

## Leadership and Decision Making

Supporting women’s leadership in the Pacific is key to reducing poverty, promoting economic growth and democracy and increasing the wellbeing of women, girls and their families. Enhanced representation of women in all levels of decision making can raise awareness, influence political agendas to respond to the needs of all and support more gender-responsive legal frameworks.<sup>i</sup>

Greater gender equality in leadership and decision making improves economic circumstances at household and national levels. It can support more inclusive economic, health and education policies, enhanced social safety nets and more inclusive service provision.<sup>ii</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>iii</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, the view that politics is ‘men’s work’, electoral systems that tend to favour men and women’s lack of access to election campaign financing.<sup>iv</sup>

Women’s political participation currently comprises around 8.2 per cent in the Pacific,<sup>v</sup> compared to a global average of around 24.3 per cent in the Lower House of Representatives.<sup>vi</sup> The Federated States of Micronesia has never had a woman member of Parliament. There are also no women elected to parliament in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. Rates of women in local-level government however show higher representation at a regional average of 14.8 per cent.<sup>vii</sup>

Number of Women in Pacific Parliaments			
Country	Number of Seats*	Number of women in parliament	Per cent
Cook Islands	24	6	25.0
Federated States of Micronesia	14	0	0.0
Fiji	51	10	16.0
Kiribati	46	3	6.5
Republic of the Marshall Islands	33	2	6.1
Nauru	19	2	10.5
Niue	20	5	25.0
Palau	29	4	13.7

Papua New Guinea	111	0	0.0
Samoa	50	5	10.0
Solomon Islands	50	3	6.0
Tonga	26	3	11.5
Tuvalu	15	1	6.7
Vanuatu	52	0	0.0
*Lower or Single House. Data as at November 2019, from <a href="#">Pacific Women in Politics</a>			

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, the 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>viii</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>ix</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. There is limited data available on women with disabilities in political leadership roles. However, existing information suggests that they account for a mere 0.1 per cent of national parliamentarians (or equivalent) across 17 countries and areas in the Asia and Pacific region.<sup>x</sup> This equates to only 18 parliamentarians with disabilities among a total of 4,960 parliamentarians (or the equivalent) in upper and lower houses.<sup>xi</sup> Inclusive decision making in terms of political participation such as being able to vote and to be elected for office is also restricted due to discriminatory laws and limited accessibility to most polling stations across the region.<sup>xii</sup>

*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.

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>i</sup> J. Ballington and A. Karam. Eds. (2009). Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, p.17. Retrieved: <http://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/women-parliament-beyond-numbers-revised-edition>.)

<sup>ii</sup> E. Duflo and P. Topalova (2004). Unappreciated Service: Performance, Perceptions, and Women Leaders in India. Mimeo, MIT, p. 12.)

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

<sup>iv</sup> Government of Australia. 2017. Pacific Women in Leadership Synthesis Report: Informing the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Roadmap 2017 – 2022.

<sup>v</sup> [Pacific Women in Politics \(as at 30 August 2019\)](#). This figure excludes Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>vi</sup> [Inter-Parliamentary Union \(As at 1 April 2019\) Single or Lower House](#).

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

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

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

<sup>x</sup> Building Disability-Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific, UNESCAP 2018, p.ii

<sup>xi</sup> Building Disability-Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific, UNESCAP 2018, p.iv

<sup>xii</sup> UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development, 2018 p.40