

Regional

'If you want something you've never had, you have to do something you've never done'.

Ms Dorosday Kenneth, Director, Department of Women's Affairs Vanuatu.¹

The Pacific region is vast and culturally diverse. Pacific Island Countries face many common challenges, mostly related to geographic isolation, small dispersed populations and limited natural resources.²

Pacific women are innovative, resilient and industrious. Despite experiencing high levels of violence from partners and family members, a lack of economic and leadership opportunities and unequal power relations in their everyday lives, Pacific women have made significant contributions to the region. There is a growing recognition among governments and the private sector that investing in women and girls has a powerful effect on economic growth and wellbeing.³

Leadership and Decision Making

Women's political representation in the Pacific is the lowest in the world. Traditional beliefs about gender roles, women's limited social capital, and a lack of support from political bodies has been identified as restricting progress towards fuller participation of women in public life.⁴

The Inter-Parliamentary Union reports the world average of elected members to be 23.6 per cent for women⁵ but in the Pacific the proportion of women in National Parliaments is 7.5 per cent (excluding Australia and New Zealand).⁶ However, rates of women in local level government however show higher representation at a regional average of 14.8 per cent.⁷

Women show significantly higher participation in senior management and decision making positions in both the public and private sector. Latest statistics from the Asian Development Bank show strong representation from women in management positions in Cook Islands (48 per cent), Samoa (47 per cent), Niue (38 per cent), Kiribati (36 per cent) and Nauru (36 per cent).⁸

Economic Empowerment

Across the Pacific, men outnumber women in paid employment outside the agricultural sector by approximately two to one.⁹ Countries with the highest proportion of women employed in the non-agricultural sector include Cook Islands (47.3 per cent), Kiribati (47.4 per cent) and Tonga (47.9 per cent).¹⁰

Many countries rely on the agriculture sector, with a large proportion of men and women engaged in subsistence work, particularly those in rural areas.¹¹ For example, it is estimated that 80 per cent of households in Papua New Guinea and more than 75 per cent of the population in Vanuatu rely on the informal economy.¹²

The Pacific is one of the least banked regions in the world. In some Pacific countries, it is estimated that less than 10 per cent of the population have access to basic financial services.¹³ Compared to men, Pacific women are further excluded from formal financial systems. This is due to lower awareness, information and access to financial tools and products.¹⁴

Ending Violence Against Women

Entrenched cultural and social norms continue to contribute to the stereotype that violence against women is acceptable.¹⁵

Anecdotal evidence suggests there has been progress, albeit uneven, in providing services for survivors of violence, with a number of regional studies paving the way for a much deeper understanding of the issues related to access to services in respective countries of study.

Eleven Pacific Island Countries¹⁶ have conducted national prevalence studies on violence against women. These studies have found prevalence rates in the Pacific to be higher than most other countries of the world.¹⁷ Data indicates that nearly two-thirds of women in Kiribati (68 per cent), Fiji (64 per cent), and Solomon Islands (64 per cent) have lifetime experience of physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. The rates are also high in Vanuatu (60 per cent), Republic of the Marshall Islands (51 per cent), and Nauru (48 per cent). Emotional violence by an intimate partner is also widespread, with the two highest lifetime rates in Vanuatu (68 per cent) and Fiji (58 per cent).¹⁸

Enhancing Agency

Most Pacific Island Countries have national gender policies, but the human and financial resources dedicated to their implementation are often insufficient.¹⁹

All but two Pacific Island Countries have ratified²⁰ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which is a commitment by States to undertake all appropriate measures to ensure the full development and advancement of women.²¹

At the 2012 Pacific Island Forum Leaders meeting, leaders expressed their deep concern about the status of women and girls in the region. This concern moved all to endorse the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, a Declaration that supports the political, social and economic advancement of women and girls.²²

Key Statistics

Leadership and Decision Making

- **7.5 per cent** women's representation in 14 Forum Island Countries National Parliaments.²³
- **14.8 per cent** women's representation in 14 Forum Island Countries Local Governments.²⁴
- **34.2 per cent** is the regional average for senior management positions held by women in the public sector.²⁵

Economic Empowerment

- Less than 10 per cent (estimate) of the population have access to basic financial services.²⁶
- Across the Pacific, men outnumber women in paid employment (outside the agricultural sector) by approximately two to one.²⁷

Ending Violence Against Women

- More than **60 per cent of surveyed women and girls** in most Pacific countries have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or family member.²⁸

Enhancing Agency

- All 14 Forum Island Countries, except two, have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.²⁹

Pacific Women

Through *Pacific Women*, the Australian Government will spend approximately AU\$96 million over ten years (2012-2022) on regional and multi-country initiatives supporting gender equality and women's empowerment. Approximately AU\$35.8 million has been spent delivering activities during the period FY2012-2013 to FY2015-2016. More information on partnerships and the scope of support is included in the [Pacific Women Regional Activities Summary 2013-2016](#). Details on activities currently underway with various partners is available via our [interactive map](#). The list of program partners can be found [here](#).

Stories of Change

1. [Understanding women's political and administrative leadership in the Pacific](#)
2. [Improving the marketing and financial literacy of market vendors](#)
3. [Making our families safe through collective action at the provincial level](#)
4. [Empowering women and girls with disabilities](#)

Further Information

- [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#)
- [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste](#)
- [United Nations Statistics Division, Minimum Set of Gender Indicators](#)

¹ Regional CSO Leadership Dialogue held at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (August 2017).

² [DFAT \(2012\) Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Design Document, Canberra.](#)

³ [DFAT, Development Assistance in the Pacific.](#)

⁴ SPC (2015) Beijing +20: Review of Progress in Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Pacific Island Countries and Territories. Noumea.

⁵ [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#). Figure is for the Lower House of Representative only as at 1 July 2017.

⁶ [Pacific Women in Politics](#) as at May 2017.

⁷ [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016.](#)

⁸ [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste](#). Managerial positions include politicians, senior government officials, and corporate and general managers in the public and private sector.

⁹ [DFAT, Development Assistance in the Pacific.](#)

¹⁰ [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste.](#)

¹¹ [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste.](#)

¹² Nagarajan V (2016). Women and Business: Policy Options for the Economic Empowerment of Pacific Women, Asian Development Bank.

¹³ [Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme \(2013\).](#)

¹⁴ [Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme: PFIP & Gender \(2017\).](#)

¹⁵ [Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. \(2013\). Somebody's Life, Everybody's Business! National Research on Women's Health and Life Experiences in Fiji. \(2010/2011\).](#)

¹⁶ Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu have undertaken national violence against women prevalence research based on the survey approach developed by the World Health Organisation.

¹⁷ [SPC Secretariat of the Pacific Community. \(2015\). Beijing +20: Review of progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Pacific Island Countries and Territories. Noumea. p.12.](#)

¹⁸ [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste.](#)

¹⁹ [SPC Secretariat of the Pacific Community. \(2015\). Beijing +20: Review of progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Pacific Island Countries and Territories. Noumea.](#)

²⁰ Palau has signed but not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Tonga has neither signed nor ratified.

²¹ Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2015. Review of the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005-2015. Noumea.

²² [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2012. Forty-Third Pacific Island Forum. Forum Communiqué.](#)

²³ [Pacific Women in Politics](#) as at May 2017 and excluding Australia and New Zealand.

²⁴ [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016.](#)

²⁵ [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016.](#)

²⁶ [Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme \(2013\).](#)

²⁷ [DFAT. Development Assistance in the Pacific.](#)

²⁸ [DFAT. Development Assistance in the Pacific.](#) This statistic is only inclusive of countries that have undertaken national violence against women prevalence research in the Pacific.

²⁹ [SPC Secretariat of the Pacific Community. \(2015\). Beijing +20: Review of progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Pacific Island Countries and Territories. Noumea](#)