

# Fiji

*‘There is such great stigma in our Fijian culture in talking about sexual violence, particularly when it concerns children and youth, and so we must respond to those survivors and their families with tenderness, respect and confidentiality.’*

**Ms Jiokapeci Waqairadovu, counsellor, Phoenix Survivors Network.<sup>1</sup>**

Fiji is a country comprised of over 300 islands and has one of the more developed economies in the Pacific region. As such, it fares well compared to its neighbours, ranking 91 out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index.<sup>2</sup> However, the 2015 Global Gender Gap Report ranked Fiji 121 out of 136 countries in terms of the Global Gender Gap Index, which measures gender disparity across four broad areas including: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival.<sup>3</sup>

## Leadership and Decision Making

Women are still often defined by traditional caregiving and nurturing roles, thus presumed to be ineffective leaders.<sup>4</sup> Men largely dominate leadership and decision making roles in the political arena, with only eight women out of 50 members in the National Parliament.<sup>5</sup> Strong patriarchal practices, rooted in traditional norms and customs that give more power to men than to women, result in little to no participation of women in community-level decision making processes. Research conducted in 2014 found that 81 per cent of respondents agree that women are under-represented in formal leadership in Fiji, and 72 per cent think it would be better for the country if there were more women in national government. The majority of respondents identified cultural barriers (60 per cent), discrimination (59 per cent) and a lack of support at the community level (53 per cent) as the major reasons why fewer women than men stand for election, rather than due to a lack of education (15 per cent) or experience (19 per cent).<sup>6</sup>

## Economic Empowerment

After Vanuatu, Fiji has the highest labour force participation rate for men at 80 per cent, with women at just 46 per cent. The gender gap in labour force across the Pacific is highest in Fiji at 34 per cent, followed by Nauru (30 per cent), Tonga (21 per cent) and Vanuatu (20 per cent).

Women constitute more than 70 per cent of market vendors in Fiji<sup>7</sup> and actively participate in almost all aspects of agricultural production, including farming, marketing, food processing and distribution, and export processing. However, compared to the rest of the Pacific, Fiji and the Solomon Islands have the lowest number of women engaged in the non-agricultural sector at 33.2 per cent.<sup>8</sup> Approximately 800 women, compared with 4,300 men, are self-employed in the formal sector, highlighting the limited participation of women as business owners.<sup>9</sup>

Fijian laws accord its male and female citizens the same rights to inheritance,<sup>10</sup> as well as access to and ownership of land and fixed assets, but in reality control of benefits from these rights are inequitable between men and women. There are no laws that restrict women from accessing credit,

but lending institutions' requirement of a deposit in the amount of 20 per cent of the loan is prohibitive for women who have low income and who do not own assets that can be used as collateral.<sup>11</sup>

58 per cent of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) have a woman on their board. Of the 87 directors of these SOEs, only nine are women.<sup>12</sup>

### Ending Violence Against Women

Rates of physical and sexual violence against women in Fiji are among the highest in the world. 64 per cent of women aged 18 to 64 who have ever been in an intimate relationship report having experienced physical and/or sexual abuse by their husband or intimate partner.<sup>13</sup> Rates of emotional abuse are high and the majority of women do not report crimes related to domestic violence to the police. There is also an alarming prevalence of child sexual abuse, with 16 per cent of women reporting abuse when they were under the age of 15.<sup>14</sup>

### Enhancing Agency

The Government of Fiji has a strong commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, demonstrated by Fiji's signatory status to several international and regional policies.<sup>15</sup> The National Women's Plan of Action guides the Government's work on gender equality and women's empowerment. A National Gender Policy has been in place since 2014.

## Key Statistics

### Leadership and Decision Making

- **16 per cent** of Fiji's National Parliament is made up of women (8 out of 50 members).
- **32 per cent** of management and decision making positions are held by women.<sup>16</sup>

### Economic Empowerment

- **46 per cent** of women participate in the labour force (includes formal and informal economy).
- **34 per cent** gender gap in the labour force participation rate (male to female).

### Ending Violence Against Women

- **64 per cent** of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their partner in their lifetime.

### Agency

- Fiji has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- **38.3 per cent** is the contraceptive prevalence rate of women aged between 15-49.
- **109** is the Gender Parity Index for secondary school enrolment (gross) in 2014 - for every 100 boys enrolled, there were 109 girls enrolled.

*Note: Statistics in this section are from the [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste report unless otherwise stated.](#)*

## Partnership with *Pacific Women*

Through *Pacific Women*, the Australian Government will spend approximately AU\$26 million over ten years (2012-2022) on initiatives supporting gender equality and women's empowerment in Fiji. Approximately AU\$4.5 million has been spent delivering activities in-country (FY2012-2013 to FY2015-2016). More information on the partnership and nature of support is included in the [Pacific Women Fiji Country Plan Summary 2014-2017](#) valued at AU\$9.7 million. Details on activities currently underway in-country with various partners is available via our [interactive map](#). The list of program partners can be found [here](#). Fiji is also supported by *Pacific Women's* regional program, details of which can be viewed on the interactive map under regional activities.

### The Fiji Women's Fund

There is growing evidence that supporting women's organisations and the women's movement is the most effective way to achieve gender equality. The Fiji Women's Fund (The Fund) is an innovative activity under *Pacific Women*, which provides targeted grants and capacity building support to women's groups in Fiji in order to enhance and expand their work on women's empowerment and gender equality. One of the outcomes of The Fund is to transition to an independent local entity with secured resourcing from other donors, the private sector and local philanthropy by June 2022. For more information about The Fund contact Ms Michelle Reddy, Fund Manager on [Michelle.Reddy@womensfund.org.fj](mailto:Michelle.Reddy@womensfund.org.fj)

## Stories of Change

1. [Ra Naari Parishad – An Important Hub for the Women in Rakiraki](#)
2. [Harnessing the power of coalitions](#)

## Further Information

- [Fiji National Gender Policy](#)
- [Government of Fiji CEDAW Country Reports](#)
- [Fiji Shadow NGO CEDAW report](#)
- [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2012\) Fiji Gender Profile](#)
- [Asian Development Bank Fiji Country Gender Assessment 2015](#)
- [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#)
- [United Nations Statistics Division, Minimum Set of Gender Indicators](#)

<sup>1</sup>[Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development \(2015\) First Progress Report 2012-2015](#)

<sup>2</sup> [United Nations, Human Development Indicators 2015](#)

<sup>3</sup> [World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report \(2015\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#) as at 1 June 2017

<sup>6</sup> [International Women's Development Agency \(2013\) Public Perceptions of Women in Leadership: A research project of the Fiji Women's Forum](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Mix FM Radio Interview \(2016\) UN Women Markets for Change](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Fiji Country Gender Assessment Report](#)

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

[See Inheritance Family Provisions Act \(2004\), Art. 3](#) and [Succession, Probate and Administration Act \(revised 1985\), Art. 6](#)

<sup>11</sup> Property Law of Fiji, Art. 21 (1) and Married Women's Property Act, Art. 3 (1)

<sup>12</sup> [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, \(2013\), Somebody's Life, Everybody's Business! National Research on Women's Health and Life Experiences in Fiji \(2010/2011\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> For instance the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Pacific Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (and subsequent revisions); the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Jakarta Declaration for the Advancement of Women in Asia and the Pacific; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the Millennium Development Goals (and now the Sustainable Development Goals); the Commonwealth Plan for Gender Equality (2005–2015) and the Pacific Plan.

<sup>16</sup> Managerial positions include politicians, senior government officials, and corporate and general managers in the public and private sector.