

Economic Empowerment

Women in the Pacific make significant contributions to their country's economies. There is a growing recognition among Governments and in the private sector that investing in women and girls has a powerful effect on productivity, efficiency and economic growth.ⁱ

Higher income for women and increased control over income leads to increased spending on food and education resulting in improved outcomes for children's education, health and nutrition, and leads to greater sustained poverty reduction.ⁱⁱ

It is estimated closing gender gaps in labour force participation rate by 25 per cent could add as much as USD3.2 trillion to the overall Asia-Pacific GDP.ⁱⁱⁱ By eliminating barriers to women's full participation in certain sectors or occupations, labour productivity could be increased by as much as 25 per cent in some countries through better allocation of skills and talent.^{iv}

A 2018 study found that although proprietors, executives and employees in Pacific exporting businesses are mostly men, there is a gradual increase in the proportion of women across all roles. Currently, 32 per cent are either CEOs or proprietors, 41 per cent are executives and 49 per cent are employees.^v

In Solomon Islands, the annual turnover at the Honiara Central Market is between USD10–16 million, with women responsible for about 90 per cent of this marketing activity as both bulk buyers and retailers.^{vi} In Samoa, 80 per cent of the private sector is comprised of micro businesses, of which women are estimated to head over 40 per cent.^{vii}

Research also shows that if women had the same access to credit, markets and technology as men, the returns to women, particularly in the informal sector, would significantly increase.^{viii}

Across the Pacific, men outnumber women in paid employment (outside the agricultural sector) by approximately two to one.^{ix} In no Pacific country do women outweigh men in employment. 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).^x

In Melanesia, women occupy only a third of jobs within the formal economy, and men typically earn 20 to 50 per cent more than women because they are working in jobs that attract higher salaries.^{xi} In Papua New Guinea, although labour participation rates are relatively even,^{xii} more women are engaged in subsistence farming than men.^{xiii} Crops are cultivated separately by women and men, who reap different rewards with women's crops earning half that of men's.^{xiv}

The 2012 Economist Intelligence Unit's Women's Economic Opportunity Index places both the Solomon Islands and PNG in the bottom five countries in the world (124 and 125 respectively out of 128). The highest ranked Pacific Island Country – Fiji – is ranked only 81 and performs below the global average in every category and on most indicators.^{xv}

In addition, economically active women suffer from an unequal burden of work because they also have responsibilities for home and family and community. In Papua New Guinea, women work on average nearly twice as many hours as men. In Tonga, women work over 50 per cent longer than men on non-economic activities each week. In Fiji, in 2015–2016, women working for wages or salaries spent on average 24 hours a week on household work, while men spent 10 hours.^{xvi}

Women with disabilities are often subjected to double discrimination due to their gender and disability status and continue to be at a disadvantage in most spheres of society and development. Employment rates for women with disabilities are significantly lower than those for men with disabilities in most countries in Asia and the Pacific.^{xvii} Available data suggests that the gender gap is even wider compared with men without disabilities, with women with disabilities being two times less likely to be employed. Among those employed, women with disabilities are two times less likely to work as legislators, senior officials or managers.

Access to livelihood opportunities is fundamental to break this cycle.

While *Pacific Women* supports the transition of women into the formal economy, women are likely to continue to work largely in the informal economy. Barriers that women face in benefiting from the economy, particularly the informal economy, include lack of social and legal protections, and the absence of voice in decision making around policies and legislation.^{xviii} This is why *Pacific Women* seeks to support activities that look at how regulations, policies and services, as well as social norms, affect how women gain from and influence both the formal and informal economies.

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

ⁱ UN News Centre (2010). [Women's Empowerment Vital for Economic Development and Peace, Migiro says](#)", 17 May, citing UN Deputy Secretary General Asha Rose Migiro.

ⁱⁱ World Bank (2011). *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*. Washington.

ⁱⁱⁱ International Labour Organization (2018). [Game Changers: Women and work in Asia and the Pacific](#).

^{iv} D. Cubers & M. Teignier Baqué (2011), 'Gender Inequality and Economic Growth' – background paper for the WDR 2012, as cited in WDR 2012, p.47

^v Pacific Islands Export Survey 2018, p.14 https://www.pacifictradeinvest.com/media/1296/full-report-pti-australia-pacific-islands-export-survey-2018_web2.pdf

^{vi} International Finance Corporation in Partnership with AusAID (2010). *Economic Opportunities for Women in the Pacific*, p1.

^{vii} S. Hedditch & C. Manuel, C (2010). [Gender and Investment Climate Reform Assessment, Pacific Regional Executive Summary, International Finance Cooperation](#), p.2.

^{viii} OECD (2012). *Women's Economic Empowerment: The OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality*

^{ix} DFAT. [Development assistance in the Pacific](#).

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

^{xi} AusAID (2012). *Women's Economic Empowerment in the Pacific: Gender Situation Analysis*, Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra.

^{xii} Asian Development Bank (2016) [Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste](#).

^{xiii} Pacific Community (SPC) [Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments \(2012\) Papua New Guinea](#).

^{xiv} World Bank et al (2013) *Papua New Guinea Country Gender Assessment 2011–2012*.

^{xv} D. Cubers & M. Teignier Baqué (2011), 'Gender Inequality and Economic Growth' – background paper for the WDR 2012, as cited in WDR 2012, p.47

^{xvi} *Women's Economic Empowerment in the Pacific: Regional Overview* (SPC, August 2017).

^{xvii} *Disability at a Glance 2015* p.8

^{xviii} V. Nagarajan (2016). *Women and Business: Policy options for the economic empowerment of women*, p.7.