



Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development

Republic of the Marshall Islands Country Plan Summary

Background

Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*) was announced by the Australian Government at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' meeting in August 2012. It commits up to \$320 million over 10 years in 14 Pacific Islands Forum member countries. The program aims to improve opportunities for the political, economic and social advancement of Pacific women. *Pacific Women* will support countries to meet the commitments they made in the 2012 Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration. The outcomes sought by *Pacific Women* are:

- Women, and women's interests, are increasingly and effectively represented and visible through leadership at all levels of decision making.
- Women have expanded economic opportunities to earn an income and accumulate economic assets.
- Violence against women is reduced and survivors of violence have access to support services and to justice.
- 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.

Pacific Women is managed by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and works with a wide range of implementing partners, including the 14 partner governments, multilateral organisations, international and national non-government organisations, civil society organisations and the private sector.

The *Pacific Women* Support Unit provides technical and administrative services to assist in the management of the program, including planning, delivery and monitoring of activities, research and communications. The Support Unit is based in Suva, Fiji, with a sub-office in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

Republic of the Marshall Islands

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is a matrilineal society where the primary rights to land parcels are held collectively by members of the *bwij*, mother's clan, who have the permanent authority on the land. However, men are usually delegated the authority to exercise and control these rights.

Although Ms Hilda Heine made history when she was elected the first woman president of any independent Pacific Island nation, participation of women at the national decision making level remains limited, with women being under-represented in the legislative and executive branches of government. Customary norms, stereotypes of women's roles and the lack of public awareness



about election processes limit women's opportunities to be appointed to leadership positions at the national level.

RMI has the second youngest population in the Pacific. Teen fertility and youth unemployment remain high. Overall, women's economic participation is described as low. It is estimated that one in three women is employed formally.

The government has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, although reporting under these treaties has been irregular. RMI has endorsed several key international and regional policy frameworks containing commitments to gender equality such as the Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration. The government has a National Gender Policy.

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 the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

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. It was developed following an in-country design mission in April 2013 to complement existing programs that contribute to gender equality in RMI. Consultations were held with government ministries, development partners, non-government organisations, civil society organisations, business stakeholders as well as discussions with women. Unfortunately, the design team was not able to visit remote outer atolls.

The Country Plan funded the establishment of a domestic violence counselling service operated by local non-government organisation Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI). The Country Plan also provided capacity support to WUTMI, so that it can continue to drive change for women.

A Country Plan review took place during February 2018 and the Country Plan is currently being updated to document future *Pacific Women* activities in RMI.

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

The design consultations indicated that Marshallese women are key drivers of change, particularly when groups work together to create momentum. WUTMI, other smaller civil society organisations and the Ministry of Internal Affairs have a history of collaborating closely and building agreement on the priority issues. There is broad concern about domestic violence and that priority needs to be given to establishing critical services, commencing with counselling. Consultations also highlighted that WUTMI, a long standing and well-respected women's organisation in the RMI, requires assistance with capacity support and reliable financing of core work to continue its strong work in driving institutional and social change.



(a) Increasing women's leadership and decision making

Women continue to be underrepresented in formal decision making at a senior governance level, but there have been notable achievements in recent years. At the RMI elections in November 2015, five of the 98 candidates were women (5 per cent of total candidates). Three women won their seats, including the Hon. Hilda E. Heine who was appointed President. The three women account for 9 per cent of the total 33 seats in the Nitijela. There is also a growing number of women in the public service with increasing numbers of women in other senior level positions.¹

(b) Increasing economic opportunities for women

A 2008 International Labour Organization study showed that the gender gap in RMI remains large in labour participation, income and women's access to productive resources, credit, and livelihood opportunities.² Two thirds of men were in the formal economy compared to a third of women. The growth rates of the working age population and the labour force are outpacing job growth, leaving the RMI with high rates of unemployment. Youth unemployment is high (63 per cent) and is particularly high among female youth (67 per cent).³ The 2006 RMI Community Survey shows a strong urban-rural divide. Remoteness, poor transport and limited access to markets and services are the primary causes of high levels of poverty in the outer islands.

(c) Reducing violence against women and expanding support services

Data from the 2014 RMI National Study on Family Health and Safety shows that 48 per cent of women in RMI have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime and 21 per cent reported experiencing at least one act of sexual violence in their lifetime.⁴

(d) Enhancing women's agency

WUTMI is the umbrella organisation for women's nongovernmental organisations in RMI. It works closely with the Ministry of Internal Affairs on gender-related work and the organisation is very strong in its community outreach and community capacity building work. WUTMI has branches on all the atolls and outer islands. This means that the organisation has links that are crucial to the full involvement of women in development processes.

Work that WUTMI has been involved in includes training for improving parenting skills, gender and leadership programs, resource management projects, programs involving parents as teachers, and considerable work on violence against women. They have also contributed to the development of CEDAW-compliant legislation.

¹ SPC, 2012, Stocktake of Gender Mainstreaming capacity, RMI.

² Duncan, R. and Carmen Voigt-Graf, C. 2008. Labour market scenarios, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, ILO, Asia Pacific Working paper series.

³ UNDP. 2009. Marshall Islands MDG Report p 16–18.

⁴ Republic of the Marshall Islands Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Republic of the Marshall Islands National Study on Family Health and Safety* (2014).



Table 1: Bilateral Activities

PROJECT NAME AND PARTNER	DESCRIPTION	BUDGET
Outcome: Ending Violence against Women		
<i>Iden Mwekun</i> (referring to Marshallese women's resilience) Program (Women United Together Marshall Islands - WUTMI)	Providing core funding and organisational strengthening support to WUTMI to improve governance and operations. This project also provides funding to WUTMI's ending violence against women program, which includes the first domestic violence support centre in RMI.	\$100,300 (2018) \$414,649 (2015–2017)
Support to the Micronesian Women's Conference, August 2017	Funding provided to ensure appropriate representation from all Micronesian member countries to attend the Micronesian Women's Conference in Majuro, RMI.	\$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 Republic of the Marshall Islands and delivered capacity building for Women United Together Marshall Islands staff to enable them 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: 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 ⁵
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 the 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 (Pacific Community POETCom)	Identifying and supporting organic value chains that benefit women as producers, suppliers, processors and entrepreneurs, while 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 for the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre's regional activities, including: FWCC's 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 (Pacific Community)	Supporting work to end violence against women, human rights and good governance, RRRT works with Pacific island governments and civil society organisations by providing technical assistance, training and 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	Supporting governments in 14 Pacific Island countries to strengthen the protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation.	\$7,000,000 (2014–2018)
Outcome: Enhancing Agency		
Gender Adviser for the North Pacific (Pacific Community)	The Adviser supports the work of SPC's Gender, Culture and Youth Programme, and through DFAT's Post in Pohnpei, supports the implementation and monitoring of Pacific Women activities in the North Pacific.	\$391,740 (2015–2018)
Progressing Gender Equality in the Pacific (Pacific Community)	Conduct stocktakes and support for the strengthening of government capacity to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into policies, legislation and programs and improve the collection and analysis of data to better track outcomes.	\$3,941,712 (2013–2018) \$5,494,203 (2019–2023)

⁵This allocation is not for RMI alone but for multiple countries under *Pacific Women*.

