

Enhancing Agency

Efforts to enhance women's agency need to work at multiple levels, to help create an enabling environment where a woman's right to make decisions about her own life is recognised, where women are economically empowered and where women and children are safe from all forms of violence.

This can be challenging in the Pacific, where social norms and attitudes are based on complex gendered hierarchies that keep women disempowered. Understanding these context specific norms is essential to achieving change. Formal structures, such as policy and legislative frameworks, also discriminate against women. For example, legal barriers exist in the majority of countries across the Pacific including laws that constrain women's ability to exercise their economic, social and political rights, as well as silent gaps in legislation, or references in legislation to discriminatory customary law. In particular, women face discrimination both informally and overtly, when it comes to land, marital property and inheritance.

In this context, amplifying women's voice and supporting their ability to act against this discrimination is critical. This is why *Pacific Women* is funding activities with a primary focus on enhancing agency and supporting an enabling environment. These include a large focus on research, with activities aimed at understanding the many dynamics contributing to gender inequality, so the program can collectively understand how best to address these complex problems. Other activities underway focus on building the capacity of national women's machineries and women's organisations to support legislative and policy reform. Enhancing agency also includes activities that support coalitions to build a local understanding of solutions for change and activities working with men. *Pacific Women* supports these activities in recognition that enhancing women's agency involves directly supporting catalytic women leaders, their organisations as well as coalitions for change.

Understanding what action can drive change, and who can catalyse change is important. An example of this work is a collaboration with the Pacific Leadership Program (PLP), where *Pacific Women* has identified women from civil society, government and the private sector who are already leading change in their communities, to undertake further training in adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership skills enable individuals and groups to thrive in complex environments, particularly those undergoing a gradual, but meaningful process of change.

Pacific Women's approach to enhancing agency recognises that change is already occurring, but often further support is needed to scale up and amplify this work. The We Rise Coalition is an example of this. Through *Pacific Women's* support, the We Rise Coalition was able to expand its work from a partnership of two organisations to a coalition of four organisations working across Fiji, Australia and the region. These four organisations work together as Pacific and Australian feminists, recognising that the whole is greater than the sum of their parts. Together, they have made progress on policy reform, human rights and women's leadership, as well contributing to a stronger regional women's movement.

For more information on *Pacific Women*-funded activities underway with various partners in this area, visit our [interactive map](#).