

# Leadership and Decision-Making

Supporting women’s leadership in the Pacific is key to reducing poverty, promoting economic growth and democracy and increasing the well-being of women, girls and their families. Greater gender equality, especially in leadership and decision-making, improves economic circumstances at the country, local and household levels. There is evidence that increasing representation of women in decision-making improves outcomes in health, education and other local services.<sup>1</sup>

The Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration emphasises the need to implement specific national policy actions to increase women’s participation in all levels of leadership and decision-making. Specific commitments include: to adopt measures, including temporary special measures (such as legislation to establish reserved seats for women and political party reforms) to accelerate women’s full and equal participation in governance reform and women’s leadership at all levels of decision-making; and to advocate for increased representation of women in private sector and local level governance boards and committees (such as school boards and produce market committees).<sup>2</sup>

Pacific scholars have attributed the continuing under-representation of women in politics in the region to a multitude of factors and barriers, including the pervasiveness of masculine political cultures<sup>3</sup>, the view that politics is ‘men’s work’<sup>4</sup>, electoral systems that tend to favour men, and women’s lack of access to election campaign financing.<sup>5</sup>

Women’s political participation currently comprises around 7.5 per cent in the Pacific<sup>6</sup> compared to a global average of around 23.6 per cent in the Lower House of Representatives.<sup>7</sup> The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) has never had a woman member of Parliament. Rates of women in local level government however, show higher representation at a regional average of 14.8 per cent.<sup>8</sup>

Number of Women in Pacific Parliaments			
Country	Number of Seats*	Women in Parliament	%
Cook Islands	24	4	16.6
FSM	14	0	0.0
Fiji	50	8	16.0
Kiribati	46	3	6.5
RMI	33	3	9.1
Nauru	19	2	10.5

<sup>1</sup> Duflo, E. and P. Topalova (2004). [Unappreciated Service: Performance, Perceptions, and Women Leaders in India](#), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> [Forty-third Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué, Raratonga, Cook Islands 28-30 August \(2012\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> A. McLeod (2002). Where are the women in Simbu Politics? Development Bulletin 59: pp.43-46.

<sup>4</sup> A. Pollard, A (2003). Women’s Organisations, Voluntarism and Self Financing in Solomon Islands: A Participant Perspective. Oceania, 74: pp. 44-60.

<sup>5</sup> S. Whittington., S. Ospina & A. Pollard (2006). Women in Government in Solomon Islands: A Diagnostic Study.

<sup>6</sup> [Pacific Women in Politics \(2017\)](#). This figure is only for the Lower House of Representatives and excludes Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>7</sup> [Inter-Parliamentary Union \(2017\) Single or Lower House](#).

<sup>8</sup> [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#).

Niue	20	5	25.0
Palau	29	4	13.7
PNG	111	3	2.7
Samoa	50	10	10.0
Solomon Islands	50	1	2.0
Tonga	26	1	3.8
Tuvalu	15	1	6.7
Vanuatu	52	0	0.0
*Lower or Single House. Data as at July 2017, from Pacific Women in Politics and Inter-Parliamentary Union			

Although progress has been slow, there are some signs of change.

For example, temporary special measures such as quotas have been used successfully in the region to increase women's representation at the sub-national level in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. In 2016, Samoa became the first country in the Pacific to legislate reserved seats for women (10 per cent) to promote gender balance in national legislatures. Quotas in leadership roles for women can help to ensure that women's perspectives are sufficiently represented in society. However, quotas will only work when there are safeguards to ensure that the women placed in these positions are representative of a wide cross-section of women.

While women are still under-represented in national parliaments, there is a higher participation of women in senior management in the public sector, with the regional average increasing from 11.3 per cent in 2012 to 14.8 per cent in 2016. Samoa and Fiji both have 44 per cent of women in senior roles, while Tonga has 38 per cent and Tuvalu around 32 per cent.<sup>9</sup> Representation of women on state-owned boards across the region stands at 27 per cent, with Samoa at 18 per cent, Tonga at 15 per cent, and Nauru at 14 per cent in 2016.<sup>10</sup>

Women with disabilities also face additional barriers to achieving gender equality, and are subjected to educational, social, cultural and economic disadvantages making it more difficult for them to take part in community life and take on leadership roles.

*Pacific Women* is helping to address these challenges by supporting strategic interventions to increase representation of women and women's interests. This include supporting regional and national coalitions made up of Pacific women and men who contribute to changing social norms about gender roles and encourage women to make their own decisions and advance their own views.

Other support includes targeted leadership interventions with young women, building their capacity and providing mentoring support; training for women candidates; mentoring opportunities for women Members of Parliament, and research that informs programming in this area.

UN Women's six-year multi-country Markets for Change (M4C) program is another example of a *Pacific Women* investment that is supporting women's decision-making, as well as building more inclusive markets that promote women's economic empowerment. The M4C program addresses women's effective representation in marketplace decision-making structures, through a number of activities, including its "Getting Started" workshops. As a result of these workshops, seventeen market vendor associations (MVAs) have been established (13) or strengthened (4) across Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji. Thirteen have more than 50 per cent women in leadership positions, and women

<sup>9</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2016) [Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#).

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

head nine. The MVAs reported a total of 7,946 members across the three countries, of which 6,334 or 79.7 per cent are women.<sup>11</sup>

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

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<sup>11</sup> UNWomen Markets for Change (M4C) Third Progress Report January-Dec 2016