave my family to do this?'

The US, for instance, does not have maternity leave. We changed the policy. Earlier, women would get two weeks, and now they get eight weeks in our company.

We also created transitional workshops for women and their managers to plan before and after their maternity leave. The workshops focus on conversations between the employees and their leaders.

## **Would you have any advice for potential women leaders and their organisations?**

Women need to have aspirations. Organisations need to change the authoritative and directive leadership. You need to be collaborative, and cannot use gender-specific words. You need to use competence-specific words. For instance, when you say a man is aggressive, he is a good leader, but an aggressive woman is not. What's important is what 'aggressive' means. We are making our leaders expand their vocabulary in the context of diversity.