



Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development

Republic of the Marshall Islands Country Plan Summary

Background

Through a 10-year commitment, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*) connects more than 170 gender equality initiatives supported by Australia and implemented by over 160 partners across 14 Pacific Island countries.

Pacific Women is one of the largest global commitments to gender equality. It partners with governments, local and international non-government organisations (NGOs), private sector, disabled people's organisations, coalitions and others to improve the political, economic and social opportunities of Pacific women and to end violence against women and girls. Its emphasis is on partnerships and locally-driven development.

Providing technical, knowledge sharing and convening support to the portfolio of partners is *Pacific Women's* Support Unit, working to improve the long-term impact of gender equality projects in the Pacific. The Support Unit's office is in Suva, Fiji, with a sub-office in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

Pacific Women was announced at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' meeting in August 2012. It commits up to AUD320 million over 10 years in 14 Pacific Islands Forum member countries.

Pacific Women initiatives respond to the commitments in the 2012 Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration, while also supporting Australia's Pacific Step-up and its Partnerships for Recovery approach of working together with Pacific partners to address COVID-19 impacts on women, girls and their communities.

The outcomes sought through *Pacific Women* are:

- **Ending Violence against Women:** Violence against women is reduced and survivors of violence have access to support services and to justice.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Women have expanded economic opportunities to earn an income and accumulate economic assets.
- **Leadership and Decision Making:** Women, and women's interests, are increasingly and effectively represented and visible through leadership at all levels of decision making.
- **Enhancing Agency:** Women in the Pacific will have a stronger sense of their own agency, supported by a changing legal and social environment and through increased access to the services they need.

Since 2012, an estimated 1.22 million Pacific Island women, men and children have been able to access services and information across 14 partner countries through initiatives supported by *Pacific Women*.



Republic of the Marshall Islands

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) has a population of around 53,000 people across 24 coral atolls in the North Pacific. Almost 75 per cent of the population live in the urban centres of Majuro and Ebeye. Population growth and urban migration place pressure on basic services, infrastructure and potable water in these areas. On the outer islands, public services and infrastructure are much less developed. Communities are generally subsistence-based with families producing copra for cash.

The RMI Government has begun to address gender as a development issue, for example through a National Gender Mainstreaming Policy released in 2014. There has been progress, especially in introducing legislation, but room to improve in implementation and monitoring. Gender Focal Points are being introduced to accelerate gender mainstreaming.

Pacific Women Country Plan

Through *Pacific Women*, the Australian Government will spend approximately **\$3.9 million over 10 years** (2012–2022) on initiatives supporting women’s empowerment in RMI.

Country Plans are the mechanism through which *Pacific Women* outcomes and activities are planned and agreed between DFAT and counterpart governments, following extensive national consultations. They provide detail on what will be funded and how these funding decisions are made. The first three-year RMI Country Plan was implemented from 2014–2016. The first Country Plan funded the establishment of a domestic violence counselling service, *Weto in Mour*, operated by local non-government organisation Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI). The first Country Plan also provided capacity support to WUTMI to continue to drive change for Marshallese women.

The Second Country Plan (2019–2022) has two objectives:

- Reduce violence against women and expand support services.
- Expand women’s economic empowerment.

The second Country Plan supports WUTMI to continue its *Weto in Mour* support services, including quarterly visits to Ebeye. Communities will be given opportunities to participate in WUTMI’s prevention activities, including campaigns, awareness materials, education in schools and media communications. This will give communities increased awareness and knowledge that violence against women and girls is unacceptable and is a crime. The second Country Plan also supports WUTMI to develop, improve and utilise linkages with relevant services and *Domestic Violence Protection and Prevention Act 2011* stakeholders.

The second Country Plan will support Marshall Islands Service Corporation the Chamber of Commerce and the Handicraft Association to work together to expand and grow the handicraft industry. An assessment of the Marshallese handicraft industry will look at the potential to grow and export products, identify current bottlenecks in the industry and necessary changes to relevant policies and programs. Technical support and training in management will be provided to the handicraft industry, including support around large orders from overseas. The second Country Plan will support development of a Handicraft Growth and Export Strategy that guides new private and public sector programs to support and enable women’s economic empowerment.



A *Pacific Women*-funded Capacity Development Adviser: Gender-Based Violence based in Chuuk in the Federated States of Micronesia will work both with the Chuuk Women's Council and WUTMI. Through quarterly visits to RMI, the Adviser will support WUTMI to develop of minimum standards for psychosocial support systems, maintain professional practice in Weto in Mour and facilitate learning exchange opportunities between Chuuk Women's Council and Weto in Mour.

In addition to *Pacific Women*, DFAT makes an important contribution to gender equality in RMI through mainstreaming gender outcomes in the aid program, as well as through political, diplomatic and corporate activities.

Rationale for activities in the Country Plan

(a) Increasing women's leadership and decision making

In February 2016, a first for a Pacific Island country, the RMI government elected a female president. Her Excellency President Hilda Heine was president until January 2020. Nevertheless, women in RMI are still underrepresented in political decision making with one of the lowest rates of representation at the legislative level internationally. Women also remain underrepresented in local government council seats. Other important decision-making structures, including the religious, private and judicial spheres are also male dominated.

(b) Increasing economic opportunities for women

There is a large gender gap in labour participation and income. The 2011 census found that 48 per cent of men work for pay or profit compared to 26 per cent of women.¹ A 2015 Employer Skills Needs Survey showed that women's unemployment far exceeds men's in almost every age group (except 15–24 years).² Women's employment in the public service increased between 2012–2014, with 43 per cent of public servants being women.³

A 2012 survey found that the proportion of women in self-employment without employees is twice as high (15.2 per cent) as that of men (7.9 per cent).⁴ Women engaged in income-generating activities outside the public sector are primarily involved in the cultural industry, food production and processing, or handicraft making. This income is particularly vital for families in outer islands due to scarce job opportunities outside the urban centres.

(c) Reducing violence against women and expanding support services

The 2015 Family Health and Safety Survey reported that 48 per cent of ever-partnered women in the RMI have experienced physical violence in their lifetime. The Survey reported that 65 per cent respondents agreed that a man could beat his wife if she didn't complete the housework and 38 per cent agreed that a man could beat his wife if she refused sex.⁵

The *Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act* 2011 makes domestic violence a crime and introduced protections for survivors. Some progress in implementing the Act has been made, including establishing the police domestic violence unit, but most law enforcement officials still have little knowledge of the content of the Act.⁶ Women find it difficult to access the court system due to issues such as: cost of legal services; difficulties in obtaining information; difficulty obtaining time off work to pursue a case; geographic remoteness and fear of further violence.⁷

¹ Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, *Republic of the Marshall Islands 2011 National Census*.

² National Training Council, 2015. *Employer Skills Needs Survey*, National Training Council.

³ Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, 2014. *2014 Public Sector Commission Annual Report*.

⁴ Haberkorn Gerald and Juan Borja, 2017. *2012 Republic of the Marshall Islands Labor Force Survey*.

⁵ Women United Together Marshall Islands, 2014. *Family Health and Safety Survey*.

⁶ Women United Together Marshall Islands and Youth to Youth in Health, 2017. *Shadow Report to the UN Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination Against Women*.

⁷ Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, 2016. *State Report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women*.





WUTMI opened the first ever national support service to address violence against women and girls, Weto in Mour, in 2016.

(d) Enhancing women's agency

WUTMI is the civil society organisation that has been a key champion of women's rights and empowerment over the last 20 years. WUTMI has been involved in supporting gender equality and human rights, including through training for improved parenting skills, gender and leadership programs and resource management projects. WUTMI advocated for the *Domestic Violence Protection and Prevention Act 2011* and has established the crisis support service Weto in Mour.

An organisational review of WUTMI found that it has the respect of government and non-government organisations in the RMI and works collaboratively with these stakeholders. WUTMI's membership includes 22 chapters, covering all the country's atolls and outer islands. This gives WUTMI extensive access to remote and vulnerable communities.

Table 1: Bilateral Activities

PROJECT NAME AND PARTNER	DESCRIPTION	BUDGET
Outcome: Ending Violence against Women		
Iden Mwekun (referring to Marshallese women's resilience) Program (Women United Together Marshall Islands - WUTMI)	Providing core funding and organisational strengthening support to improve governance and operations. Funding the ending violence against women program, which includes the first domestic violence support centre in the Republic of the Marshall Islands.	\$550,000 (2019–2022) \$100,300 (2018) \$414,649 (2015–2017)
Support to the Micronesian Women's Conference, August 2017	Funded appropriate representation from all Micronesian member countries to attend the Micronesian Women's Conference in Majuro, the Republic of the Marshall Islands.	\$40,000 (2017)
Technical assistance to Women United Together Marshall Islands (PACTAM, Women United Together Marshall Islands)	Provided technical assistance through an adviser who supported the design of a domestic violence support service for women and girls in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Delivered capacity building for Women United Together Marshall Islands staff to provide rights-based support to women and girl survivors of violence.	\$200,558 (2015–2017)
Establish a domestic violence support service (WUTMI)	Enabled wide community consultation on the design of a culturally appropriate domestic violence support service for women and girls in the Republic of the Marshall Islands.	\$80,000 (2014–2016)
Outcome: Economic Empowerment		
Expand women's economic empowerment (Marshall Islands Service Corporation)	Assessing the Marshallese handicraft industry, including its potential to grow and export products.	\$200,000 (2019–2022)
Outcome: Enhancing Agency		
Organisational capacity development and strategic planning (<i>Pacific Women Support Unit</i>)	Undertook a capacity assessment of Women United Together Marshall Islands to identify organisational capacity development needs and explore future opportunities for partnership.	\$7,970 (2015–2016)



Table 2: Regional Programs with Activities in RMI

PROJECT NAME AND PARTNER	DESCRIPTION	BUDGET ⁸
Outcome: Leadership and Decision Making		
Pacific Women Parliamentary Partnerships Project (Australian International and Community Relations Office, Department of the House of Representatives)	Supported building the capacity of Pacific women parliamentarians and their staff to ensure gender equality issues are better addressed in parliament.	\$2,850,037 (2013–2018)
Outcome: Economic Empowerment		
Building prosperity for women producers, processors and women owned businesses through organic value chains (The Pacific Community (SPC) POETCom)	Identifying and supporting organic value chains that benefit women as producers, suppliers, processors and entrepreneurs whilst also enhancing their capacity for inter-regional organic trade within the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and Kiribati.	\$3,884,100 (2018–2022)
Outcome: Ending Violence against Women		
Women's Crisis Centre Programs to Eliminate Violence against Women in Fiji and the Pacific (Fiji Women's Crisis Centre)	Funding the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre's regional activities, including: the Regional Training Program; the Male Advocates Program; and the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women.	\$2,250,000 (2016–2020)
Support to Pacific Community Regional Rights Resource Team (The Pacific Community (SPC))	Supporting work on ending violence against women, human rights and good governance with Pacific Island governments and civil society organisations. Providing technical assistance and training. Advocating for women and girls to have increased access to justice for domestic violence and to promote and protect human rights commitments.	\$5,750,000 (2015–2020)
UNICEF Pacific Child Protection Program	Worked across 14 Pacific Island Countries to strengthening protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation.	\$7,000,000 (2014–2018)
Outcome: Enhancing Agency		
Gender Adviser for the North Pacific (The Pacific Community (SPC))	Supported the work of the Pacific Community's Gender, Culture and Youth Programme and supported implementation and monitoring of Pacific Women activities in the North Pacific.	\$391,740 (2015–2018)
Progressing Gender Equality in the Pacific (The Pacific Community (SPC))	Phase one (completed) conducted stocktakes of Pacific Island governments' capacity to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into policies, legislation and programs and strengthened the collection and analysis of data to better track outcomes. Phase two is supporting Pacific Island countries to adopt evidence-informed policies and legislation that promote gender equality and women's human rights.	\$3,941,712 (2013–2018) \$5,494,203 (2019–2023)

⁸ This allocation is not for RMI alone but for multiple countries under *Pacific Women*.
