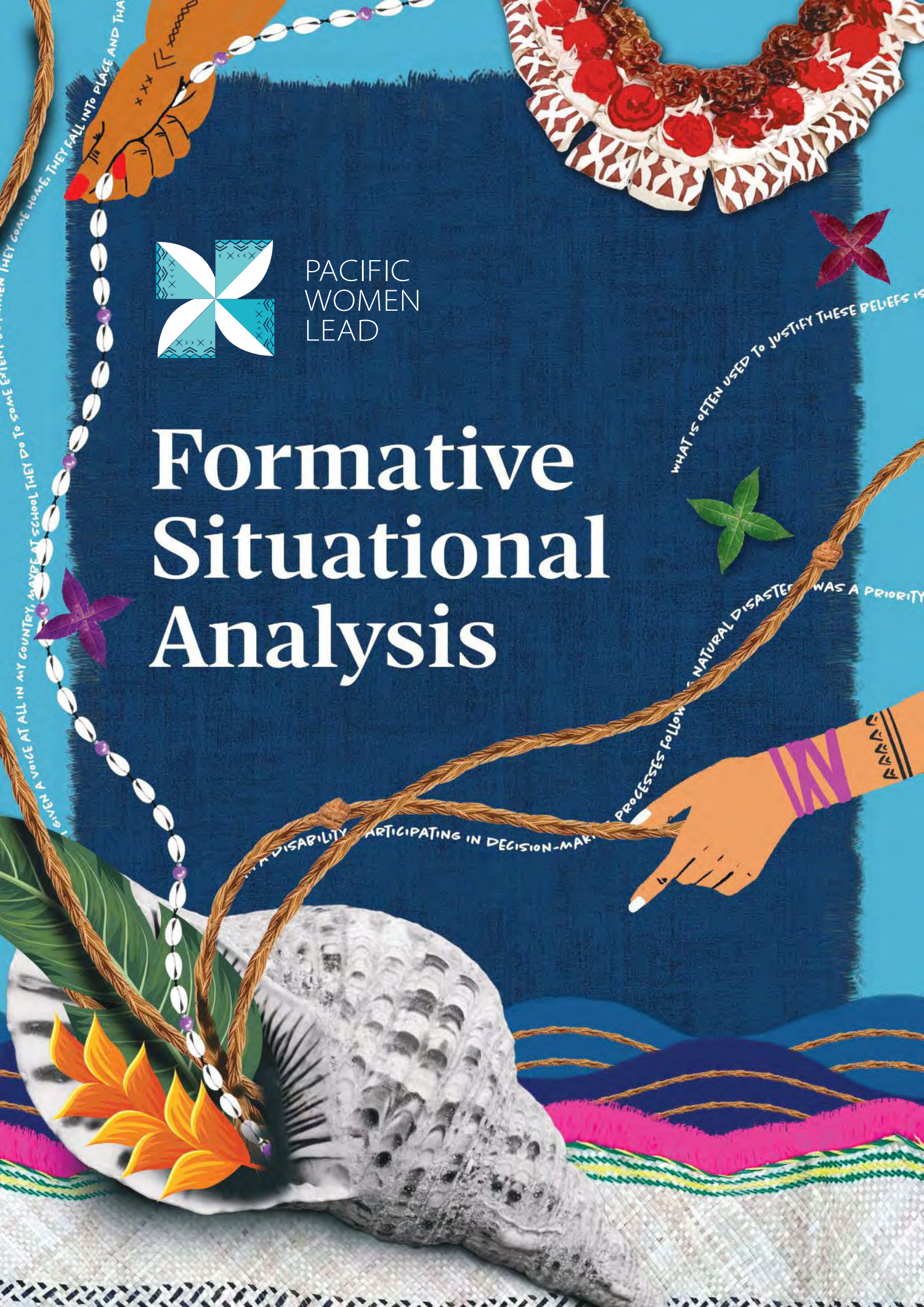




PACIFIC
WOMEN
LEAD

Formative Situational Analysis



GIVEN A VOICE AT ALL IN MY COUNTRY, MAYBE AT SCHOOL THEY DO TO SOME EXTENT WHEN THEY COME HOME, THEY FALL INTO PLACE AND THAT

DISABILITY PARTICIPATING IN DECISION-MAKING

PROCESSES FOLLOWING NATURAL DISASTER WAS A PRIORITY

WHAT IS OFTEN USED TO JUSTIFY THESE BELIEFS IS

COVER IMAGE

The design draws inspiration from the richness of Pacific cultures and the unique, multilayered herstories within our region, employing an illustration style blended with cutout images to highlight the importance of storytelling. The cover and pages feature a visual narrative crafted through the intentional use of meaningful materials such as *magimagi*, *davui*, shells and *masi*, with the conch shell symbolising hope and the collective voices of Pacific women leaders. The mat on the cover signifies the sacred space for Pacific women to share their stories, while the strands of *magimagi* and *buli* necklaces symbolise the transmission of these narratives to inspire the next generation. Illustrated hands represent young Pacific women accepting and embracing the stories of women's rights and cultural ownership.

CREDITS

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Authors: Nikki Bartlett and Niketa Kulkarni (Clear Horizon), 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki, Michelle Reddy and Virisila Buadromo

Editors: Neehal Khatri, Emily Miller and Erica Lee

Stakeholder consultations (women's economic empowerment, sexual reproductive health and rights and gender mainstreaming): Joanne Kunatuba and Junita Ngai

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For further information, please contact:

Kye Taylor
Contractor Representative
DT Global Asia-Pacific
+613 91004145
Kye.Taylor@dt-global.com



PACIFIC
WOMEN
LEAD

Glossary

- ADB** Asian Development Bank
- BOP** Balance of Power
- CEDAW** Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- CPR** Contraceptive prevalence rate
- CRPD** Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- CROP** Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific
- CSOs** Civil society organisations
- DIVA** Diverse Voices and Action
- DFAT** Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- EVAWG** Ending violence against women and girls
- FP** Family planning
- FSM** Federated States of Micronesia
- FWCC** Fiji Women's Crisis Centre
- GBV** Gender-based violence
- GBViE** GBV in emergencies
- GDP** Gross domestic product
- GIZ** German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH
- ILO** International Labour Organization
- ICPD** International Conference on Population and Development
- IPV** Intimate partner violence
- IWDA** International Women's Development Agency
- LICs** Low-income countries
- LGBTQIA+** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual
- M4C** Markets for Change
- MEL** Monitoring, evaluation and learning
- MSMEs** Micro, small and medium enterprises
- NGOs** Non-governmental organisations
- OECD** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- PACCOM** Pacific CSO Organising Mechanism
- PFRPD** Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- PICTs** Pacific Island Countries and Territories
- PIFS** Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
- PLGED** Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration
- PNG** Papua New Guinea
- PPA** Pacific Platform for Action
- PWNAVAW** Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women
- PWL** Pacific Women Lead
- PWLES** Pacific Women Lead Enabling Services
- RBTR** Rise Beyond The Reef
- RMI** Republic of the Marshall Islands
- SDGs** Sustainable Development Goals
- SOGIESC** Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics
- SPC** Pacific Community
- SPREP** Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
- SRH** Sexual and reproductive health
- SRHR** Sexual and reproductive health and rights
- TSMs** Temporary special measures
- UN** United Nations
- UN Women** United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
- UNDP** United Nations Development Programme
- UNFPA** United Nations Population Fund
- UNICEF** United Nations Children's Fund
- VAW** Violence against women
- VAWG** Violence against women and girls
- WEE** Women's economic empowerment





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mainstreaming



Foreword

As co-chairs of the Pacific Women Lead Governance Board, we are honoured to present the Pacific Women Lead: Formative Situational Analysis, which will serve as a baseline for the program.

We know that measuring the impact of gender equality is a complex and multifaceted endeavour, primarily due to the intricate interplay of societal, cultural, economic and political factors that shape the experiences of Pacific peoples. Gender equality is not solely about quantifiable outcomes; it encompasses intangible aspects such as changing attitudes, norms and power dynamics, which are often resistant to linear measurement and require context-specific approaches and qualitative insights. With this situational analysis, we anticipate gaining a richer understanding of the dynamics that underpin gender equality efforts, thus equipping us to chart more informed and effective paths forward.

The 7 chapters in this report are a snapshot in time to help us understand the situation for diverse women against Pacific Women Lead's 3 outcome areas: women's leadership promoted, women's rights realised, and partners are supported to increase Pacific ownership and effectiveness of regional gender equality efforts. Four of the 7 chapters were led by Pacific gender equality advocates. Our sincere thanks to 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki, Michelle Reddy and Virisila Buadromo. Your wealth of knowledge and experience has brought a depth of understanding that is truly invaluable.

We hope this situational analysis will help us build a more nuanced understanding of impact by illuminating how change occurs, providing lessons about our agency and influence, and creating a shared responsibility as we forge a path towards a brighter and more equitable future where gender equality is not just an aspiration, but a lived reality for all.

Ultimately, this situational analysis symbolises our commitment to continuous learning, growth and the unwavering pursuit of a more equitable world.



Dr Audrey
Aumua

Rev. James
Bhagwan

Introduction

Background to Pacific Women Lead

Pacific Women Lead (PWL) is a 5-year (2021–2026) AUD170 million regional gender equality portfolio funded by the Australian Government. PWL's design is unique in that the program defines the problems, identifies solutions and drives strategy through a governance board of eminent Pacific women and men with strong and diverse memberships from across the region.

PWL's work is implemented through various partnerships; notably with the Pacific Community (SPC), as a regional intergovernmental technical agency; the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), through the new Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders Meeting; Pacific women's funds; the United Nations, through UN Women, UNFPA and UNICEF; and other non-governmental organisations. PWL also includes bilateral investments and works to ensure that regional approaches contribute to progress at the national level. In taking this approach, PWL is designed to address and deliver Pacific and Australian Government commitments to progress gender equality in the region.

PWL supports programmatic efforts across 13 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs). These have been broadly grouped into 3 ethnogeographic areas: Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia as listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Pacific countries included in PWL's portfolio

Melanesia	Micronesia	Polynesia
Fiji	Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)	Niue
Papua New Guinea (PNG)	Kiribati	Samoa
Solomon Islands	Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI)	Tonga
Vanuatu	Nauru	Tuvalu
	Palau	

Most of these 13 countries have shown a commitment to international conventions and frameworks regarding gender equality. Specifically, most of these Pacific nations have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), while all have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore, many Pacific countries have harmonised their national strategies with key international and regional policy frameworks, including the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Revised Pacific Platform for Action (PPA) on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005–2015.

However, variations in cultural, political, economic and other factors in these countries have led to significant disparities in their capacity to effectively implement targeted initiatives for sustained progress towards gender equality. Achieving sustainable and inclusive outcomes for PWL depends on aligning all activities and actions with Pacific values, principles and priorities. Notably, PWL dedicates focused attention to women and girls with disabilities.



Pacific Women Lead outcome areas

PWL's goal is for Pacific women and girls in all their diversity to be safe and equitably share in resources, opportunities and decision-making with men and boys.

PWL seeks to achieve progress towards gender equity by supporting efforts designed to advance 3 broad outcome areas:

- Women's leadership promoted
- Women's rights realised
- Partners are supported to increase Pacific ownership and effectiveness of regional gender equality efforts.

PWL has further defined sub-outcome areas to help target its support. These sub-outcomes are described in Table 2.

Notably, PWL maintains a strong focus on ensuring the benefits of its programs reach diverse women and girls, including disability, age, sexual identity and location (e.g. urban versus rural). PWL also incorporates strong considerations of climate change risks and disaster resilience tactics.

Table 2: PWL outcomes and sub-outcome areas

PWL outcomes	PWL sub-outcomes
Women's leadership promoted	<p>Women and girls' voice: More women and girls in all their diversity are respected, listened to and influence decision-making at all levels and spheres (community, provincial, national, public and private).</p> <p>Pacific feminist civil society: The Pacific feminist movement has grown in depth, is better connected, and their expertise is drawn upon by Pacific partners.</p>
Women's rights realised	<p>Women's health: Women and adolescent girls have improved access to quality health care services, with a focus on sexual and reproductive health.</p> <p>Women's safety: Violence against women and children is reduced and survivors of gender-based violence have access to quality support services, including in times of disasters.</p> <p>Women's economic empowerment: Diverse women have more equitable access to resilient economic opportunities, including increased voice in economic decision-making.</p>
Partners are supported to increase Pacific ownership and effectiveness of regional gender equality efforts	<p>Pacific ownership and regional effectiveness: There is robust engagement, cooperation and mutual sharing between regional agencies and intergovernmental organisations to deliver on gender equality commitments.</p> <p>Gender mainstreaming: Pacific governments and development partners are implementing programs and policies that support gender equality.*</p>

* Development partners include DFAT, UN agencies, SPC and other organisations that fund project work under Pacific Women Lead.

Purpose of the situational analysis

The purpose of this report is to describe the situation for each of PWL's 7 sub-outcome areas (refer to Table 2) during the program's early years, 2021–2023. This situational analysis is expected to be used yearly to understand if and how change has occurred and will provide a reference point to understand PWL's contribution to change during the remainder of the program.

The situational analysis will be used in the following ways to support PWL improvement, learning and accountability:

1. It will support dialogue and mutual understanding among PWL partners (and regional actors more broadly) about our shared regional **context**. Each chapter unpacks the constituent elements of each sub-outcome area (e.g. women's economic empowerment), conducts a situational analysis for each of these elements and explores underlying factors that explain this situation. This provides a clear, coherent and well-evidenced framework for dialogue among PWL partners about the strengths, challenges and priorities of the actions they are facing.
2. It aims to help PWL partners reflect on and improve the **relevance** of their projects. This involves asking: Are we doing the right thing? At the whole-of-portfolio level, PWL will support partners in using the situational analysis to review the relevance of PWL's overall thematic and geographical coverage under each sub-outcome. Where relevant, each partner will also consider changes to the strategic focus of its own projects.
3. It aims to strengthen the evidence base for future assessments of PWL's **effectiveness and impact**. It will provide an important source of evidence to inform future retrospective judgments about what has changed under each outcome area and the strength of PWL's contribution to this change.

Approach

This report provides a formative situational analysis for PWL. While not an officially recognised term, a formative situational analysis is a hybrid of a traditional monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)-focused baseline study and situational analysis. It contains elements of both types of studies and works well in adaptive programs or where it is important for interventions to avoid locking in activities that may not be appropriate or relevant without further understanding the needs or situation on the ground.

In line with PWL's ambition to be Pacific-led, the chapters in this report aim to represent diverse Pacific experts' perspectives and priorities. The chapters have been either co-authored or heavily informed by expert Pacific practitioners and advocates, prioritising inputs from those doing the work to achieve PWL's goals. This co-authorship approach means that each chapter has its own distinct style, perspective and voice, which is a testament to the individuality and diversity of the authors.

The methodological approach adopts and enacts Australia's commitments to locally led development,¹ recognising that 'local people are best placed to identify local challenges and propose feasible solutions'.² It also aligns with PWL's commitment to yielding power to partners in the Pacific to support a Pacific-led approach to promoting gender equality.[†] Additionally, the methodology draws from key principles in the relevant literature, such as participatory action research,³ feminist participatory action research,⁴ broader

[†] 'Yielding power' is an approach that involves donors consciously stepping back and empowering local actors through the transfer of capacities, authority and ownership. It recognises that sustainable development requires systemic shifts in power imbalances between donors and aid recipients.

feminist transformative practice,⁵ and transformative evaluation theory.⁶ This ensures that the voices of Pacific women both shape and are centred within knowledge production processes, and that Pacific women benefit from the knowledge produced in service of action towards transforming unjust systems and structures.

Three of the chapters followed the *talatalanoa* methodology,⁷ while the other 4 drew largely from semi-structured interviews that were led by Pacific women.⁸ Both approaches respond to Pacific worldviews of constructing knowledge communally through social engagement.⁹ The methods further pay attention to techniques like researcher credibility, qualitative methods, inductive analysis and purposeful sampling.¹⁰ PWL also undertook 2 rounds of collective sensemaking workshops, where over 70 diverse stakeholders reviewed and validated the draft findings.¹¹ This supported one of the stated purposes of the situational analysis – namely, to contribute to ‘ongoing cycles of action and reflection’ as the program is implemented, measured and reflected upon to inform further action in annual PWL reflection workshops and align with the principles of participatory action research and feminist transformative practices.¹²

A heartfelt thank you

We, the authors, extend our profound gratitude to all the individuals who contributed to this situational analysis by framing the conversations, contributing expertise and insights during the interviews, conducting the reviews and/or participating in the collective sensemaking processes. Your admirable work at the forefront of these critical issues, combined with your contributions of time and invaluable insights in this research process, enabled us to capture timely, valid and contextualised knowledge. This knowledge will contribute to and strengthen efforts aimed at bringing about transformative and lasting change for women and girls in the Pacific.

To women and girls in all their diversity in the Pacific, we dedicate this to you.

1. Commonwealth of Australia, DFAT, [Australia's International Development Policy](#), 2023, p 33.
2. Commonwealth of Australia, DFAT, [DFAT discussion note for partners: Investing in locally led development \[PDF 299KB\]](#), p 1.
3. See: P Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Herder & Herder, New York, 1970; WF Whyte, *Participatory action research*, Sage Publications, Inc., 1991; LT Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*, Zed Books, New York, 1999.
4. See: K Crupi and NJ Godden, '[Feminist evaluation using feminist participatory action research: Guiding principles and practices](#)', *American Journal of Evaluation*, 2023, 45(1):51–67; T Chakma, '[Feminist participatory action research \(FPAR\): An effective framework for empowering grassroots women & strengthening feminist movements in Asia Pacific](#)', *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 2016, 22(2):165–173.
5. See for example: b hooks, *Feminist theory: From margin to center*, South End Press, Boston, 1984; MF Belenky, BM Clinchy, NR Goldberger and JM Tarule, *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*, Basic Books, New York, 1986; D Haraway, '[Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective \[PDF 719KB\]](#)', *Feminist Studies*, 1988, 14(3):575–599; IWDA, [Feminist research framework](#), 2002.
6. See: M Bamberger and DR Podems, '[Feminist evaluation in the international development context](#)', *New Directions for Evaluation*, 2002, 96:83–96; D Mertens, *Transformative research and evaluation*, Guilford Press, New York, 2008.
7. See: O Guttenbeil-Likiliki, '[Creating equitable South-North partnerships: Nurturing the vā and voyaging the audacious ocean together \[PDF 1.39MB\]](#)', IWDA, Melbourne, 2020; TM Violeti, '[Talanoa research methodology: A developing position on Pacific research](#)', *Waikato Journal of Education*, 2006, 12(1):21–34; V Ponton, '[Utilizing Pacific methodologies as inclusive practice](#)', Sage Open, 2018, 8(3).
8. See for example: DJ Clandinin and FM Connelly, *Narrative inquiry*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2000.
9. D Enari, '[Methodology marriage: Merging Western and Pacific research design](#)', *Pacific Dynamics: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2021, 5(1):63.
10. MQ Patton, '[Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis](#)', *Health Serv Res.*, 1999, 34(5 Pt 2):1189–1208.
11. Patton, '[Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis](#).' p 1195.
12. Crupi and Godden, '[Feminist evaluation using feminist participatory action research: Guiding principles and practices](#)'.



Chapter 1

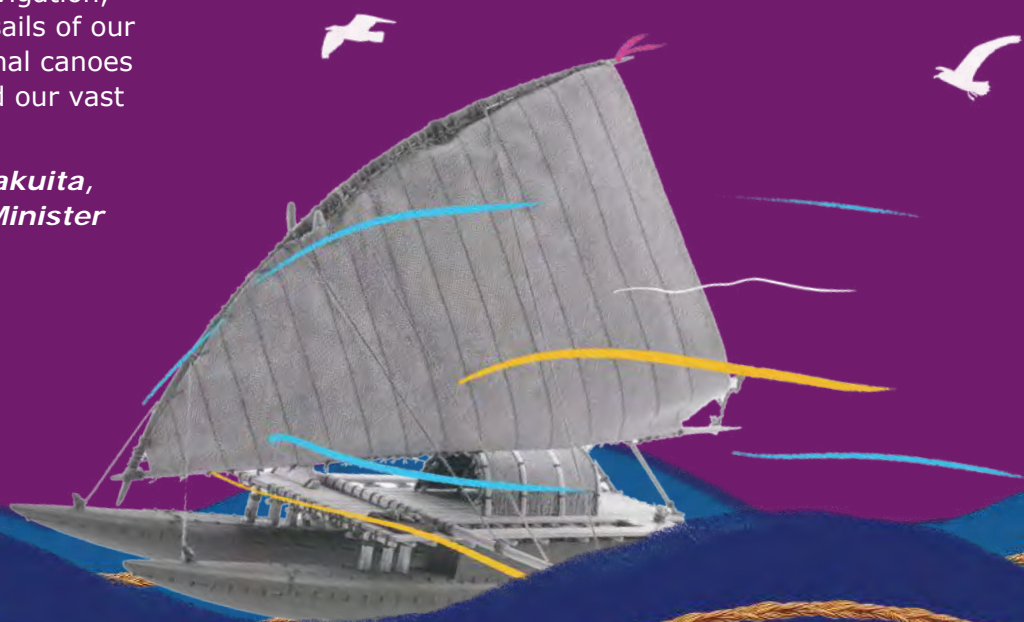
WOMEN AND GIRLS' VOICE

By 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki

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- 21** Promoting alternative forms of leadership
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'In the Pacific, women played a critical role in traditional navigation, weaving the sails of our great traditional canoes that traversed our vast oceans.'

*Mereseini Rakuita,
former Fiji Minister
for Women*





Introduction

'I was brought up with the mindset that men are always leaders – at home, in our community, at church, and even in our country. For girls, we were told that our role was in the home – the cooking, the washing and the household chores.'

Anamalia Falemaka,
Youth Leader Tonga
PWL Board Member



Understanding women and girls' voice

Women and girls' voice, for the purpose of this situational analysis, requires an understanding of how leadership and participation are perceived in the Pacific. We need to identify the spaces and institutions where women and girls are able to participate, lead and engage meaningfully, as well as those where they cannot. PWL indicates that **women's leadership is promoted when women's voices are increased in decision-making spaces in households, communities, businesses, and local level leadership at national, regional and global spaces.**¹

For many women and girls in the Pacific, being able to use their voice, particularly in decision-making spaces on private and public life issues, is often a far-reaching reality. However, when women and girls are given the opportunity to influence decisions that reflect the needs of the most vulnerable and high-risk groups in society, it benefits entire villages, communities and nations.



“

It was kind of the norm where following natural disasters, we would just leave it to our menfolk to gather and discuss how we would recover from [the] impacts of what happened, but then over time, as we started to experience more and more disasters, we noticed that a lot of the decisions being made by our men didn't really tick off a lot of the things on the list of priorities that we women wanted done because of the safety, health and wellbeing of our families ... so eventually, out of a sense of frustration, we lobbied and advocated for us women to be part of the discussions and decisions; otherwise, the men would continue prioritising things that didn't benefit us as a whole but rather just benefited them really ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

”

The qualitative methodology used to collect information for this situational analysis was *talatalanoa* (informal conversations) over a series of 8 regional meetings held during 2023, mainly in Fiji. The regional meetings provided an ideal opportunity for the researcher and writer to use these spaces to engage in person with experts and practitioners working on promoting women and girls' leadership and voice in the Pacific – which would otherwise have been conducted through online platforms such as Zoom. *Talatalanoa* was held on the sidelines of the regional events and during workshops and side events where the theme of women and girls' leadership and voice was discussed.

This formative situational analysis focuses on how women's leadership is promoted through strategies and approaches used to ensure women and girls' voice. It includes a brief overview of women's leadership and voice in public spaces and during and after crises across the Pacific. It also provides a summary of what has and hasn't worked well over the last decade and the urgent priorities moving forward.

The root causes of restricting women and girls' voice

The root cause of restricting women and girls' voice stems from patriarchy, where men hold roles and positions of power, privilege and dominance. Patriarchal thinking supports men in remaining at the top of the hierarchy of power and control. An extreme example of this can be seen in certain religious institutions that disallow women from holding certain positions just because they were born female.

PWL notes that **patriarchal, cultural and social norms, lack of knowledge of the law, limited access to justice, and stigma within communities all contribute to social acceptance of men controlling women's participation in social, political and economic life.**² This situational analysis acknowledges patriarchy and gender bias in cultural, social and religious norms as the major root cause of women and girls not being able to freely exercise their voice in decision-making spaces.





In the Pacific region, leadership is a role and responsibility often reserved for men. It is usually considered a decision-making role or position that holds influence and power. Within the home, many Pacific Islanders experience the traditional delegation of roles and responsibilities based on their biological sex.

Girls and boys learn from an early age that they are expected to act and behave in certain ways. It is widely accepted for girls to express their emotions, and they are not expected to be strong, fit and courageous. However, their brothers, male cousins and friends are expected to control their emotions, especially those that display weakness, vulnerability or fragility. Moreover, boys are taught from a young age that they are expected to be physically and mentally strong.

Young girls and boys who are raised in this gender stereotyping environment are highly likely to be exposed to the same behaviours and attitudes outside the home, in the wider extended family, village, schooling institutions, sports institutions, faith-based institutions and government institutions.

“

Gender roles and responsibilities that is internalised by girls and boys through to adulthood is a result of decades of being told they should do this and not do this just because they were born a female or male. So, imagine the long, hard work that is needed to untangle those decades. It's a process of unlearning that needs to be done skilfully if we want to start seeing any shift in mindsets and attitudes ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

”

“

To work on changing negative beliefs around women and girls having a voice, you need to start from the root cause, which is gender inequality that stems from patriarchy. You can pass laws and policies, but it's not going to change people's mindsets. I spoke with a female town officer who won the local elections as a female candidate for the first time. She said when she called her first town officer meeting, she was verbally attacked by the men who told her she was lucky to be voted in and that they were not going to listen to her just because she was a woman ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

”



“

Girls are not given a voice at all in my country. Maybe at school they do to some extent, but when they come home, they fall into place, and that place is in the kitchen with their mother, grandmothers and aunties, and they grow up seeing this just like we did. We are not given an opportunity to speak about matters or to dare ask questions at family meetings. Most times, girls are left out of family meetings and told to stay in the kitchen and help there if they are a little bit older, and if they are younger, to play nicely outside. It takes huge guts to go against this, huge guts. I couldn't do it my entire young life, and it wasn't until I started joining workshops and programs that empowered me that I started to gain the confidence bit by bit to use my voice and speak, question and even challenge ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

”

It is clear that approaching women and girls' leadership as only a technical issue with technical solutions (i.e. leadership training or mentoring) overlooks the complex social, cultural and systemic factors that women and girls face across the Pacific. It also keeps the status quo as it is and fails to address the underlying issues of patriarchy and inequality.

“

... going further than just teaching technical strategies and taking men who hold the power through a transformative process whereby they face head-on their own gender biases and where it stems from, and the impact it has had on the lives of women and girls in their own families and spaces can lead to a deeper understanding on gender inequality and unequal power between women and men. You do it this way and it will lead to transformed attitudes and behaviours. And this way it will be more sustaining and not rest on the ego of the male as to whether he wants to let a woman speak or not...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific regional conference, Melbourne, Australia, 2023)

”

Leadership has many patriarchal and masculine connotations, making it an adaptive challenge that requires experimentation, new learning and changes in attitudes and behaviours at various levels. It starts in the home, where the father is regarded as the head of the household and the one holding overarching decision-making powers. A comparative survey on voter perceptions about women and leadership conducted in Tonga in 2016 and 2020, using the same methodology, revealed the following:

- In 2020, **65%** of the respondents indicated that the father is the head of the household, preferring this over the father sharing the head of the household with the mother.
- In 2016, **68%** of the respondents preferred having the father as the head of the household.



The decrease from 2016 to 2020 is only 3%.³ This trend reiterates the persistent patriarchal norms, beliefs and behaviours that continue in Tonga and have broader application across the Pacific, particularly concerning women and leadership. As a result, women continue to be under-represented in parliament and local government. Institutions such as churches are dominated by male leaders, with some denominations not allowing women to take leadership roles, including preaching from the pulpit.

“

What is often used to justify these beliefs is culture and the Bible. For example, the reading that talks about women not being allowed to preach in the church is often used to remind women that they are not to take up these roles, but that particular passage from the Bible is actually taken from Paul's letter to the Corinthians and it was for a specific time and place in history which no longer applies to our context now ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

”

Children who are exposed to the situation, both visually and verbally, naturally grow up fiercely defending these belief systems. This occurs when they see more men holding leadership positions at home, in the village and in institutions such as the church, local government and national government, and when they are repeatedly told that men are the heads of households and leaders of the community and country. As a result, girls who become women tend to protect the status quo because of the genderisation and internalisation that has taken place their whole lives. They believe that men are leaders and women are not and, therefore, it does not matter that women make up 50% of voters on election day because they vote with a benevolent sexism mindset.

“

When I was young, all the people making the main decisions at home and in my village were men. And then, when we would go to church, it was the same thing I saw – men preaching and leading church services. At school, we were taught that men are the leaders, and so when I became an adult, that is what I believed and thought was right, so I always voted for men because I equated leadership with men. I remember even one time when a female candidate ran for parliament from my constituency, and I purposely didn't vote for her because I knew she had children who still needed her to do her motherly roles, and so if we voted for her, children would be neglected, but now I know better after attending the women's advocacy workshop ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women's Advocacy Workshop, Tonga, 2023)

”



Promoting women and girls' leadership

'Only 7% of the world's elected heads of government are women ... To change this, women's representation in the parliament needs to reach 50%. This requires challenging the cultural impediments and social conditioning to create a more supportive environment for women to participate in politics.'

Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa
Prime Minister of Samoa



Promoting women and girls' leadership and voice is a key indicator of gender equality.⁴ Gender equality means that women and men of all ages, in all their diversity, have equal rights in all areas of life. This includes:

- the right to participate in decision-making and occupy leadership positions
- the right to decide for themselves the future they want.

The Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) 2012 focuses on 5 dimensions. One of the dimensions is decision-making, which has 3 indicators:

- seats held by women in parliament
- seats held by women in local government
- women in senior management in the public sector.



Pacific countries have made steady progress on the third indicator in the past 2 decades, reporting an increase in the number of women in senior management positions within government ministries and divisions. However, with the exception of the Cook Islands and Niue, Pacific countries have faced many barriers and challenges in making progress on the first 2 indicators. In May 2023, Niue reached the global benchmark of having at least 30% women parliamentarians, with 6 out of its 20-seat parliament comprising women, making it the first Pacific country to achieve this milestone. Moreover, Niue is also the first Pacific country to achieve gender equality in its Cabinet, with 50% of its 6-member Cabinet comprising women.

However, the overarching trend in the Pacific shows a slow upward trajectory in the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women: from 2.7% in 2013 to 8.5% in 2023.⁵ Some Pacific countries – such as Fiji, RMI, Tonga and Palau – show a regression from their last general election results, recording a decrease in the number of women elected.

“

In our 2016 and 2020 General Elections, none of our women candidates were successful in getting elected, and it was such a sad state that we were in ... Thank God for the snap elections in 2022 that we were able to celebrate finally with one woman successfully elected, Gloria Julia King. It is just such a huge mountain to climb to get voters to change their mindsets that women can be parliamentarians ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, PWLES collective sensemaking workshop, Fiji, 2023)

”

Diverse women and girls in leadership roles

PWL supports programs focused on women and girls' leadership and voice. The aim is to ensure that more women and girls in all their diversity are respected, listened to and influence decision-making at all levels and spheres (community, provincial, national, public and private).



The **Pacific Girl program** has been designed by and for Pacific girls in Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands, FSM, Tonga and Vanuatu. According to Pacific Girl Highlights Booklet 2018–2021, the program has reached over 3,000 girls since 2019:



1,817

girls had formal opportunities to share ideas and learn from each other from July 2019 to June 2021.

1,183

girls participated in advocacy activities at the sub-national, national and regional levels from July 2019 to June 2021.



138

girls were supported to take leadership roles at the community, provincial and national levels.



17

advocacy initiatives were undertaken by adolescent girls at the sub-national, national and regional levels from July 2019 to June 2021.



6

girls with disabilities were supported to participate in advocacy activities and virtual forums in COVID-19 pivot responses in 2020.





“

Pacific Girl had some awesome outcomes, but we need to step up the pace, and that includes investing in inter-generational dialogues between women leaders and girl leaders because there is still a lot of tension in that space ... you can empower a young girl to raise her voice, but when she gets back home among other experienced women leaders, she freezes and finds herself keeping silent and not wanting to use the tools that she was equipped with, so yeah, let's try and work on that ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

”

Balance of Power (BOP) is a locally led, multi-country initiative to support Pacific countries in achieving their objectives of inclusive and effective leadership in line with national policy frameworks. It specifically focuses on balancing women's and men's leadership roles and opportunities.⁶ BOP has the following high-level outcomes:

- Women's right to participate in the public sphere, including in humanitarian response decision-making, is increasingly accepted and valued by women and men in the community.
- There is a shifting balance of power towards women and men sharing decision-making at all levels.
- Traditional, church, and democratic governance institutions demonstrate action consistent with their commitments on women in leadership and role model integration of women's voice and agency.

Phase I of BOP (2019–2024) was implemented in Vanuatu and Tonga, and it has shown some successes over the last 4 years. In Vanuatu, the *Tru the lens* film roadshow has successfully showcased diverse women in leadership roles across Vanuatu and highlighted strategies that support the influence of diverse women in decision-making.



“

This [Tru the lens] has really worked well in Vanuatu, and it is such a great way to start conversations about women in different leadership positions across Vanuatu. The stories of women in leadership showcase just how many women are actually making decisions and leading in their various places of work. The process of making the films is just as important because men are making the films and transforming their perspectives while they are in production ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

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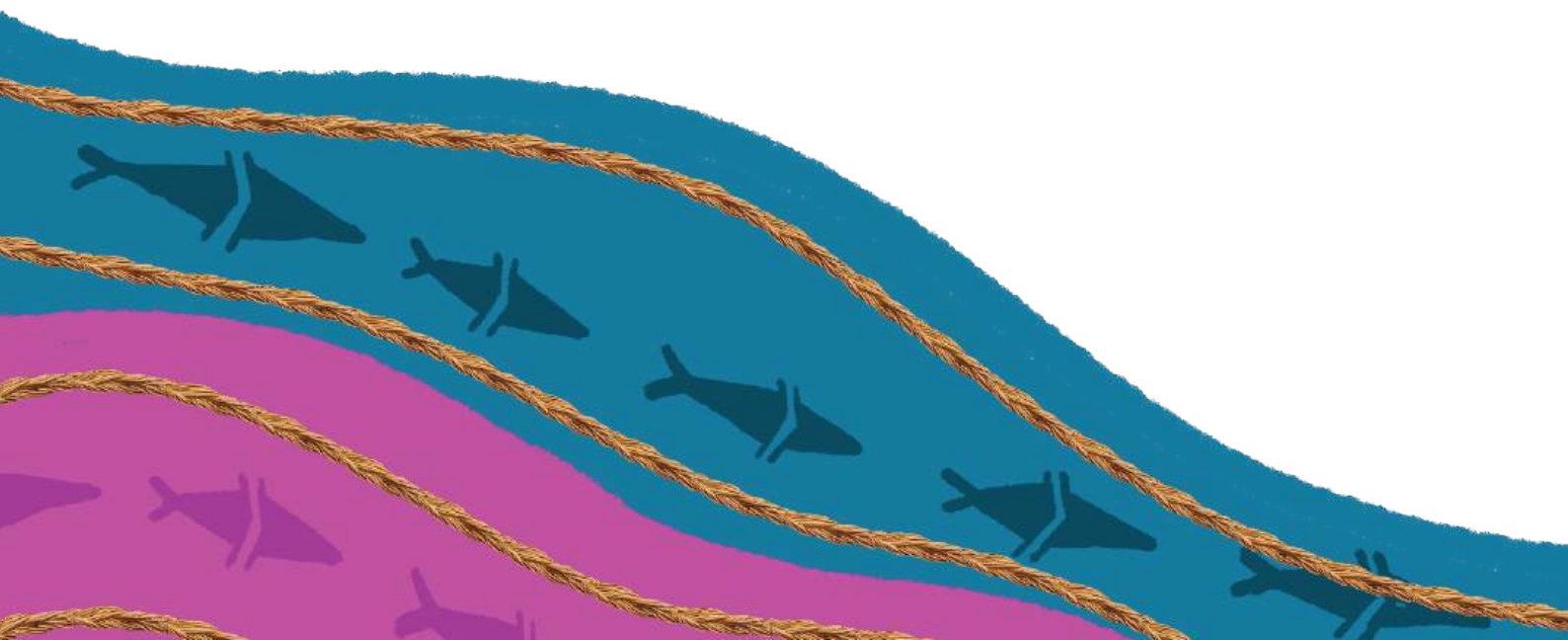
In Tonga, the **Fi-e-Fi-a'a Fafine Tonga Women's Coalition** is made up of women leaders from various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individual activists, advocates and academics. They are working together to advocate and lobby for Tonga to adopt temporary special measures (TSMs) to increase the number of women in parliament. Despite facing several challenges, they remain committed to encouraging more women to stand as candidates in local and national government elections.

“

We have been working on the best TSMs option for Tonga so that we can take it out for nationwide consultation and then present it to either the Minister for Internal Affairs or an independent member of parliament to submit as a private members' Bill. Right now, we are translating the TSMs Bill so that we can take it out to communities across Tonga and explain the TSMs properly because many people misunderstand it, and they look at it negatively. A lot of women are against it, and I know it's because they don't understand it ...

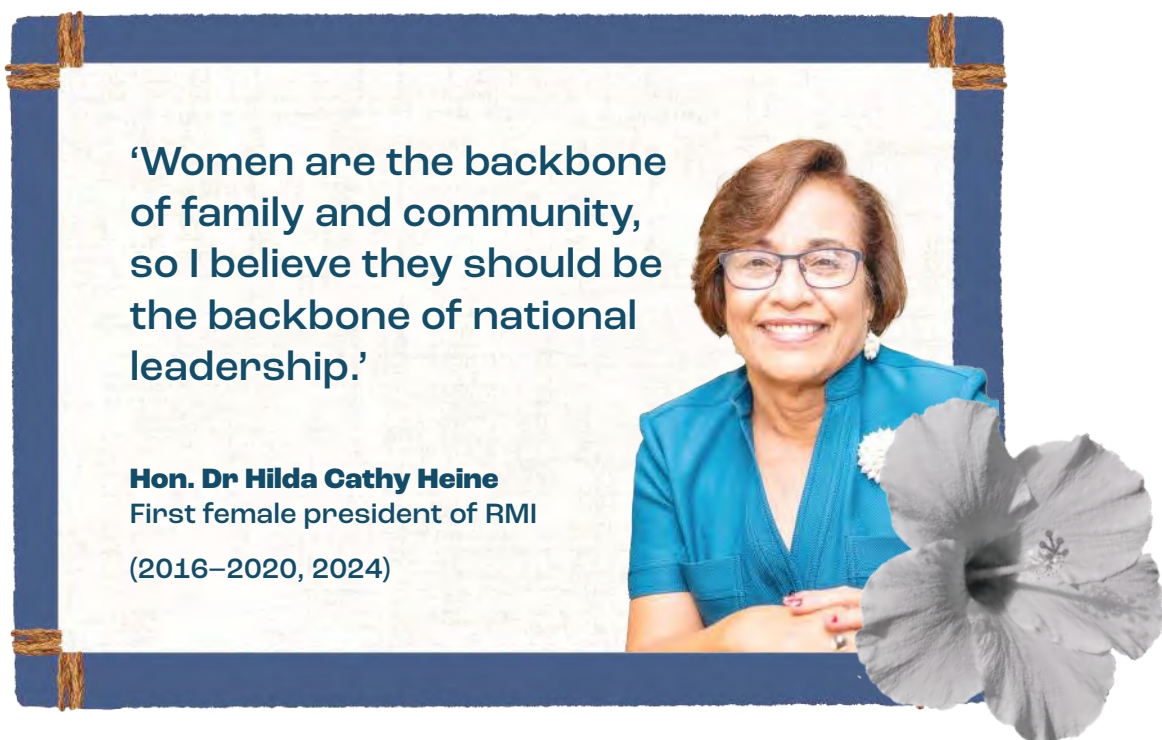
(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Tonga Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

”





Promoting alternative forms of leadership



Under PWL's thematic outcome area 'women's leadership promoted', one of the end-of-program outcomes is: **More women and girls in all their diversity are respected, listened to and influence decision-making at all levels and spheres (community, provincial, national, public and private).**

Under this outcome, there is an opportunity to document stories of strategies that have given women access to a variety of decision-making spaces.

“

... we've always focused on parliament, and that has resulted in one type of story being told, and it's a negative story. But you have to look within our communities to see how women are leading in so many other ways, and this is what we need to share, both the bad and the good. If we share more stories of women leading in other spaces, then people will see women in another light ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific conference, Fiji, 2023)

”

Successful strategies and approaches

Redefining leadership as an activity or a verb rather than a role or a noun is key to understanding the wide scope of successful influence women in all their diversity have had on decision-making. Some women have successfully influenced decisions in informal authority spaces such as churches, communities, families, and public and private spaces. Most of the time, the strategies they have used are not documented and shared.

“

There is a woman back at home who has influenced major decisions in my village, and she has excellent public speaking with oral skills that cannot be matched – even some of our male leaders cannot match her skills. I have witnessed her many times influence decisions and also overturn decisions that were made when she was not present. If you ask me if she is a leader, I would say absolutely yes, but the problem is [that] outside of our village, she is just another village woman.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific conference, Fiji, 2023)

”

The strategies that have supported women in influencing decisions in their various fields require more in-depth analysis and understanding. More stories that focus on these alternative strategies are needed so that the public is exposed to more women exercising leadership across a range of issues. This will raise the visibility of women exercising leadership and counteract the story of women lacking in leadership roles in parliament, local government and senior management roles in the public sector.





“

We have to change the way we are telling the story. Bringing visibility to women influencing decision-making across many platforms will show just how powerful and influential women are, and this is what we need to do. Tell more of these stories, and then little boys and little girls will grow up understanding that leadership can be taken up by men and women.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific conference, Fiji, 2023)

”

If this happens, by the time these young children become adults, voting will no longer be a gender issue. The internalised view that leadership is a male role and position will not be part of the voters' mindset.

There is a need for a two-pronged approach. This means not only increasing or promoting women's voice but also getting more men involved in promoting women and girls' voice and acknowledging their privilege and power. This requires creative thinking – beyond traditional ways – about how to promote women and girls' leadership and voice, such as by developing campaign strategies. These strategies should work in various spaces, including family, community, church, national, and public and private spaces. There is also a need for more investment in initiatives and programs that focus on raising girls' voices and supporting inter-generational dialogues.

“

I remember during phase 3 of one of the male advocacy training, one of the male advocate participants presented his speech on promoting women's participation in decision-making, and he said it should start from home when she is a young child, where using her voice is nurtured. And if that is not possible, then at school the teachers should offer that support. And if it is not available at school, then it should be promoted at the workplace. And if it is not available at the workplace and if she enters a marriage, then husbands should support their wives by giving up their power and privileges to control everything at home and declaring to his wife that they are in a partnership together and thus decisions will be shared. This showed me that it's never too late to support women in decision-making ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

”

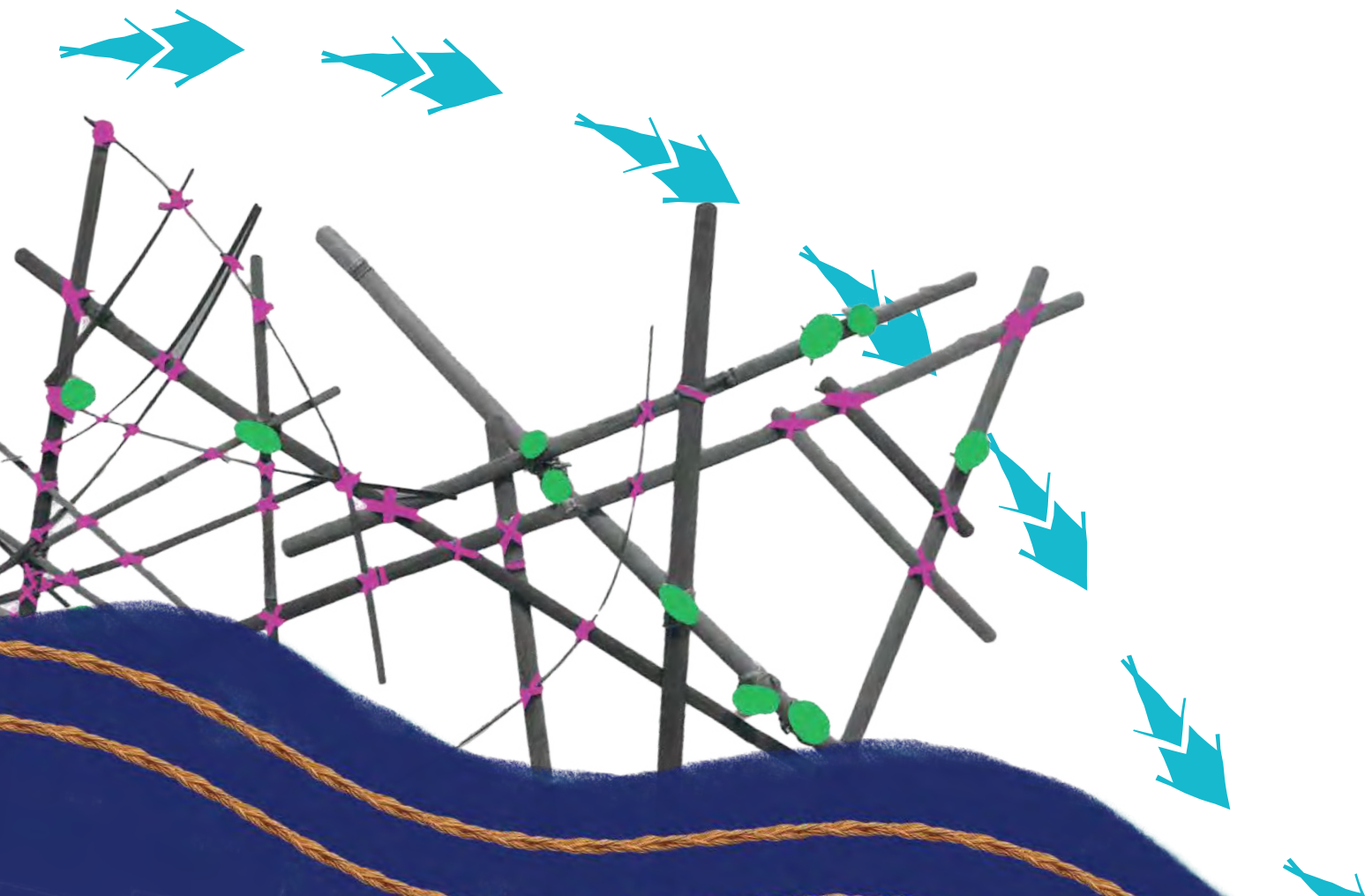
Determining, running, integrating

Under PWL, respondents felt there are key entry points to changing the story about how women and girls in the Pacific feel fearful about leadership and voice. The Adaptive Leadership Framework provides the following concepts to consider how to address what has been covered in this formative situational analysis as an adaptive challenge:

Determining what practices are core to the future and what are obstacles. Some practices have been unable to mobilise change at the individual, family and community levels and across organisations, societies and systems. These practices need to be reviewed or stopped. The practices that have evidence of shifting social norms and behaviours should continue.

Running smart experiments and testing new practices. The key transformative aspect of TSMs is that there are reserved parliamentary seats for women over a specific period. Once this period ends, the TSMs are removed and voting returns to normal. It is anticipated that during the specific period with TSMs, both young women and men will be exposed to the presence of women in parliament. Then, when voting returns to normal, voters will be less likely to base their votes on the candidates' gender. This is the key to increasing the visibility of women in leadership roles. By sharing more stories about current women leaders, we make it easier to change mindsets.

Integrating new practices and allowing people across the organisation or system to execute. Redefining leadership as an activity or a verb rather than a position or a noun opens up space for innovative ways of moving away from the rhetoric that women in the Pacific are struggling with leadership and decision-making.





Women and girls' voice: An adaptive challenge



An adaptive challenge refers to a type of problem that is complex and cannot be solved with traditional, straightforward or technical solutions. Instead, it requires new learning, changes in behavior and shifts in mindset.

Social norms that promote patriarchal structures

Investment in social change (behaviour and attitude) is often one-off and short-term. It is also often not well facilitated, lacks cultural context and can sometimes be demeaning.

“

This is where we need to be honest about what hasn't worked to ensure that time and effort is not wasted repeating interventions that have failed progressing women and girls' leadership and voice ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

”

The Prime Minister of Samoa, Hon. Fiame Mata'afa, reiterates this effectively:

“

We need to move beyond rhetoric and enhance our effort to promote and educate, and to lift the representation of women in decision-making roles in politics, businesses and communities. We must do better to strengthen outcomes for women and girls across key national and regional priorities and ensure that Pacific women and girls are not left behind.

”

The *talatalanoa* respondents highlighted areas that need reassessing, which had failed to address the social norms regarding women and girls' leadership and voice. For example, they mentioned the negative impact of practice parliaments on public perception. This can continue to reinforce the social norm that parliament is not a place for women and girls, and they need to 'practice' or undergo training before considering a career in parliament, whereas men and boys do not require this.

“

We had programs where women were provided training to become parliamentarians and training to improve their campaign strategies, and after all that, when it came to elections, we still were unsuccessful in getting more women into parliament.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Pacific Oceanic regional conference, Melbourne, Australia, 2023)

”

Women and girls' leadership and voice experts from the Pacific region, who are supported under PWL, indicated that the following strategies have been successful in addressing women's and men's negative attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in their respective country contexts.

'Voters' perceptions of women as leaders' surveys, like the one conducted in Tonga, can help countries understand the underlying root cause for the challenges and barriers that women and girls face in exercising leadership and their voice. These surveys can also provide an opportunity for Pacific countries to conduct comparative analyses for the region and can help boost lobbying and advocacy for affirmative action and TSMs.



“

Sometimes, all our leaders need is robust evidence as to why we need legislative change or policies developed. And when we cannot provide that, sometimes they just don't want to believe what we are saying, and then they just go with what they believe. And that's where we get into trouble because if they are already gender biased, then they will continue down that road.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific regional conference, Melbourne, Australia, 2023)

”

Gender and human rights training that thoroughly covers gender relations, gender equality and equity, discrimination, human rights and diversity in relation to participation, engagement and inclusion. These specialised trainings help participants, both women and men, unpack internalised social biases that cause barriers and challenges for women and girls' leadership and voice.

“

It's a strategy that works on transforming from the inside-out and focuses on shifting social norms, but the problem is there are few trainers in the Pacific who are really skilled at this and so we need to develop a training of trainers to develop more trainers so that they can spread out across the Pacific and roll out more trainings because I went through this and it changed my attitude a lot. I never believed in TSMs and thought it was an easy way out, and I was also very judgmental about women candidates, but after going through the training, I think very differently now ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Tonga Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

”

The following strategies were noted by respondents to be most effective in addressing negative social norms and attitudes:

(Individual) Transformative interventions to address social norms that develop attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that leadership and formal authority are better suited to men and boys. These interventions are needed for both girls and boys, as well as women and men. It is a common misconception that efforts to change attitudes and behaviours should only focus on men and boys. The 'Voters' perceptions of women as leaders' survey conducted in Tonga revealed that women are also affected by gender stereotyping that they have internalised since childhood. Therefore, strategies need to be developed to work with women and girls at an individual level.



“

Joining Pacific Girl allowed me to understand why my family thinks and believes a certain way, which has led to the way I used to think and believe, and it opened my eyes to understanding gender equality better because I used to think that gender equality was a bad thing because that was what I kept hearing at home and from other adults in my life. I even remember a few of my teachers saying the same thing, that we girls shouldn't do things just because we're girls ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, PWLES collective sensemaking workshops, Fiji, 2023)

”

(Family) Multi-media programs and initiatives that address negative social norms, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender inequality. While this was identified as one of the most powerful ways of challenging and shifting social norms, it is an area hugely under-utilised. It was also raised under the thematic outcome area 'women's rights realised: women's safety'. Multi-media strategies need to be incorporated into various approaches, including television, radio and social media advertisements, as well as programs, panel discussions, dramas, documentaries and films. The options are endless, but respondents indicated that the media can also create high-risk situations of maintaining the status quo.

“

There are many times when I've heard our radio station open up for public talkback on the topic of increasing the number of women in parliament. Because they [radio announcers] have no experience or skills on the topic, they often get caught up in supporting misinformation, or they themselves create more misunderstanding. There was one time the radio host agreed with a number of callers who called in and said that if more women get into parliament that the children and family will suffer at home because the wife and mother is away at parliament. The radio announcer, who was female, said that she understood the concern because she herself is a mother and she was struggling with keeping up with her duties at home as well as coming in to do her job at the radio station and then suggested that maybe single women should run for parliament.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

”



(Community) Advocacy-based *talatalanoa* sessions and workshops for specific groups, such as men, boys, women, girls, youth, churches and community-based groups. These advocacy *talatalanoa* sessions and workshops focus on why women and girls' voice is critical for the overall development of the nation, linking it to national legal frameworks and how it can improve the economic and social situation of the country. It focuses on community mobilisation, providing advocates with knowledge, skills and tools to advance women and girls' leadership and voice.

“

Intervention can happen in places where national efforts often forget about, like village youth groups. Imagine if there was some kind of support given to youth to understand why decision-making and leadership is a role that both females and males can execute, or what if [in] Sunday schools at church there was a program where little girls and little boys are taught about leadership as something that both girls and boys can do. There are female and male Sunday school teachers, so the teachers can use that as an example because they are leaders of the Sunday school program ... there are many ways to raise the issue of leadership early on, and this starts with interventions at the village level ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific Regional Conference, Melbourne, Australia, 2023)

”



Recommendations

‘Much more can be achieved when women are supported with minds, hearts and actions, not just words. We need political will, action, engagement, diversity, justice and social support.’

Dame Meg Taylor
Former Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2014–2021)



“

As women with a disability, participating in decision-making processes following natural disasters was a priority for us because it was important that we got to determine what our urgent and immediate needs were. There was no way anyone else should speak on our behalf – what would they know about our lived experiences? Anyway, so I think if we could document how the disability movement ensures women and girls with disabilities participate in decision-making processes during and post disasters, it will show how we are leaders in our own right, but I know it’s never perceived as such, and so our stories never make it under the spotlight ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, PWLES collective sensemaking workshop, Fiji, 2023)

”





Programs, activities, strategies and approaches to promote women and girls' voice should acknowledge the following key benchmark principles:

- **Women and girls' voices are diverse.** Diversity refers to women and girls from different social, economic, ethnic, geographic, religious, gender identity, sexual identity, age, class, privilege and power backgrounds and how these differences reflect the intersectionality of lived experiences. These lived experiences, with sometimes complex and multi-layered intersectionalities, are often not showcased or talked about. With these complex nuances, stories about women taking leadership roles and making/influencing decisions are missed. Activities, programs, strategies and approaches undertaken must ensure that transgender women, women in remote and rural areas, and women with disabilities are not disadvantaged when it comes to ensuring women and girls in all their diversity are respected, listened to and influence decision-making at all levels and spheres (community, provincial, national, public and private).
- **Understand that leadership can be exercised in various spaces,** not just at the parliament, local government and national government levels:
 - » at the individual level
 - » at home, within the family and extended family
 - » at the village and community levels
 - » at churches
 - » at arts, culture, music and sports spaces
 - » at NGOs, CSOs, associations
 - » in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), education and health spaces
 - » in private businesses and enterprises.
- **Acknowledge and accept across all levels and intersections of women and girls' leadership and voice work** that the challenges and barriers to having more women in leadership roles and having a voice are due to strong genderisation and internalisation of gender roles and responsibilities stereotyping from childhood to adulthood.
- **Girls' leadership and voice is almost non-existent in many Pacific countries,** but to start transforming people's views on women and leadership, we need to start with young girls, who are given tools to use their voice from a young age. Programs that have proven to transform young girls and empower them to use their voice should be explored and invested in, such as Pacific Girl.
- **Women and girls' leadership and voice is not a technical problem with a technical solution** with short-term funding. It requires a long-term investment to address decades of internalisation, using a mix of technical and adaptive solutions.

Successful and new strategies and approaches that should be continued and supported:

- **Pacific Girl should continue to be supported in designing programs for girls, by girls – with the support of Pacific women as mentors and collaborators.** Intergenerational dialogues between women and girls are critical for women's gender equality and women's rights movements to be sustained in the Pacific.
- **Showcasing women exercising leadership across a variety of spaces, both traditional and non-traditional, can help transform minds.** When defining leadership, we need to consider who is being left out and what stories are not being told, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals, and Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration

have traditionally focused on the number of parliamentary seats to measure women's leadership. However, we need to shift the focus away from solely measuring women's leadership based on the seats held in parliaments and local governments. Instead, we should include stories that showcase women carrying out leadership roles and influencing decision-making across all levels and spheres: community, provincial, national, and public and private spaces. When young children and youth are exposed to these stories, they will see women's leadership as the norm rather than the exception. Adults exposed to these stories may unlearn biased attitudes and beliefs about women's leadership capabilities. This will transform the understanding of leadership to include not only positions of formal authority but also positions of informal authority and influence.

- **Mobilising people towards change requires the ability to influence decision-making.** Women have been doing this across many spaces on various issues. However, leadership has never been understood in this light. To change people's attitudes toward women and girls' leadership and voice, we need to highlight and showcase the work that is already being done through various forms and strategies. The more stories we collect and document, the better our chances of changing mindsets.

TSMs can play a key transformative role in changing the perception of women's leadership. By reserving parliamentary seats for women over a specific period, we can expose both young women and men to the presence of women in parliament. Then, when voting returns to normal, voters will be less likely to base their votes on the candidates' gender. This approach is key to increasing the visibility of women in leadership roles. By sharing more stories, we can make current women leaders more visible, making it easier to change mindsets.

- **Carry out the 'Voters' perceptions of women as leaders' survey** across 6 other Pacific countries. In 3 countries, the proportion of seats held by women has decreased; in 2 countries, it has remained the same; and in 2 countries, it has increased and reached the global benchmark of at least 30%.

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1. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), [Pacific Women Lead design framework](#), DFAT, Australian Government, 2021.
 2. Pacific Women Lead (PWL) at the Pacific Community (SPC) programme, [Thematic brief: Ending violence against women in the Pacific \(version 2\)](#), PWL at SPC, Suva, 2023, p 4.
 3. Tupou Tertiary Institute, [Voters' perceptions of women as leaders in Tonga \[PDF 3.35MB\]](#), 2022, p 9-10.
 4. Anon., [Pacific Platform for Action on gender equality and women's human rights 2018-2030: Endorsed by the Ministers for Women's on 5th October 2017 / Prepared by the Pacific Community, Pacific Community](#), Noumea, 2017, p 5.
 5. Pacific Women in Politics, [PACWIP website](#), n.d.
 6. Balance of Power (BOP), [Balance of Power brochure](#), BOP, Suva, 2021.



Chapter 2

PACIFIC FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Stakeholder consultations and analyses were conducted by Michelle Reddy and Virisila Buadromo, with writing contributions from Nikki Bartlett and Niketa Kulkarni of Clear Horizon Consulting.

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**ENOUGH IS
ENOUGH
TAKE A STAND
AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**

Introduction

Culture, religion and politics continually present challenges to progressing gender equality across the Pacific. For example, the strong allegiance to tradition throughout Pacific communities has led to a reluctance to allow women to step outside the patriarchal expectations of their roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, the intersection between religion and politics across the Pacific often limits the ability to push for policy reform in ways that seem to contradict prescriptions on women's sexual and reproductive health. While cultural and religious barriers to achieving gender equality are not new, there is broad agreement that gender and sexuality remain at the centre of cultural repression by state and non-state actors, with the increasing popularity of anti-feminist, anti-gender and anti-rights movements.

The anti-rights movement exploits Pacific sentiments and pride by equating gender equality to a loss of Pacific identity. Gender equality and feminism are presented as concepts that draw upon a Western worldview and, therefore, do not have a place within the Pacific culture.

“

The pushback is coming back because [of] the friction between our local understandings of gender and then what we learn through our education system, which is very Western, and it's just rubbing up very badly. In PNG, the provinces that are more forward are the ones that have been able to marry them and take the best of both worlds.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

This cultural backlash to gender rights has further leveraged the close connection many Pacific communities have with the church, often working directly through churches to gain credibility and influence.

“

This whole trend of globalisation and militarisation, fundamentalism, they've all been there, and they are slowly eroding our spaces because we see the way in which it is intersecting with culture and becoming more prominent. Culture and religion are becoming porous, fluidly moving from religion to culture, and it's kind of dangerous, but people seem to be okay with it.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Finally, the wave of populism currently spreading across the globe provides a platform to leaders who 'claim to represent the authentic voice of their people, [while also evincing] a deep hostility to at least half their population: women'.¹





“

Allocation of resources by national governments is key to understanding the extent of political will. These decisions are often geopolitical and self-serving to protect duration in office.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

The most obvious impact has been on funding, with less than 1% of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD) Development Assistance Committee member funding directed to Pacific women’s organisations.²

“

Ten, 15 years ago, there was a lot of money around in the women’s rights space. Everyone had a big gender equality grant or something. But that has gotten less and less over time. When you look at resources in the last 2 years, we are at an all-time low for money going to gender equality. For me, that’s a success indicator for these [anti-rights] people.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

The Pacific feminist movement and the institutions that support it are facing vehement backlash. As a result, spaces for progressive civil society advocacy are closing.³

“

The way in which global funding, all the global trends, is going, they are coming for us. They want us gone. They don’t want the multilateralism that the UN is supposed to have with member states and civil society on the other side – they don’t want us there. They are using every which means to make sure that we are squashed out.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Nevertheless, the feminist movement continues to play a key role in ensuring that the priorities of diverse women are considered at both local and international levels. To counteract anti-rights movement efforts to infiltrate domestic and international policy and program development, it is clear that the feminist movement needs to mobilise resources and vocalise key issues affecting women. For example, the 2023 Commission on the Status of Women convened global leaders, campaigners and policymakers to develop strategies to achieve progress against gender equality goals. Key members of the Pacific feminist movement coalesced to prepare for the presence of anti-rights stakeholders at the event.



“

We've seen true progress come out of CSW. But there has also been resistance, particularly from regressive forces who threaten hard-won rights. If women's rights advocates are missing, CSW gives those who wish to maintain the status quo of gender inequality a chance to push us backwards. (IWDA 2023)⁴

”

It is imperative that the feminist movement continues to challenge the anti-rights backlash across the Pacific. This requires strength in numbers, identity, resources and purpose. It also requires the ability to negotiate the complex cultural backdrop through Pacific-owned strategies, languages and goals.

This chapter aims to provide a deeper understanding of the Pacific feminist movement's current ability to form a collective shield against threats to progressing gender equality. It considers the different ways that power is expressed and how it influences the movement. The Pacific feminist movement's core aim is to progress gender equity. However, its positionality, diversity and dependence on donor funding have challenged its power and strength to achieve the desired change.

Scope and purpose

This chapter has been authored by two pre-eminent Pacific feminists, Michelle Reddy and Virisila Buadromo, and explores the current state of feminist civil society across the Pacific to inform future measures of progress related to PWL's goal of strengthening the Pacific feminist movement.

As a formative situational analysis, this chapter seeks to provide a reference point against which to measure progress. Understanding the highly dynamic nature of feminist efforts and the feminist movement within the Pacific, it is critical to note that the findings are specific to 2021–2023. Unlike traditional situational analyses, however, this chapter also provides broader insights about context, situation and experiences to inform adaptations to program delivery. To this effect, the chapter concludes with recommendations for advancing current areas of program focus within the broader category of Pacific feminist civil society and related efforts.





Methodology

Data collection and validation

The findings in this chapter were developed and validated in a staged process to ensure they incorporated the views and perspectives of diverse Pacific stakeholders and leveraged the deep and significant experiences of contributors to and leaders of gender equality and feminist efforts in the Pacific.

Two primary methods of data collection were used:

- **Document review:** The review and analysis of relevant documents helped to scope existing knowledge, identify gaps, triangulate other data and provide useful context.
- **Stakeholder consultations:** The authors of this chapter – 2 Pacific women who are experts in Pacific feminism – organised and facilitated consultations with a broad group of individuals with specific relevant expertise from across the Pacific. Most of those interviewed are based in Melanesia, reflecting the stronghold of Pacific feminism in Fiji. Those consulted represent efforts in supporting gender equality at the local, national and regional levels. Most of them identify as feminists, but not all. The consultations were guided by a list of focus areas linked to specific questions. However, the conversations were allowed to flow organically based on the participants' backgrounds and interests.

PWL undertook 2 rounds of collective sensemaking workshops to ensure the findings were interrogated and validated by a wide range of stakeholders from the Pacific, including participants from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). In the first workshop, 8 participants representing Pacific Women Lead Enabling Services (PWLES), SPC, DFAT and the authors met to engage with the evidence and review the draft findings. In the second workshop, key findings were discussed with a further 70 participants representing Pacific civil society organisations (CSOs), NGOs, DFAT and Pacific regional organisations.



Depth and connectivity of the Pacific feminist movement

While there is wide acceptance of a Pacific feminist movement, there is no standard description yet. The idea of Pacific feminism is fast evolving and is steeped in significant contextual and traditional nuances. There are both conceptual and practical differences across communities, provinces and countries. There are also interpersonal differences in how individuals understand, engage and apply a feminist lens to their everyday interactions and interpretations of events. For some, feminism is the defining core of their identity, while for others, feminism sits on the periphery but still bears influence.

“

Accept the diversity [in] the way that people think about feminism ... Accepting the diversity and that there will be different ways of working and that you'll be working with different perspectives, and that's okay.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

In one sense, the ambiguities surrounding the Pacific feminist movement are a natural product of its aim to be diverse and inclusive (this is further discussed below). However, it also presents an opportunity for a deeper contestation related to the definition, leadership and broader influence.

What is the Pacific feminist movement?

At a basic level, the Pacific feminist movement is distinct from the Pacific women's movement. The latter focuses on issues that affect biological women and undertakes predominantly responsive work. As reflected by a trans-feminine woman:

“

There is one space [the feminist movement] that I can occupy, and the other is one that I can communicate with [the women's movement]. There's one that I can advocate for, and there's one I can advocate with.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”



The Pacific feminist movement, on the other hand, is concerned with targeting the underlying structures of power that hold issues in place. The feminist movement is intentionally political, driven by its lens, values and goals. Feminists move levers behind the scenes to leverage opportunities for change.

“

It's the political nuancing and understanding that makes the Pacific feminist movement different from the Pacific women's movement.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

The definition of the Pacific feminist movement requires understanding the terms 'feminist', 'Pacific' and 'movement', including their intersectionality. As discussed below, these are independent sources of confusion and contestation.

Feminism

Most of the people consulted for this chapter said that identifying as a feminist is both an inwardly focused and an outwardly focused expression of feminist values in relation to others. It is also seen as a political act, particularly in the face of increasing backlash or misunderstanding about the meaning and purpose of feminism.

“

Feminism is something I can relate to on a cellular level because it's what defines me as a transwoman. Most times, I don't say I'm [a] transwoman. I say I'm trans-feminine because of my indigenous identity. The indigenouness of my identity is what makes it a little bit more complex because that challenges the Western definition of transgender. Because we are not trying to ascend to biology, we are going from masculinity to femininity. And for us, that is attached to duty. Duty is profound and what makes us part of society. That's why I sometimes, it's a slip of the tongue, I say I am trans-feminine – iTaukei trans-feminine. And that is, to me, what fits me perfectly into feminism. Because I think that's what feminism is all about.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

The lack of an articulated Pacific version of feminism has led to misrepresentations for local feminists. Pacific feminist activists are adopting global feminist language and approaches, which have been heavily influenced by Western perspectives on feminism. This has fuelled the anti-rights rhetoric that feminism is a Western concept that does not have a place in the Pacific. The use of Western definitions and language also implies to some people that the narrative of feminist priorities is imposed from the top down rather than being driven by local priorities.



“

We must be careful when we are having national, regional, global conversations that we are not losing the need to know of these different spaces. What I mean is that we are beginning to lose national conversations and national experiences because we are getting lost in global conversations. And the problem with that is people get left behind. And that's one of the guiding principles of feminism – leaving no one behind. We must understand what that is supposed to look like. I know it's okay to link national to global, but let's not sacrifice one for the other. We have to respect these different spaces for what they are.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Nevertheless, there is wide recognition of the prevalence of feminist ideology and practice across the Pacific long before the specific terminology was introduced. One proponent of this view pointed to Queen Salote, Mrs Papiloa Foliaki and Princess Siu'ilikutapu as influential women to recognise in Pacific feminism, as they 'have led the way and made it possible for other women to stand up and work and lead and do what they believe in'.

“

It was brought to our attention from the Western sphere ... but it already existed here on some level. What that looked like for all of us in the Pacific and in our own individual contexts is up for discussion.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Furthermore, it is clear that the concepts of feminism and Pacific feminism are not widely understood. This is particularly true in remote areas, where English is spoken less and patriarchal traditions are strongly enforced. Linguistically, Pacific vernacular languages lack a word that directly translates to feminism. This affects how people understand, support, contribute to, and potentially identify with feminism. It has also led to pushback in places where it is poorly understood.

“

People don't know what [a] 'feminist' is, so when you don't know anything, I think people attribute it always to a Westernised idea.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”





Misunderstandings or concerns about individuals or approaches defined as feminist are common, so it has been proposed that 'renaming or reframing' feminism while retaining its lens and values may help the movement gain further traction. One interviewee described her reluctance to identify with the feminist movement, even though her work may be described as feminist. Instead, to enable her work, she felt more comfortable aligning with the women's movement.

“

That can be a barrier, the word 'feminist' or even putting that as part of your organisation's mandate, that you are part of the feminist movement. And whether that's at the community level or even the national level, so they might be happy to support a gender action plan, but then you try and have the word 'feminist' in there and then you face the resistance.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Pacific

There is no universal definition of what constitutes a 'Pacific Islander' or who is entitled to that identity, and this definition is being interrogated, particularly by young Pacific women. While there is consensus that Australia and New Zealand are part of the Pacific as a political region because of their economic and social position, other dimensions of identity are less clear.

“

Of course, there has to be categories, those that are originally from here, but then who was originally from here? When you're tracking down origins, then we see that they're not necessarily 'original', but they're the first settlers. First settlers, and then second round, and then third round. So, to me, a Pacific Islander is ... so difficult to answer. For me, this is my only home. I don't have anywhere else ... if my heart and my being belong here, then I am an islander. If someone's heart belongs in a certain place and if they want to be there and they're allowed to be there, then it's their home. But, you know, done in the right way, which was never the case with colonialism.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”



Even if it were clear who belongs to the Pacific and who does not, the broad diversity across the Pacific – culturally, politically and economically – creates contestations around who represents the ‘Pacific voice’. Within the context of feminism, there remains uncertainty about whether there is and should be a singular definition of feminism that is relevant across the Pacific. A key challenge for the feminist movement is to negotiate a collective voice across island states and the sub-regions of Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia.⁵

“

One of [the] things is we talk about these white saviours, but I think we [are] always keeping ourselves in check that we don’t turn into these black saviour types. We know the issues, especially with sorcery – that’s been a big challenge for me. People say this is [a] primitive kind of behaviour. And I say to people, we’ve got to find other ways to deal with this. It’s so strong; we’ve just got to work with what we have. Because if we go in with big change and to save all these women, it doesn’t help. Because these women don’t want to be taken out of their communities, they just want it to stop.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Fiji, particularly Suva, is described as the stronghold of Pacific feminism. It hosts the head offices of many major donors, intergovernmental organisations, regional agencies and The University of the South Pacific. As a result, Fijian feminists have had much more exposure to regional organisations, which has brought them access and opportunities. Furthermore, higher education and living standards have meant that people have the awareness and time to spend on incubating key feminist organisations.

Pacific feminist individuals and organisations outside of Fiji are aware of the need to define feminism for themselves and to ensure that any approaches adopted from Fiji are locally contextualised. They also note that because of the strength and depth of the feminist movement in Fiji, spaces like the Pacific Feminist Forum can involve a disproportionate number of Fijians.

“

At the moment, the way I think PNG sees feminism is a lot of what we are adopting is from Fiji, but we need to rethink the approaches to make it PNG approaches.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”





Notably, Fiji's dominance at regional events is slowly decreasing, due to an intentional strategy by Fijian feminists to invite representatives from other countries and regions and also because the strength of other feminist organisations across the region is growing.

“

I think [in] Fiji, we have been blessed to have organisations that can withstand the political upheavals and the stresses and all of that and still continue. And we have our organising in very different ways: forums, leadership seminars. It's vibrant, it just needs to translate into some sort of organising in other countries. And then also, I realise that is not the only thing that needs to happen.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

However, there is still work to be done to ensure that feminism maintains broad resonance across the Pacific. One interviewee noted that Pacific feminism as a term 'doesn't really resonate with me at all, and the reason is my experience from working in PNG, the word feminism gets lost in translation'.

Another interviewee reflected that there is perhaps a lack of conceptualisation, leading to different understandings of words, including feminism. In addition, one interviewee noted that there isn't a lack of appetite or desire for advocacy on women's issues; however, 'it's just the way in which it's being shaped [that] scared people sometimes, it puts them off'.

Movement

Shared values and feelings of camaraderie, solidarity, reciprocity, collective care, nurturing and love drive the Pacific feminist movement. The idea of a duty of care in relationship and solidarity with others is core as Pacific feminists show up for themselves and each other. This collective rather than individual mentality underpins feminist work and contributes to how feminism feels for those in the movement.

“

Feminism reminds people about the duty of care to each other and 'do no harm'.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”



The stronghold of the Pacific feminist movement is in Suva, Fiji. Two Fijian feminist organisations, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) and Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, are seen as 'catalysts' for the regional movement. They lead by example and have established relationships with feminist individuals and organisations outside of Fiji, including mentoring support. The Fijian feminist movement has also made significant contributions to the Pacific feminist movement. Many of the identified 'feminist pockets' in the Pacific, such as Tonga, Solomon Islands and Kiribati, have links to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) through their regional training program. The model of the crisis centre in Fiji has inspired similar organisations in Tonga, Vanuatu and Kiribati.

There are also pockets of feminist movements in PNG, particularly in the Highlands, Bougainville and New Britain, and in Tonga, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Kiribati. The movement in the PNG Highlands is reflected as 'fragile' by some interviewees, due to the divisions created by the ways in which donors work (this is further discussed below).

“

We've done a really good job because we've created this impression that it's right across the Pacific, where in reality, that's far from the truth. We are nowhere near that.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Important efforts are being made, both formally and informally, to strengthen the connections between feminist individuals and organisations across the region. This includes the national and regional Pacific Feminist Forums, capacity-building activities and leadership of the We Rise Coalition, and other organic and informal connections that are established and nurtured.

“

Feminism within the Pacific has grown from strength to strength, with various feminist organisations, networks, activists and groups accumulating a wealth of experience and knowledge to advance gender equality and women's rights across the region.

(Jane Alver, opening address at the Second Pacific Feminist Forum, 20 May 2019)⁶

”

The strongest articulated connections within the Pacific feminist movement are between Fijian feminist individuals and organisations and the rest of the region. Strong relationships have been established between the PNG Highlands and Bougainville and the regional movement, but particularly with the Fiji feminist movement. The region with the least engagement in the regional feminist movement, from the perspective of one interviewee, is 'the North'.





Online connections have been important for the Pacific feminist movement. During the COVID-19 pandemic, being able to run online campaigns and present information across dispersed geographies was helpful and allowed users to feel connected and engaged while geographically removed. However, it is important to acknowledge that there is a digital divide. This means that those who can connect online have a certain level of privilege, as they can afford, access and use the internet.

Who is part of the Pacific feminist movement?

Estimates of the Pacific feminist movement's size vary depending on perspective, but they mainly indicate that it is relatively small. Geographically, it appears fragmented, and many interviewees highlighted a lack of grassroots support across the region.

“

It's not really a movement; it's a trickle, if anything.
(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

However, the movement appears to be growing, with new participants at the regional feminist forums and national forums held in 11 countries. The increased involvement of voices from Melanesian countries was noted.

“

The reality is that far from a decrease in feminist civil society activity, it is, in fact, increasing [in the Pacific] – mobilising, forging new coalitions and combining resources. (Alver 2021)⁷

”

However, it may be difficult to fully understand the true size of the Pacific feminist movement. This is partly due to the definitional issues discussed earlier but also because of the ways in which feminists work across diverse issues and organisations. Driven by feminist values and motivated by the same goal of equality, feminists in the Pacific are applying their feminist lens to highly diverse causes and interests.⁸ A significant driver of this is the acknowledgement of the intersectionality of issues and the importance of responding to local priorities and concerns. For example, in confronting the issues of climate change, activists must also address the increasing violence against women and young girls.

There are some concerns that the diverse range of issues focused on by Pacific feminist movements may pose challenges in communicating the work they do. Practically, these links are self-evident, but there have been challenges in articulating these links, especially to donors who tend to fund siloed issues. However, most agree that this diversity is a strength of the movement, as the feminist lens is being applied across many sectors and issues to ensure a connective thread that speaks to power and the interrelated nature of the issues.

“

We are a feminist rapid response grant – the Urgent Action Fund – and so traditionally, the kinds of things that we’ve supported is relocation, anything to do with wellbeing. So, it’s wide, but some of the people are saying to us, look in the Pacific when we come from Tuvalu, population 30,000 people, a crisis for us is water, we need a desalination thing – that’s life and death for us. And so, when we talk to Urgent Action Fund, you say, ‘Oh, that’s humanitarian,’ but for us on the ground who are experiencing it, it’s not humanitarian, it’s not feminist, it’s just life and death. If we don’t get water, no one is going to live. No one’s going to do any of this; push aside your feminist agenda. So again, it’s a reframe. Now I’m talking to my team to try and get them to push back on this to say, guys, we really have to rethink this. You can’t have a one-size-fits-all. You’ve got to think about the Pacific.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

In addition, there is evidence that the relationships Pacific organisations have with donors may be creating ‘divisions’ within Pacific feminist movements. This fragmentation is partly driven by organisations competing for grant funding, which has led to breakdowns in communication and relationships between organisations. This has also damaged relationships between feminist organisations and women’s organisations. Another contributing factor is the primacy of the relationship between donors and the grant recipient. As reflected by multiple interviewees, these ‘vertical’ relationships disrupt ‘horizontal networks’ between organisations.

Furthermore, some donors manufacture coalitions of feminist/women’s organisations within their area(s) or programming that are parallel to existing coalitions in the Pacific. This undermines the connectivity and longevity of the movement because these manufactured coalitions exclude non-grant recipients. Some of these manufactured coalitions are perceived by interviewees as being ‘forced’ and founded on meeting specific targets that are monitored and measured.

“

I don’t see any of the donors saying to their partners: look, the networks that you have and the movement that you’re part of is more important than, or as important as, your relationship with us.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

“

This has fractured a lot of networks and movement building.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”





Finally, an interviewee noted the 'gate-keeping' behaviours of donors. A smaller feminist organisation was not supported in connecting with the regional Pacific feminist movement, despite the donor working with them.

“

I've had invitations from [anonymised donor name], they always come to our stuff, but they've never supported us to make sure we understand the feminist movement ... there hasn't been a time when they're like: have you seen this, or you should really look into this. This is what's happening in the Pacific for the feminist movement – when I know they know.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Diversity

Pacific feminists adopting an intersectional lens has led to diversity in the movement. One clear example can be seen in the Pacific Feminists Charter for Change 2016 and 2019, which defines 'women and girls' and refers to the specific identities and needs of lesbians, bisexual, trans people, intersex people, *fa'afafine*, *leititi*, and other non-heteronormative Pacific identities, Francophone women, diaspora women, indigenous women, women living in occupied and colonised territories, migrant women and girls, women with disabilities, and women with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, sex workers, women living with HIV, women living in rural and remote places, young women, the girl child, single mothers, women with albinism, older women, heterosexual women, women in sports, and women in creative industries.

While the movement may be growing (as shown in Table 3), there was less diversity reflected at the regional Third Pacific Feminist Forum compared to earlier forums. There was also less participation by trans people, sex workers, and women with disabilities. Some of this is due to how the national feminist forums were organised, as the organising committee determines the national delegation to the regional space. Another reason is the extent to which diverse people feel welcome in the Pacific feminist movement, as discussed elsewhere in this chapter.



Table 3. Number of participating individuals and countries at regional Pacific feminist forums*

Feminist Forum	Year	Number of participants	Number of participating countries
First Pacific Feminist Forum	2016	100	13 (Fiji, New Caledonia, RMI, Samoa, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Bougainville, Vanuatu, Kiribati, New Zealand and Australia)
Second Pacific Feminist Forum	2019	150	17 (PNG, Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Fiji, Vanuatu, West Papua, Solomon Islands, FSM, Kiribati, RMI, Samoa, Tonga, New Caledonia as well as Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada and the Philippines)
Third Pacific Feminist Forum	2023	Over 150	17 (PNG, Fiji, Palau, Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, West Papua, Solomon Islands, FSM, Kiribati, RMI, Samoa, Tonga, New Caledonia, French Polynesia as well as Australia and New Zealand)

Table 4. Number of participating individuals and organisations at national feminist forums*

Feminist Forum	Year	Number of participants	Number of participating organisations
Vanuatu National Feminist Forum	2022	70	20
Samoa National Feminist Forum	2022	100	At least 9
Cook Islands National Feminist Forum	2022	74	5
Fiji National Feminist Forum	2022	Over 80	At least 6
Tonga National Feminist Forum	2022	30	At least 3
West Papua National Feminist Forum	2022	40	4
Palau National Feminist Forum	2022	18	
Papua New Guinea National Feminist Forum	2022	46 women and 7 males	
Solomon Islands National Feminist Forum	2022	15	At least 8
Tuvalu National Feminist Forum	2022	45	3

* International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), We Rise Coalition reporting, IWDA, 2023.



Competitiveness, gatekeeping and the attitude that there's a 'right way' to do feminism is causing some people, especially younger women, to turn away from feminism. One interviewee reflected that they felt 'a little bit fearful to participate in the feminist forum'. This feeling was not about individuals but rather 'the perspective and the mindset of feminism' articulated by the collective, which made them question how welcome they were in the space. This also contributed to the delay in collaboration between the LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual) rights movement and the feminist movement because of some 'territorialism' and the exclusion of LGBTQIA+ perspectives. As a result of witnessing fighting and 'tantrums', some people prefer to identify as activists rather than as feminists.

Leadership

Leadership within the Pacific feminist movement involves a range of individuals and groups who all play critical roles in advancing feminist goals and challenging broader gender-based inequalities. While there are leading feminists across the Pacific region who are seen as 'leaders', there is also a growing number of emerging younger and diverse feminists. This can be largely attributed to the feminist leadership programs organised and implemented by national and regional feminist organisations such as FWRM, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, Young Women's Christian Associations across the Pacific, Kup Women for Peace, femLINK Pacific, Talitha Project, Brown Girl Woke, Sista, and DIVA for Equality.

However, there is evidence of burnout among key leaders and activists in the movement. People and organisations with intersectional capabilities and knowledge are scarce. As a result, they are spread thinly across multiple spaces as they are committed to highlighting interlinkages between prioritised funding pillars, programmatic workstreams and policy areas.

The development sector lacks trust that feminist movements and activists on the ground know what is best for them. Consequently, they are given only a small number of resources. They are doing the work and being paid very little (or nothing at all) and accept other consultancies to make sure that the work is fully funded.

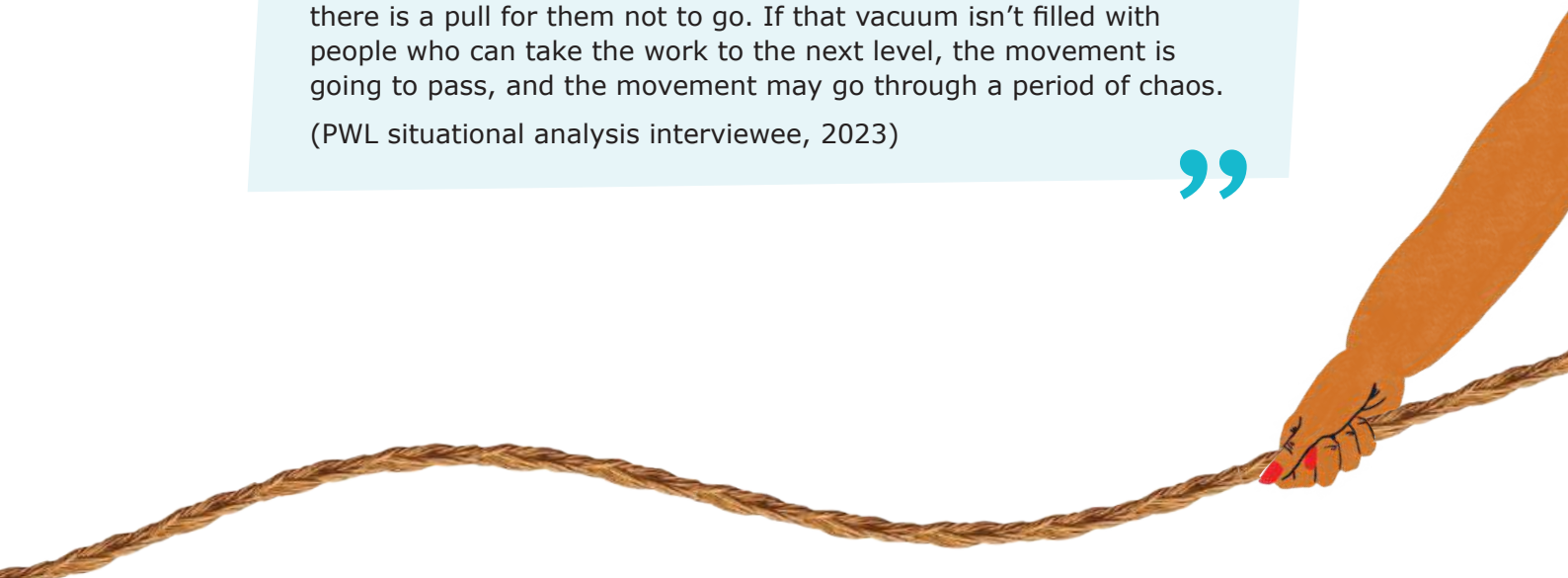
Interviewees spoke about the need to 'build stronger organisations foremostly and then movements'.

“

This is a moment. There are a lot of transitions that are happening. The old guard wants to move on, do something else. There's a level of transition; people want to move on in life, in their activism, but there is a pull for them not to go. If that vacuum isn't filled with people who can take the work to the next level, the movement is going to pass, and the movement may go through a period of chaos.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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Since many organisations do not receive long-term core funding, internal organisational strengthening and building is usually not prioritised. They are more focused on addressing the multiple forms of discrimination that women face in their communities. Many are also outwardly focused without focusing on internal succession planning.

Another concern is that as the more established feminist organisations grow their reputation and mandate, the demands on their time increase – both in terms of expectations from the movement and from donors. This can lead to the risk of becoming increasingly disconnected from the populations they aim to serve. An interviewee described the impact as ‘what they’re taking to the national, regional, international level[s] are weaker, less voices’ and, therefore, less representative.

“

We need organisations that think differently, they give us that food for thought, they produce that analysis. They could be something else in a different region altogether, but it makes you go, right, you know that’s something we could try, or that analysis we could try and use or some particular resource out there ... we need to put aside time to make sure we can go and read up because there’s hardly time ... I find that really useful, things that other feminist organisations or other feminists have done, and it’s thought-provoking, useful.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Funding has been concentrated on more established organisations, curtailing growth and presenting significant challenges for smaller, emerging groups within the movement. Limited financial resources hinder the growth and impact of innovative initiatives. This lopsided allocation perpetuates power imbalances, stifles diverse voices, and potentially narrows the scope of the work being undertaken. Diversifying funding distribution could foster a more inclusive feminist landscape, supporting a broader array of voices and driving a more holistic and dynamic approach to addressing gender inequalities in the Pacific.

“

More resources have gone to the older, more structured feminist organisations, and not a lot has spread out to others as well, so there’s that discord ...

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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The concentrated funding towards established feminist organisations also exacerbates burnout within the movement. With limited resources, smaller organisations face immense pressure to compete for recognition and support, often relying on volunteers and overworked staff. This constant struggle for funding amplifies stress, as they’re compelled to show immediate results to secure future support. Meanwhile, established organisations may be overburdened due to high expectations and concentrated demands on their time to contribute to many agenda-setting spaces, leading to burnout among their members. This imbalance not only strains the sustainability of these organisations but also exhausts individuals striving for change.



Organisations often receive funding from multiple sources, and each donor has its own reporting requirements. The time spent on fulfilling these reporting obligations detracts from implementing their work and building the relationships and trust that underpin their work. It also limits the personal time of the organisations' staff as the work often occurs outside of regular work hours.

“

There's a heavy compliance that [donors] place on their partners.
(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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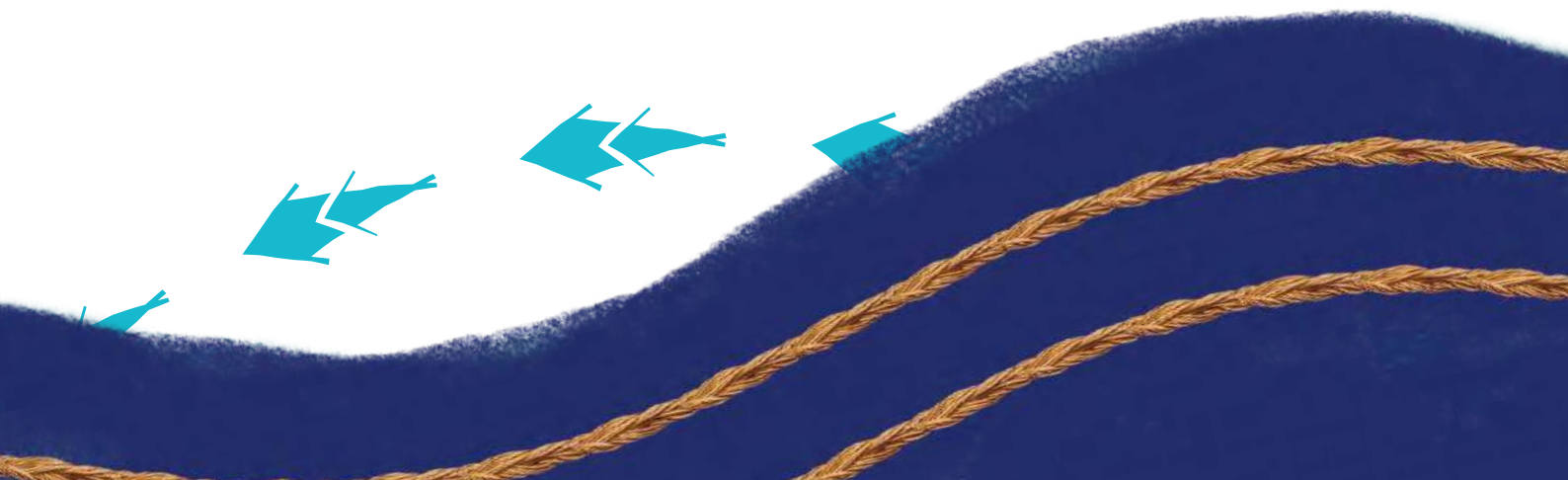
The Pacific Regional Rights Resources Team used to lead a legislative advocacy and lobby program, which was credited for imparting knowledge and contributing to a generation of feminist leaders. However, this program has been discontinued and there has been no replacement. If there is insufficient knowledge transfer or succession planning, the feminist movement may experience a leadership vacuum. This can disrupt decision-making processes, hinder effective coordination and create challenges in maintaining momentum and unity. Knowledge loss can diminish the overall effectiveness and impact of the movement. The movement may struggle to sustain its energy, mobilise supporters, adapt to changing circumstances or effectively advocate for its objectives. Understanding the historical roots, strategies and lessons learned from past movements is crucial for informed decision-making, effective organising and maintaining a sense of identity and purpose. Without this historical knowledge, a movement may struggle to navigate challenges or build on past successes.

“

This has led to the shifts in generation, the next lot coming up, not knowing anything about what we all knew about as part of our organising and all of that. It is depressing. That's what needs to be done, just as we were moving into the NFFs [National Feminist Forums] and all of this. The knowledge is gone, the way people are actually understanding the issues they are facing, that part of analysis and understanding is not there.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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Strategies and influence of the Pacific feminist movement

Building capacity and capability

Financial capacity support through resource redistribution has been a foundational strategy of the feminist movement. It involves the redistribution of resources between feminist organisations. This strategy is a strong example of expressing power with and was most apparent when and where horizontal relationships and connections were strong between feminist individuals and feminist organisations.

Equitable resource distribution is a foundational strategy to strengthen and broaden the feminist movement. By directing resources to both established and emerging organisations, the movement gains diverse perspectives and innovative approaches. This strategy counteracts power imbalances within the feminist movement, fostering collaboration and ensuring marginalised voices are heard. A robust ecosystem of well-supported feminist initiatives can address a broader spectrum of issues, amplify collective impact, and cultivate long-term, sustainable change. However, it was noted that this strategy has been declining as the competitive donor grant model moved into the Pacific.

Individual capacity development. One interviewee reflected that when they were starting their own organisation, they reached out to a feminist leader, Noelene Nabulivou (political advisor from DIVA for Equality), to request mentorship. Noelene then connected this person to others in the feminist movement. These connections and support enabled this newer organisation to get established and exemplified the 'duty of care' value of the feminist movement and the benefits of collaboration within the feminist movement (expressing power with) to build coalitions.

“

DIVA [for Equality] is also doing this individual learning, this Pacific community of practice. That's very important, too, because we need to understand concepts. We need to understand what sexual and reproductive health and rights means and how do you understand that and what are the key issues now, what do you want to do. Same with every issue. Need to break it down and go to school, learn about it. Because the knowledge has gone.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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“

I didn't call myself a feminist until later on. Like when I was in my early 20s, and it really began from a leadership program that the Fiji Women's Rights Movement had put together. It was a one-year feminist leadership program which completely changed the way that I looked at the world.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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Organisational capacity includes modelling organisational structures and ways of working. Some countries have adapted programs and organisational structures from Fiji. For example, as mentioned previously, the FWCC model can be seen in Tonga, Vanuatu and Kiribati.

Connection with the Pacific feminist movement has, in the words of an interviewee, also 'enabled and enriched' the feminist movement in the PNG Highlands. The work of organisations in the PNG Highlands has been 'fast-tracked' as a result of connections with the Pacific regional women's rights movement and organisations – through relationships, informal capacity development and training. This has been particularly important because of the lack of support from other provinces or the PNG Government.

Another example of capacity development within the feminist movement is related to the use of language and framing of issues by emerging organisations and activists, who have adopted the language and framing promoted by more established organisations they've connected with.

“

DIVA [for Equality] and FWRM ... we look to them for the language.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Building networks

Building and leveraging relationships

Pacific feminists are intentional about leveraging relationships to open space for conversation about key issues. They look for those in positions of power who may have values that lean towards or align with feminist values and enter relationships and conversations with them. Much of this occurs behind the scenes, particularly when trying to influence decision-makers. For example, they have written speeches for a parliamentarian to give, pushing for a particular law that is in line with feminist priorities.

Convening feminist spaces and creating a feminist community

The Pacific feminist movement convenes spaces to connect and build relationships, to reflect and share ideas and learn from one another, and to build the shared capacity of the movement. These forums foster solidarity and amplify collective strength. Additionally, these spaces nurture mentorship, leadership development and skillsharing among participants.

“

That’s how I know there is a specific feminist movement because of the way that we bring people together.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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The most notable of these forums are the Pacific Feminist Forums. After its establishment in 2016, these forums are now occurring at both the national and regional levels. Leading up to the third and most recent regional Pacific Feminist Forum in May 2023, 11 national feminist forums were held in 2022 in Vanuatu, Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji, Tonga, West Papua, New Caledonia, Tuvalu, Palau, PNG and Solomon Islands. The Pacific Feminist Forum is seen as ‘a participatory and celebratory safe space for Pacific feminists in all their diversity to come together and connect, reflect, renew their commitments and discuss issues and solutions for women’s movements locally and regionally’.⁹

“

The Fiji National Feminist Forum is a way for our feminist organisations to keep up with the challenges women and gender-diverse people face and the changes in those challenges.

(Susan Naisara Grey, 2022)¹⁰

”

The regional organising of various entities through the Pacific Feminist Forums has created space for the critical exploration of the identity of ‘Pacific Feminist’, as outlined in the Pacific Feminist Charter of Change 2016, which outlines the defining nature of Pacific feminists. These forums have also been the main unifying driver for pushing past siloed approaches to redefine and reclaim solidarity on issues such as climate change.¹¹ In addition, the forums have built regional networks and alliances to strengthen the Pacific feminist movement, such as the Pacific Sexual, Reproductive and Health Rights Coalition, Pacific CSO Organising Mechanism (PACCOM), We Rise Coalition, and the Pacific Young Women Leadership Alliance. FWRM and DIVA for Equality were involved in the inaugural PACCOM and in drafting the PACCOM outcomes document, ensuring that the Pacific Feminist Forum principles were reflected in it.¹²

“

We must now build on that [regional organising]. We must encourage that [regional organising] and whether it is something that happens before the Pacific Feminist Forums or whether those that want to do it on their own timeframe, it’s up to them. But I think some level of organising needs to happen.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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The original intent of these forums, as articulated by an early organiser, was 'to create a joyful regenerative kind of space'. However, some interviewees have raised concerns that this intent is being eroded as a result of losing the 'political edge' of the forum space and the 'knowledge and memory' of the movement.

Collective impact through coalitions, within the movement and with allies

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There's no other way to do this – getting our goals achieved – unless we work together.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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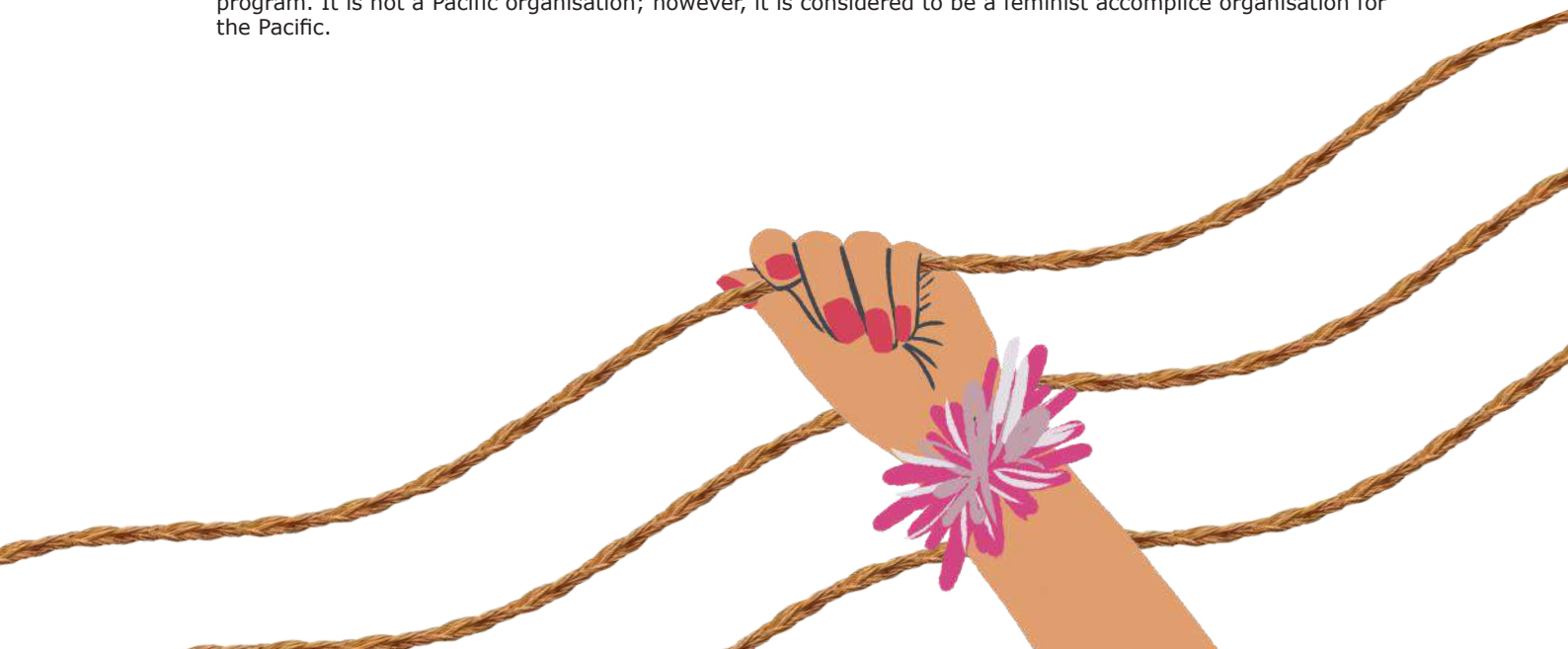
The Pacific feminist movement has established and participated in multiple coalitions to enhance the collective impact on priority areas. A key example is the We Rise Coalition, established in 2016 after 4 partners signed the Memorandum of Understanding. It has since expanded to include 6 Pacific feminist organisations that implement the We Rise 3 program. Members include femLINKpacific, FWRM, Brown Girl Woke, Sista, Voice for Change – Jiwaka, and the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA).*

The We Rise Coalition plays 3 roles:

1. **Communication** – it facilitates a regional dialogue between individuals and organisations with different constituencies across the region.
2. **Knowledge-building** – it builds the capacity of Pacific feminists to conduct their own research, build movements and advocate.
3. **Organisational** – it coordinates the generation of a regional feminist voice.¹³

The We Rise Coalition directly engaged with 7,125 people from 13 Pacific Island countries through its coalition building, feminist analysis and practice activities between 2015 and 2019.¹⁴

* The International Women's Development Agency is an Australia-based member organisation of the We Rise 3 program. It is not a Pacific organisation; however, it is considered to be a feminist accomplice organisation for the Pacific.



Evidence generation and dissemination

Research and analysis

Pacific feminists undertake relevant and timely research and analysis on social issues in the Pacific through the unique lens of feminism. However, the capacity to undertake this work is declining, leaving a notable gap in evidence to drive policy and programmatic decision-making. Although there is a willingness to undertake research on key gender issues, often the time required is too prohibitive, as many gender researchers in the Pacific also have other responsibilities in their institutions, communities and countries that contribute to them being time-poor.¹⁵

“

There also aren't too many feminists or even women's rights organisations that are doing research and advocacy, using the kinds of strategies that build that base of evidence. You move it away from emotion, but you look at data analysis and you connect it to commitments and what's happening internationally and you're watching global.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Raising awareness

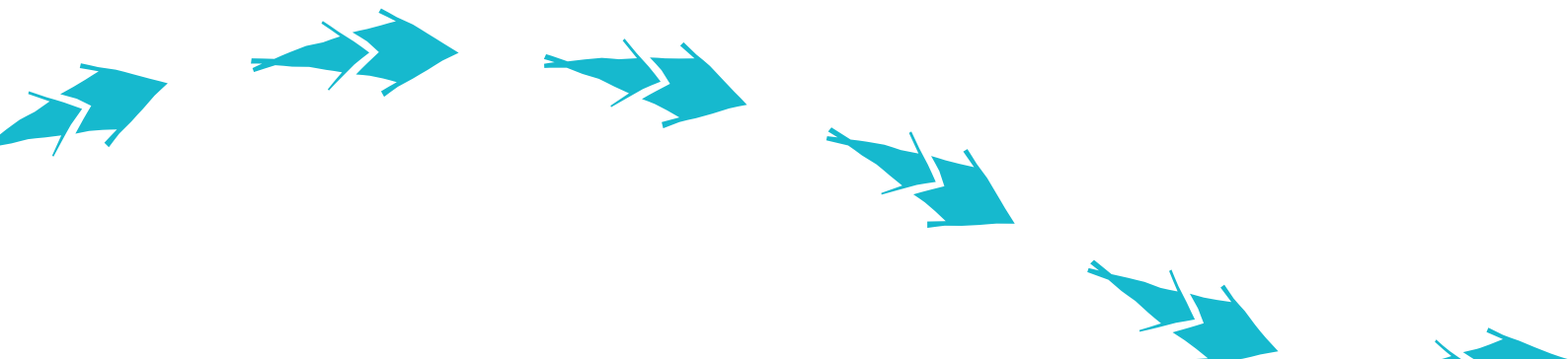
The feminist movement raises awareness and seeks to change attitudes through informal and formal conversations. The content of these conversations is just as important to the strategy as the conceptual framing on which they are based. In other words, the conversations are grounded in a rights-based feminist approach to addressing social issues and are driven by feminist values. This has been exemplified, for example, by the work of the FWCC. The influence of this strategy is apparent both outside the movement and within the movement itself.

“

Bringing civic awareness about these issues and trying to get the community to play a role or to be better citizens in trying to influence legislation ... like to struggle.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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It can also involve developing and distributing templates for people to have a say in political processes and using traditional and social media to raise awareness about a particular issue.

“

What we did with the Pacific Feminist Forum, it was a really big game changer because we never have funding to do anything that big and it was really the basics, Feminist Basics 101 for people to understand what it was, and I could see everyone's eyes opening and understanding.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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Advocacy and lobbying

As a strategy, many of the feminist organisations, networks and groups engage in a range of advocacy and lobbying. By using evidence-based research and raising awareness, progress has been made in several areas of women's rights. Some examples can be seen in FWRM's work in preparing national budget submissions and policy briefs, engaging in global UN Conventions, such as providing shadow reports for CEDAW and being involved in the Universal Periodic Reviews, as well as participating in the state delegation to provide a civil society perspective.

The progressive family and domestic legislations across the Pacific have links to the foundational advocacy and lobbying of FWCC, FWRM and other crisis centres in Vanuatu, Tonga and Kiribati. This includes changes to the legislation and policies around violence against women, changing the definition of rape, sexual harassment and family law.

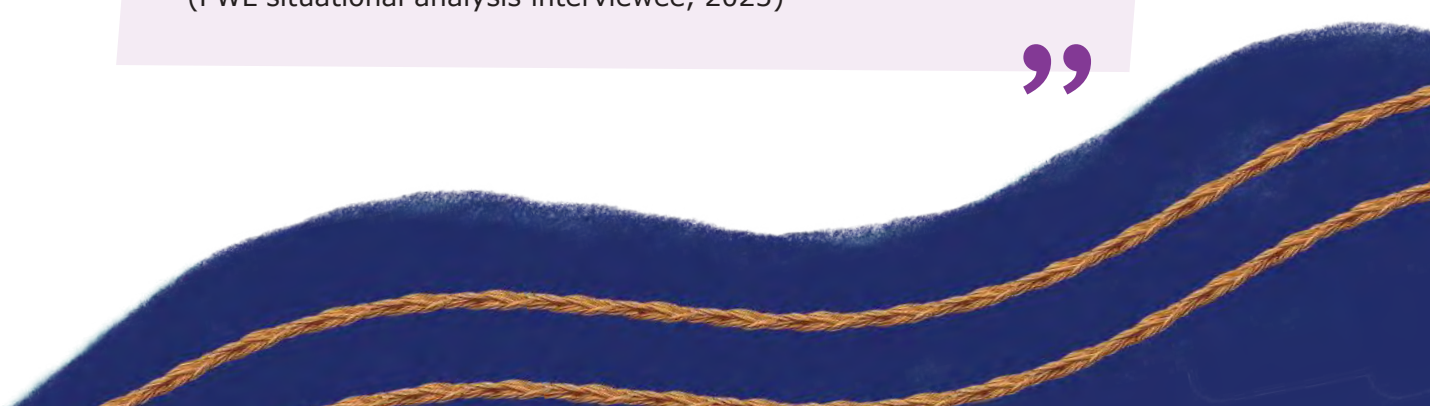
At the national, regional and global spaces, DIVA for Equality has tremendously contributed to bringing feminist analysis and praxis to climate change discussions by linking the voices and experiences of diverse women, rural women, indigenous women and gender non-conforming groups to regional and global discussions. Some examples include their engagement in the 13th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, Women Defend the Commons, and the Commission on the Status of Women.

“

We find other ways to lobby and advocate and we can see the changes around the political will. That's what we've been saying – we want the political will. We can do all the things up to a certain level, but if there's no political will or commitment, then we keep banging our heads against a wall.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”



Empowering the Pacific feminist movement

The Pacific feminist movement has influenced the Australian Government’s funding priorities in the Pacific. One interviewee noted that ‘the fact that you have a Pacific Women Lead Program is about Australia looking at the impact of feminist work and wanting to support it’. While the Pacific feminist movement welcomes this support, donors must be mindful of how they are expressing power to ensure they are not unintentionally wielding power over local feminist actors and stymieing progress.

The Pacific Feminist Fund and the Women’s Fund Fiji are promising examples of ways that donors can support the Pacific feminist movement. As these funds are increasingly able to draw on support from actors other than bilateral donors, this removes the extent to which a top-down agenda is being pushed on them. This allows greater space for the funds to think and act independently.

Example of leading practice – The relationship between Urgent Action Fund and DFAT

“

The way that we engage with the DFAT came about through a negotiation and conversation [about] what we saw as the biggest challenges affecting Asia and the Pacific and presenting our response. We provided that strategy to DFAT, which was based on consultations that we’ve had on the ground, our current work and guided feminist and non-binary lead movements both in Asia and the Pacific. So importantly, the ‘ask’ was coming from the movements. Based on those negotiations over 2 years, we were able to have DFAT invest in our strategy.

So, what makes that different from the way that, say, DFAT works with other movements or organisations on the ground is that usually they come up with the idea. It’s like, you know, they come up with what the challenges are, and then they come up with a strategy, and then they expect everybody else to try and buy into their strategy ... It’s very different from the way they engage with other feminist movements and groups on the ground.

We were very clear that if they weren’t going to meet our ask to a particular extent, we were going to walk away. I think for a lot of women’s rights and feminist organisations, they don’t have that privilege; they can’t do that because they need those resources.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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However, the current dynamic established under donor-led ways of working in the Pacific can inadvertently marginalise the voices of Pacific-based and Pacific-led organisations, limiting their autonomy and influence. The reliance on external funding becomes particularly pronounced in cases where national governments fail to adequately support feminist causes. This reliance further strengthens the donors' position of power, as organisations are compelled to align their goals with donor priorities, potentially sacrificing their own vision for change. Consequently, a system of one-way accountability prevails, where donors dictate the terms, often emphasising immediate results and measurable outcomes.

“

I think it's one of the things that foreigners don't realise – that when we don't speak, it doesn't mean that we're happy; it's another form of protest.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Donor priorities are often shaped around specific sectors or issues, which can inadvertently create incompatibilities with the feminist movement, which approaches issues through an intersectional and systems view. To ensure continued funding, some Pacific feminists are adopting the siloed approach and donor-driven language. However, this can distort the amount of influence donors have on the Pacific feminist movement's priorities and negatively affect the movement's power to set its own agenda.

“

There's a lot more resources coming in on the issues we work on, but now what we are seeing is a real active push from those in power and in bureaucracy decision-making, who are actively coming out and saying: we're not going to be using that term, we're going to be using something else.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Donors' priorities are embedded in conceptual frameworks, siloed into neat and bounded issues, and accompanied by accepted language to frame key issues, generally from a Western lens. It is the antithesis of what should be happening, reflected one interviewee, where 'needs [are] driven by the community and the experience of people, rather than what the donor thinks the need is'.

'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki, Director of the Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC) Tonga, highlighted this issue during the 2022 Mitchell Oration at the Australasian Aid Conference. WCCC's rapid response to the humanitarian crisis in Tonga in early 2022 (resulting from the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai underwater volcanic eruption followed by a tsunami and the subsequent COVID-19 lockdown) emphasised the provision of psychosocial support to local communities in line with the 'do no harm' principle. However, as soon as communication lines to the outside world were restored, WCCC started receiving pre-designed approaches of how to roll out psychosocial support to communities from foreign experts and were advised that these pre-designed activities would be rolled out on the ground with support from the Tongan Government.¹⁶

“

You know, it felt like WCCC and other local NGOs were very much like the locals with no white blood in their veins and the Tongans who had been employed by these larger expert interagency organisations as the in-country focal points were the half-castes because they were closer to the white experts and obviously, they had more knowledge, access to resources and expertise. So, who were we to question them? (ʻOfa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki, 2022)¹⁷

”

The way funding is administered also has implications for feminist movements in the Pacific. Fragmented and project-based funding lacks the continuity necessary for long-term and meaningful change, which is the core of feminist work. It also rarely accounts for core funding to ensure the strength and sustainability of feminist organisations.

“

The way that donors have put in their money across the region, the chopping and changing of what is that fund going to be for ... from pulling away from core funding to looking at just program, projects and then you decide it's women's economic empowerment one time, and then violence against women, and then it's climate change ... but if you don't have strong organisations, they won't be able to cope with anything. Then, it's left to the bigger organisations.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

The extent to which local people are entering into foreign-designed and foreign-led development work undermines the feminist movement and social change in the Pacific more broadly. Those entering these spaces use their technical skills on behalf of foreign governments and their priorities and are left 'with no voice' in their own country. They are also increasingly disconnected from the issues that led them to work in this sector in the first place and are increasingly perceived by their community to be pushing foreign agendas.

“

The donor is complicit, the technical agencies are complicit because they take the good people, who are very good feminists when they were out working with non-government organisations, with feminist organisations, but once they go in there, they're sucked in and then just have to deliver on the donor priorities.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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Reclaiming the Pacific feminist movement

There is a need for more dialogues on feminism in the Pacific and improved documentation of different experiences and perceptions through writing, art or other forms of communication to help deepen and strengthen the Pacific feminist herstories.

“

We need to actually take the time to actually sit and reflect and say how do those values show up and how would we describe it? I mean, we are showing up with it. How do we describe it so that others can understand that this is what we mean when we talk about Pacific feminism?

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Part of the work involves decolonising the language of gender equality because, as articulated by one interviewee, Pacific gender equality ‘might not be equality in the Western sense’. For example, reflected another interviewee, there is a complex interplay that Western people don’t understand: ‘It doesn’t matter if you’ve got this big PhD... it’s very easy for me to go back into my PNG girl way of thinking’ in response to family requests such as contribution to bride price. Within these duties, however, there is still resistance and exemplification of feminist principles through changing attitudes of family through conversation: ‘I say to them, we’re paying the bride price, but that doesn’t mean this woman is coming here to slave for us ... she’s our family’.



“

I think that the problem with decolonising or localising is that we just have completely competing worldviews ... Australians or New Zealanders or whoever is coming in to give funding. They carry with them a different worldview that is dominant, and they expect us as local people to abide, follow through with their way of thinking. And we have our dominant way of thinking as well, which has been suppressed for a really long time and I feel the problem is we are all coming to the table, but we are not accepting that both worldviews are shared, and they have value. So, the way I feel the aid and development systems or processes are working is that one worldview is being promoted or accepted and ours is devalued. So, in order for real structural change to happen, they have to accept that our worldview is also important and the value is equal. Because once they accept that, they will start to understand some of the realities that we are going through, and the realities are difficult, you know, working within the development aid space.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Part of this dialogue is how and if decolonisation is a roadblock or key for Pacific feminism. Decolonisation is a political project in the Pacific, historically associated with the pro-indigenous and independence movements led by men who put gender equality on the backburner as a minor issue rather than seeing it as central to their activism. Therefore, when feminists speak about decolonisation in the Pacific, there is a need to unpack which systems are moving towards gender equality that shifts and places power to and with movements led by women and non-binary human rights defenders. There is a balance to strike between the collaborative nature of defining Pacific feminism and streamlining non-negotiables.

“

We all have different angles and understanding of what decolonisation is, what it means to an individual but also to an institution ... We should have these spaces continuously to talk about what decolonisation means for us as individuals because it starts up here in the mind before it takes any form in an institution or any form of action. Sometimes, decolonisation can be used as an excuse to push for someone's personal agenda as well. We have to question what our intent is.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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“

There were a lot of things that were negotiable that I thought should not have been negotiable; they were being discussed and compromised on in the feminist spaces.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Feminist organisations need to shift the way they engage with donors to change the status quo of donor practices and reclaim the Pacific feminist movement. Part of this involves self-reflection and awareness of feminist organisations to acknowledge their power and influence in negotiating with donors, as well as support in knowing how to push back.

“

It's a complex conversation because we are so used to working within a dominant system. It's the idea that as we start changing things, especially for NGOs and women's movements, are we going to be left out of funding? Are we not going to be able to get the support because it is dealing with the power structure that we've benefited from for some time? We've realised that it's important to push back because the system – the colonised aid system/development system that we've benefited from – it is provoking our identity, our uniqueness as Pacific people, so it's important. But not a lot of people are having those conversations. Sometimes, I question whether the decolonising project is also a neo-colonial kind of perspective or push. It's another kind of rebranding of colonialism ... they're benefiting from it too.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Efforts to reset the Pacific feminist movement may include supporting the appointment of feminists/feminist allies in key regional roles. Having people in leadership who are receptive to opening spaces and inviting feminist participation is one of the key enablers of the feminist movement's influence.

“

There is not enough conversation, not enough people who genuinely want to come into this and let go of power, share the power. I'm talking obviously about expatriates who are coming into our context and trying to push for this agenda. Tell them not to – just stop.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

”

Finally, decolonisation in the Pacific is not just about former colonies such as Australia, but also Fiji. Recognising the dominance of Fijian feminist perspectives and ideology within the movement and the impact it has had on others is critical to the path forward.

“

We look across the region and all the ways of working and influencing because we are all the same colour, brown, somehow that’s not colonisation. It’s going back to the idea that if we are looking at colonisation as a form of dominant system, we have to acknowledge that there are different kinds of dominant system playing at different points, and when does it – our agenda – when does it suit our agenda? How do we talk openly about that? It’s not about having an answer. But actually just naming it. The other one is this concept of white supremacy. It’s so embedded in all of us, too.

(PWL situational analysis interviewee, 2023)

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Recommendations

Pacific Women Lead aims to ensure that the Pacific feminist movement has grown in depth, is better connected, and their expertise is drawn upon by Pacific partners. The program currently maintains a focus on:

- improving the level of influence of Pacific women's organisations and the feminist movement on the national and regional development agenda
- enhancing the size and connectivity of the Pacific feminist movement.

The following recommendations for PWL are based on the formative situational analysis to support progress within these programmatic areas of focus.

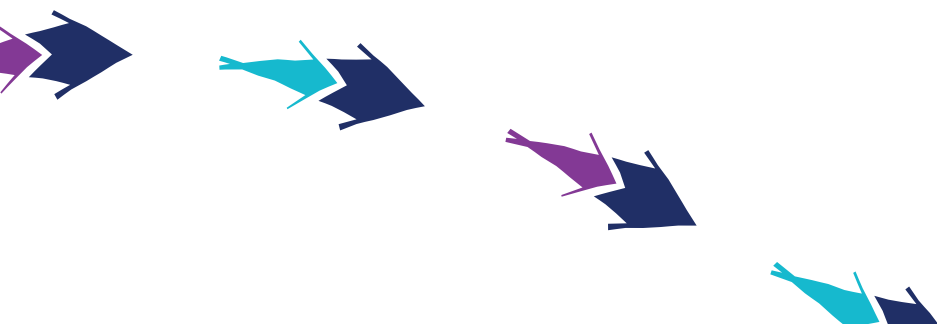
Improve the level of influence of Pacific women's organisations and the feminist movement on the national and regional development agenda.

- Increase the amount of money that the PWL Board has influence over and ensure it can be disbursed flexibly.
- Increase the amount of money invested in coalitions such as We Rise. Let them design the program in line with, for example, the formula: 10% of the money must meet PWL priorities, while 90% is invested at the coalition's discretion based on what they think will be the greatest levers of change.

Enhance the size and connectivity of the Pacific feminist movement

- Convene a forum for Pacific feminist stakeholders to reflect on and discuss the key emerging themes, with the following considerations:
 - » Who facilitates the forum and how it is hosted is just as important as who is in the space.
 - » Foreign donors should not fund it. Instead, it could be resourced by feminist funds to improve the sustainability of the effort.

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Chapter 3

SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Consultations carried out by Junita Ngai, Pacific Women Lead Enabling Services. Analysis and writing completed by Niketa Kulkarni and Nikki Bartlett, Clear Horizon Consulting.

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Introduction

Universal sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are enshrined at international and regional levels. Article 12 of CEDAW highlights the need to eliminate discrimination against women in healthcare and ensure their equal access to healthcare services, including those related to family planning.¹ The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) cemented the expansion of reproductive health to include sexual health and resulted in an agreement among participating states that reproductive rights are human rights. SPC recognised SRHR as fundamental to human rights at the ICPD.² The Beijing Platform for Action states that women have the right 'to have control and make decisions freely and responsibly about matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, without coercion, discrimination, or violence'.³ Finally, Article 25 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) extends these rights to all persons with disabilities and highlights the need to remove societal barriers that prevent women and adolescent girls with disabilities from enjoying a safe and healthy sexual and reproductive life.

As signatories to these documents, 13 PICTs within PWL's scope have been making progress on recognising and advancing SRHR.⁴ These countries are increasingly adopting policies and supporting programs to improve the integration of SRHR into primary health programs.⁵ However, PICTs remain comparatively weak on the realisation of SRHR. This chapter will provide insights into the current state of SRHR across the 13 countries, focusing on evidence related to availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of healthcare. Based on the analysis, the chapter will provide recommendations for the program to consider for helping improve progress within this outcome area.

What is SRHR and why does it matter?

SRHR encompasses a wide range of interconnected issues related to individuals' wellbeing and autonomy in matters concerning their reproductive system and sexual lives. The ICPD Programme of Action defines reproductive health as:

... a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes ... It also includes sexual health, the purpose of which is the enhancement of life and personal relations, and not merely counselling and care related to reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases.⁶



The concept of sexual and reproductive health and rights includes:⁷

- knowing about how our body works and understanding the way we feel, particularly in relation to our sexual feelings
- understanding about healthy relationships and how we can communicate effectively with other people
- being able to enjoy healthy sexual relationships
- being able to express ourselves free from discrimination and in a way that respects the rights of others
- being able to plan when and how often we get pregnant and have children
- getting good quality information and services for contraception and family planning, sexually transmitted infections (including HIV), pregnancy and parenting, antenatal and postnatal care, and skilled assistance during childbirth
- being able to live free from violence and getting help to deal with violence when it happens to us.

Many of these aspects relate to bodily autonomy, which describes the right for everyone to exert power and agency over their body, life and future without violence or coercion. The right to bodily autonomy is central to the realisation of SRHR and refers to having both the power and agency to make choices about one's body without fear of violence or coercion and without having someone else make decisions on one's behalf.⁸ Among other factors, gender-discriminatory social norms can significantly hinder the realisation of bodily autonomy for women and adolescent girls and prevent access to SRHR and services.

Universal rights to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) are essential for the health and wellbeing of women, adolescents and youth (SDG 3) as well as for gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG 5). Specifically, SDG Target 3.7 aims to achieve universal access to SRH services and SDG Target 3.1 highlights the need for SRH services to prevent pregnancy complications that lead to maternal deaths.

Furthermore, when women, adolescents and youth can exercise their right to make informed decisions on 'when and how often to become pregnant, they enjoy better health, can achieve higher levels of education, expand their workforce opportunities, and generate more income for their families. This triggers a cycle of prosperity that carries well into future generations and contributes to poverty reduction and national economic growth'.⁹

Scope and purpose

This chapter explores the status of SRHR across the Pacific to inform future measures of progress related to PWL's goal of ensuring women and adolescent girls have improved access to quality healthcare services, with a focus on sexual and reproductive health.

As a formative situational analysis, this chapter seeks to provide a reference point against which to measure progress. Understanding the highly dynamic nature of SRHR within the Pacific, it is critical to note that the findings are specific to 2021–2023. Unlike traditional situational analyses, however, this chapter also provides broader insights about context, situation and experiences to inform adaptations to program delivery. To this effect, the chapter concludes with recommendations for advancing current areas of program focus within the broader category of SRHR.



Methodology

Data collection and validation

The findings described in this chapter were developed and validated in a staged process to ensure they incorporated the views and perspectives of diverse Pacific Island stakeholders and leveraged research conducted by substantive experts. Two primary methods of data collection were used.

- **Document review:** The review and analysis of relevant documents helped to scope existing knowledge, identify gaps, triangulate other data and provide useful context.
- **Stakeholder consultations:** PWLES staff organised and facilitated consultations with representatives of key SRHR grassroots as well as funding organisations and individuals with relevant expertise.* The consultations included participants who were knowledgeable about disability inclusion and climate change and resilience. To the extent possible, the consultations explored differences and similarities across Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia. It is noted, however, that the focus of conversations often remained on Melanesia. The consultations were guided by a list of conversation topics, which was distributed to participants ahead of time. However, the conversations were allowed to flow organically based on the participants' backgrounds and interests.

PWL undertook 2 rounds of collective sensemaking workshops to ensure the findings were interrogated and validated by a wide range of stakeholders from the Pacific, including participants from DFAT. In the first workshop, 8 participants representing PWLES, SPC, authors and DFAT met to engage with the evidence and review the draft findings. In the second workshop, key findings were discussed with a further 70 participants representing Pacific CSOs, NGOs, DFAT and Pacific regional organisations. In addition, the findings were reviewed by a disability inclusion expert and a representative of the Australia Pacific Climate Partnership.

* The authors would like to give special thanks to all those who gave us their invaluable time and candour to inform these reports.





Framework of analysis

The extent to which SRHR are realised can be considered using the AAAQ framework, which sets out 4 essential, interrelated elements to health rights: availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of healthcare.¹⁰



Availability refers to having adequate functioning healthcare facilities and services with trained personnel and skilled providers who can perform the full range of SRH services. This includes the availability of abortion services, essential medicines for abortion and post-abortion care.

Accessibility refers to all individuals being able to access SRH services 'without discrimination and free from procedural, practical and social barriers interfering'.¹¹ This also includes proximity (i.e. being within safe physical reach), particularly for people experiencing social disadvantage (such as people with disability and/or people living in remote locations), and affordability of SRH services for all individuals.

Acceptability refers to providing SRH services in a culturally respectful way that is sensitive to an individual's gender, age, disability, sexual diversity and other requirements. This includes ensuring that women's privacy and confidentiality are maintained and providing non-stigmatising SRH information.

Quality refers to SRH services being evidence-based, medically appropriate and performed by personnel trained to provide the relevant service. This also includes the provision of sexual and reproductive health goods that are scientifically approved and not expired.

This framework will be used to assess SRHR across the Pacific. Acknowledging the intersectionality between these quadrants, the following discussion will combine evidence related to acceptability, accessibility (emphasising the influence of social acceptance over the accessibility of SRH options), availability and quality (to emphasise the goal of increasing the availability of high-quality SRH service options).



SRH service accessibility and acceptability

Providing comprehensive, people-centred services is critical to realising sexual and reproductive health and rights. Nevertheless, evidence suggests low levels of access to services across the Pacific. This section explores key indicators of access to SRH services, social norms regarding diverse women and adolescent girls' access to SRH services, barriers for women and adolescent girls with disabilities, and other barriers to seeking SRH services in the Pacific region.

Contraceptive prevalence rate and unmet need for family planning

There are 2 accepted proxy indicators of access to SRH services, which estimate the extent to which women or couples are taking any action to avoid or delay pregnancy. The first indicator is the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR), which tracks the percentage of women aged 15–49 currently married or in a partnered relationship who are using or whose partner is using any contraceptive method at the time of the survey.

Across PWL's 13 Pacific countries, the CPR is estimated to range from 17% to 55%, with an average of 35%. This average is significantly lower than the global average of 62% for low-income countries (LICs).¹² The second indicator estimates the unmet need for family planning (FP) by tracking the percentage of married women or women in a partnered relationship who want to stop or delay childbearing but are not using modern methods of contraception. Estimates across PWL's 13 Pacific countries range from 8% to 39%. These rates are comparatively higher than the global estimates of less than 10% for LICs. The low CPR and high levels of unmet need for FP have yielded a fertility rate of 3–4% across PICTs, which is markedly higher than the 1% global average.

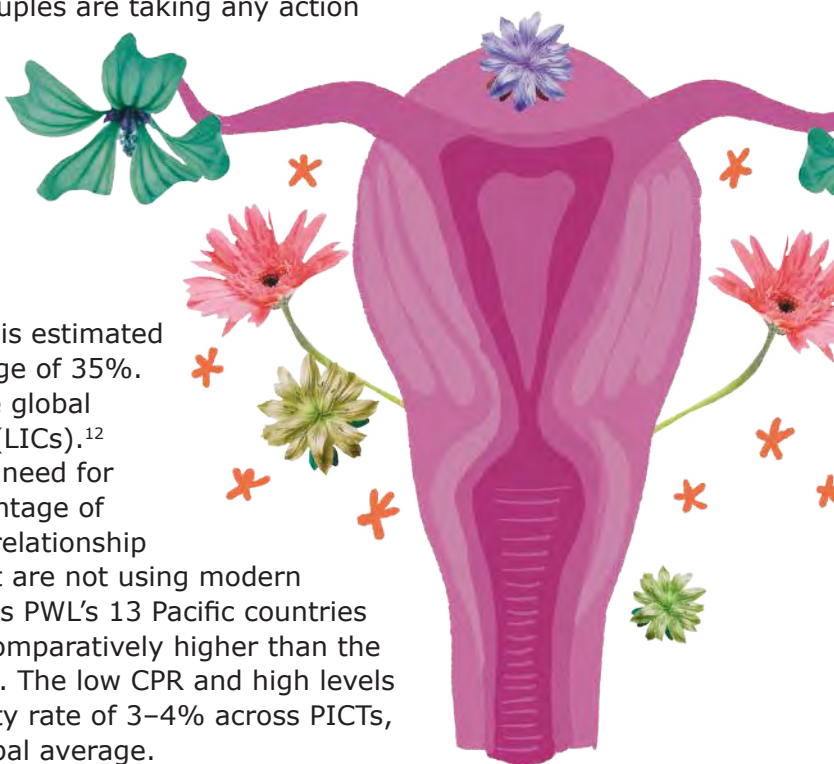
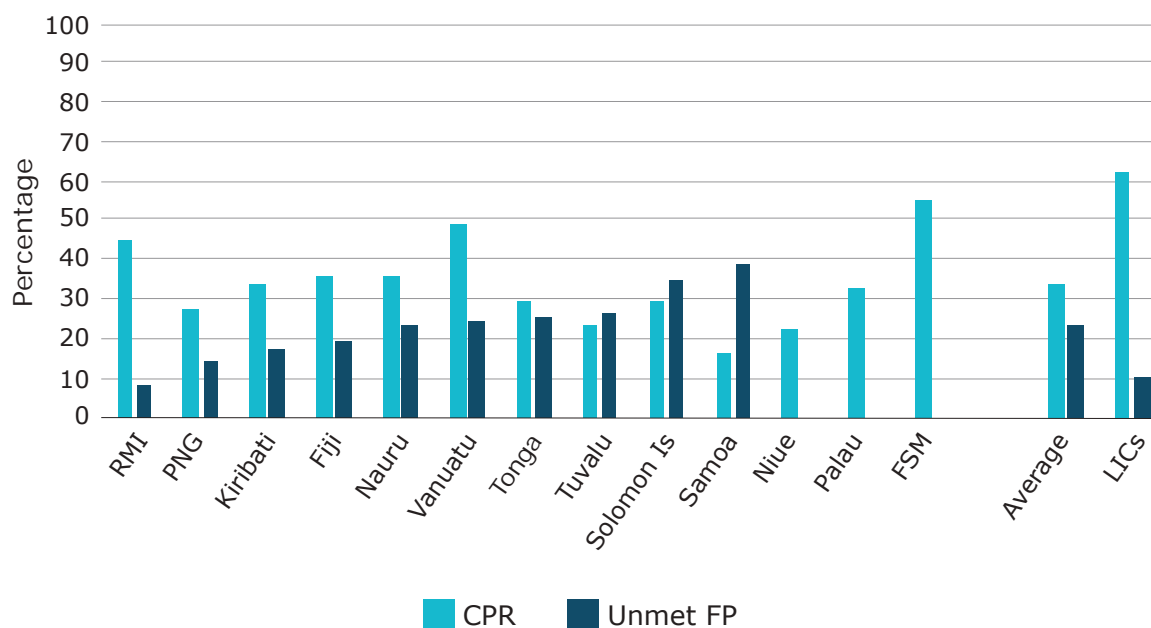




Figure 1: CPR and unmet need for FP rates*



However, there are reasons to believe that these figures do not accurately depict the current state of access to SRH services. A significant concern lies in the definition of these indicators, which restricts measurement to women aged 15–49 who are married or in a partnered relationship. This limited scope ignores the needs of unmarried women and adolescent girls who require health services to avoid pregnancies from both consensual and non-consensual sexual relationships.

Furthermore, poor reporting systems and processes cast doubt on the validity and reliability of the data.¹³ Country-level data on CPR and unmet need for FP is gathered inconsistently through national census and health surveys. In the chart presented above, 3 countries did not have data on the unmet need for FP and 2 countries last collected data on CPR and the unmet need for FP in 2007.

Another issue is the lack of disaggregated data, which means we cannot accurately determine contraceptive rates among diverse groups of women, including women and adolescent girls with disabilities, persons with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), etc. This lack of disaggregated data hinders our ability to identify and address specific barriers and disparities in contraceptive access and use among different populations. Managing these data gaps and improving the accuracy of data collection is essential for informed policymaking and ensuring equitable access to comprehensive SRH services for all individuals, including for people with disabilities.¹⁴

* PICTs rates are based on the latest national population and housing census and demographic health surveys and administrative data, reported by UN DESA, UNICEF and SPC.

Social norms regarding diverse women and adolescent girls' access to SRH services

Gender norms and women's low status affect women's ability to make decisions over their own lives, particularly around sexual and reproductive health and family planning.¹⁵

Cultural constraints to realising universal SRHR and accessing SRH services in the Pacific region vary across different countries and communities, but common dimensions include:

- **Taboos and stigma:** Cultural taboos surrounding discussions about sex, sexuality and reproductive health can prevent open dialogue and limit access to information and services. The stigma associated with premarital sex, contraception and sexually transmitted infections can create barriers to seeking SRH services. Particularly troublesome is the evidence that stigma often prevents women from seeking services after instances of non-consensual intercourse. These norms impede data collection efforts, as women and men are reticent to offer accurate information. The Last Taboo research, conducted in 2016–2017 across Solomon Islands, Fiji and PNG, highlighted that beliefs and attitudes around menstruation being considered 'dirty' have created stigma and led to poor hygiene management practices, unwanted behavioural restrictions and negative impacts on emotional wellbeing. Further, 'girls in all 3 countries reported teasing by boys, contributing to feelings of humiliation, and potentially absenteeism from school'.¹⁶
- **Gender norms and inequality:** Traditional gender norms and inequalities can restrict women's autonomy and decision-making power in matters related to their SRHR. Gender roles that emphasise male dominance and control over women's bodies and choices may limit women's access to contraception, family planning and safe abortion services. In Samoa, about a quarter of both urban (24.9%) and rural (23.7%) women indicated that they need permission from a family member to go for health treatment, with a higher prevalence for young women aged 15–19 (31.5%).¹⁷ Some cultural practices and beliefs, such as early marriage, perpetuate harmful traditional norms and put women at risk of pregnancy-related complications, unwanted pregnancies and poor reproductive health outcomes. Additionally, there is a prevailing acceptance and expectation across the region that having multiple children is desirable and socially valued. This social norm is reflected in various contexts, such as in Kiribati, where there is a strong desire for many children and discouragement of contraceptive use. In PNG, research has shown a significant preference for many children among married men aged 21–44.¹⁸ Similarly, in Samoa, husband opposition and a preference for multiple children have been identified as primary barriers to contraceptive use and family planning.
- **Limited access to education:** Inadequate access to comprehensive sexual education and limited awareness about SRHR contribute to cultural constraints. The lack of information and understanding about SRHR can perpetuate myths, misconceptions and unsafe practices. For instance, a study conducted in PNG revealed that women harbour concerns regarding the potential adverse effects of contraceptives.¹⁹
- **Religious and moral beliefs:** Strong religious and moral beliefs can influence attitudes and practices related to SRHR. As religious institutions play a fundamental role across the Pacific, their potential for positive or negative advocacy on SRHR issues is significant and influential. Some churches have highly conservative views on issues such as premarital sex and the provision of contraception. This results in unmarried women being more likely to be neglected in family planning clinics.²⁰



The beliefs and behaviours of healthcare workers also play a crucial role in shaping SRH services in the Pacific region. In some Pacific Island countries, such as Vanuatu²¹ and PNG,²² negative attitudes and beliefs of healthcare workers about contraceptives have led to them discouraging adolescents from accessing SRH services and using contraceptives. These personal views that conflict with certain SRH rights can hinder the provision of comprehensive care.²³ This highlights the need to address healthcare providers' underlying biases and misconceptions, as their attitudes directly affect the availability and accessibility of these services to young people. This issue is also highlighted in a study conducted in PNG, which identified an 'entitlement mentality' among healthcare workers, where certain individuals were perceived as more deserving of family planning services than others. This mindset reflects underlying biases and inequities in service provision, underscoring the need for comprehensive training and awareness programs to address these issues.

The barriers to accessing SRH information and services are further exacerbated for young women and adolescent girls. Many Pacific communities expect that young people should refrain from engaging in sexual activity until marriage. As a result, unmarried women are more likely to experience neglect in family planning clinics.²⁴ For instance, in Vanuatu and Samoa, young women and adolescents are often denied SRH information and services due to the belief that they are not yet in need of such support.²⁵ However, the reality, as reflected in adolescent fertility rates, often contradicts these expectations. SPC estimates an average adolescent fertility rate of 48 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 across PICTs, which is well above the 2030 SDG goal of no more than 13 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19.²⁶

Women who experience intimate partner violence or sexual assault may face physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies and other reproductive health complications. Reproductive coercion refers to behaviours that control or manipulate women's reproductive choices, such as pressuring them to have or not have children, interfering with contraceptive use or coercing them into unsafe abortions. This form of violence restricts women's agency and autonomy in making decisions about their reproductive lives, impacting their SRHR. Women who experience violence may additionally face barriers in seeking healthcare, including fear, stigma and financial dependence on their abusers. This can prevent them from accessing essential services such as contraception, prenatal care, STI testing and treatment, and safe abortion services.

Social consequences of seeking SRH services emphasise the need for confidentiality and privacy to improve the willingness of women and adolescent girls to access care. The fear or experience of a lack of confidentiality is particularly concerning for vulnerable populations, such as sex workers in Fiji, who express concerns about the confidentiality of HIV or STI test results and how they are delivered.²⁷ Concerns about levels of privacy and confidentiality is a common barrier for young people as well.²⁸ Based on information shared during a consultation, Kiribati women and adolescent girls feel more comfortable seeking care from health care professionals who travel from other islands, as it mitigates concern about information being shared to community members.



Emerging focus: Programs that seek to create a supportive environment for SRHR

Although sociocultural practices are seen to constrain progress in SRHR, including family planning in some PICTs, there are examples of culture being used to advance SRHR. These practices leverage the cultural values and traditions of the region to promote positive outcomes in SRHR. For example, Yumi Toktok Stret is a radio program in Vanuatu that combines storytelling, music and discussion to address taboo topics related to SRHR. It uses local languages and cultural references to engage the community and promote open conversations about sensitive issues. Peer education programs in Samoa engage young people as advocates and educators on SRHR topics. These programs train young individuals to become peer educators who deliver culturally sensitive and age-appropriate information and support to their peers. By using familiar language and relatable experiences, these programs aim to create a supportive environment for discussions about SRHR. Finally, in Solomon Islands, an 'O clinic' (ovulation clinic) is provided for those who wish to use natural methods for cultural, religious or health reasons.

Women and adolescent girls with disabilities

Women with disabilities often face the misconception that they are not sexually active.²⁹ This misconception leads to the belief that they do not require SRH services since they are seen as 'sexless' or 'asexual'. In Fijian society, for example, the idea that women with disabilities can engage in sexual activities, get married or have children is often rejected. Additionally, there is a prevalent belief that these women are incapable of managing their own sexuality and fertility.³⁰ These social norms lead to women with disabilities feeling judged or mistreated by service providers and family.

For these reasons, women and adolescent girls with disabilities receive less information about SRHR and are often excluded from sexuality and relationships education.³¹ For example, women and adolescent girls with intellectual disabilities have been found to sometimes lack understanding or acceptance of menstrual hygiene management, while women and adolescent girls with physical disabilities experience difficulties related to discomfort, positioning of the product, concerns about leakage due to sitting for an extended time and the added difficulties of managing assistive products such as catheters.³²





Discriminatory norms and lack of knowledge about options often lead to a loss of control over decisions about women and adolescent girls with disabilities' bodies and sexuality. In Fiji, medical decisions are often made by family members, particularly affecting women and young individuals with disabilities who have limited access to education, those with psychosocial disabilities, and those who struggle to communicate directly with service providers (such as deaf women or women with intellectual disabilities).³³ There is evidence that these family decisions have resulted in nonconsensual sterilisations of women with disabilities.³⁴ In Samoa, there is no formal legal guardianship system, granting individuals with disabilities the right to make independent decisions.³⁵ However, beliefs about their decision-making abilities regarding healthcare vary. While some healthcare providers support decision-making, there is evidence of widespread 'informal deprivations of legal capacity'.³⁶ Women and adolescent girls with disabilities often face barriers in communicating with doctors, leading to disparities in healthcare provision. Women with intellectual disabilities or mental illness may also experience involuntary sterilisation or contraceptive use.³⁷

The format and language of SRH information and services significantly affect access. Public health information is often unavailable in accessible formats, such as sign language, easy-to-read formats, or braille. The lack of internet access and assistive devices further exacerbates disparities in access to information.³⁸ It is essential to provide appropriate and accessible information, education and communication resources that meet the specific needs of women with vision, hearing and/or intellectual impairments.³⁹

Moreover, women and adolescent girls with disabilities in remote areas face additional obstacles in accessing SRH services depending on the availability of transport that responds to their accessibility needs. They are often poorer on average and incur higher healthcare costs. A significant number of individuals with disabilities cannot afford healthcare, and they are more likely to experience financial hardships due to healthcare expenses. Transport costs are often cited as an obstacle for people with disabilities in accessing services. There is also a lack of physical accessibility in healthcare facilities, including buildings, rooms, equipment and toilets, making it difficult for people with disabilities to access services. One promising practice exemplified in Fiji is an initiative known as 'the walk'. Medical Services Pacific has enlisted healthcare providers to go to the homes of individuals with disabilities to provide necessary care.



Women in remote communities

Access to SRH information and services in the Pacific Islands is often concentrated in urban areas, creating disparities in healthcare accessibility between rural and urban populations. This limited access can have significant implications for the health outcomes of rural communities. For instance, in Solomon Islands,⁴⁰ Samoa, and Tonga,⁴¹ there is a high unmet need for SRH services in rural areas. The situation is particularly challenging for women due to social norms around caregiving, as making long and expensive trips may disrupt their caregiving responsibilities. In addition, the expenses associated with travelling to urban areas, where services may be more accessible, can deter individuals from seeking care, particularly if multiple visits are necessary. Even when services are nearby, the cost of the services can be a barrier.

In remote areas of Fiji, the availability of healthcare services depends on visits from NGO mobile clinics, which can occur every 12–18 months for harder-to-reach islands. In the interim, women must rely on community health workers or nursing stations, but these healthcare providers are typically not trained to administer contraceptive services themselves. Consequently, women may be left with limited options and may have to undertake expensive and burdensome travel to urban centres for adequate care. For example, many women in Fiji prefer injections as their contraceptive method due to their ease of concealment. However, the requirement for injections every 3 months poses a challenge for those living in remote areas as these services may not be readily available to them. While efforts have been made to extend healthcare outreach to remote locations and islands, implementing these initiatives depends on available resources and political commitment. The geography of the Pacific Islands presents challenges in achieving economies of scale, further complicating the delivery of healthcare services.





SRH service availability and quality

This section explores the links between SRH service availability and quality, focusing on the supply of commodities, the availability of quality service providers and the broader enabling environment in Pacific Island countries.

Availability of SRH commodities and services

Most Pacific Island countries have sufficient availability of SRH-related commodities (e.g. contraceptive devices and medicines), primarily through the efforts of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Despite challenges in distribution and supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic, commodities have generally been available in these countries over the past 2 years. There are 9 major commodities or family planning methods, and the demand for specific types of commodities varies between countries. This variation often stems from the capacity of healthcare workers to provide certain methods. Health workers tend to request and provide the methods which they are familiar with and have the necessary skills and capacity to deliver. In addition, a few countries prohibit certain forms of contraceptive methods due to beliefs held by their leadership.

Consultations with key Pacific SRHR stakeholders revealed that problems with 'stock-outs' are a regular occurrence at the national level. Poor data about SRH needs within their country creates challenges for accurately forecasting commodity requirements. Consultations also revealed issues with distribution, particularly to remote or less politically influential communities.

Linking healthcare availability with maternal and infant mortality

Table 5 provides details about the number of doctors, nurses and midwives per 10,000 population across 11 countries (health workforce data for Niue and FSM were not available). According to the latest data from the World Health Organisation (WHO), low rates of health service providers are available in PNG, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Samoa and RMI.

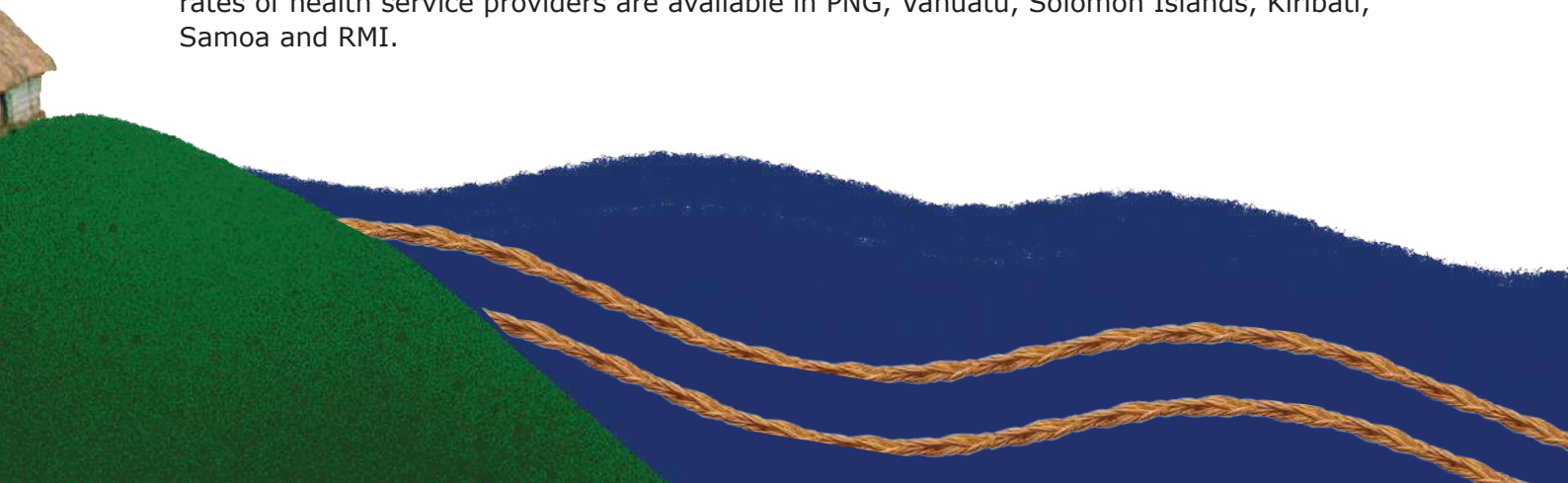


Table 5. Skilled health workforce per 10,000 population⁴²

	Doctors	Nurses and midwives
PNG	0.7	4.5
Vanuatu	1.7	14.2
Solomon Islands	1.9	21.6
Kiribati	2	38.3
Samoa	3.4	34.4
RMI	4.2	33.4
Tonga	5.4	43.3
Fiji	8.6	39.6
Tuvalu	9.1	42.6
Nauru	13.5	78.5
Palau	14.2	72.6

Based on data published by SPC since 2015,⁴³ an estimated 90.5% of births across 9 Pacific countries were attended by skilled health professionals. (The latest SPC data from Nauru, the Cook Islands, FSM, Niue and Vanuatu were collected before 2015 and are therefore not counted in this average.) Countries with the lowest rates included PNG (56.4% in 2018), Solomon Islands (86.5% in 2015), Samoa (88.9% in 2020), Kiribati (92.0% in 2018) and RMI (92.4% in 2017). The subset of Pacific countries with lower rates of births attended by skilled health professionals aligns with the workforce rates presented in Table 5 above.

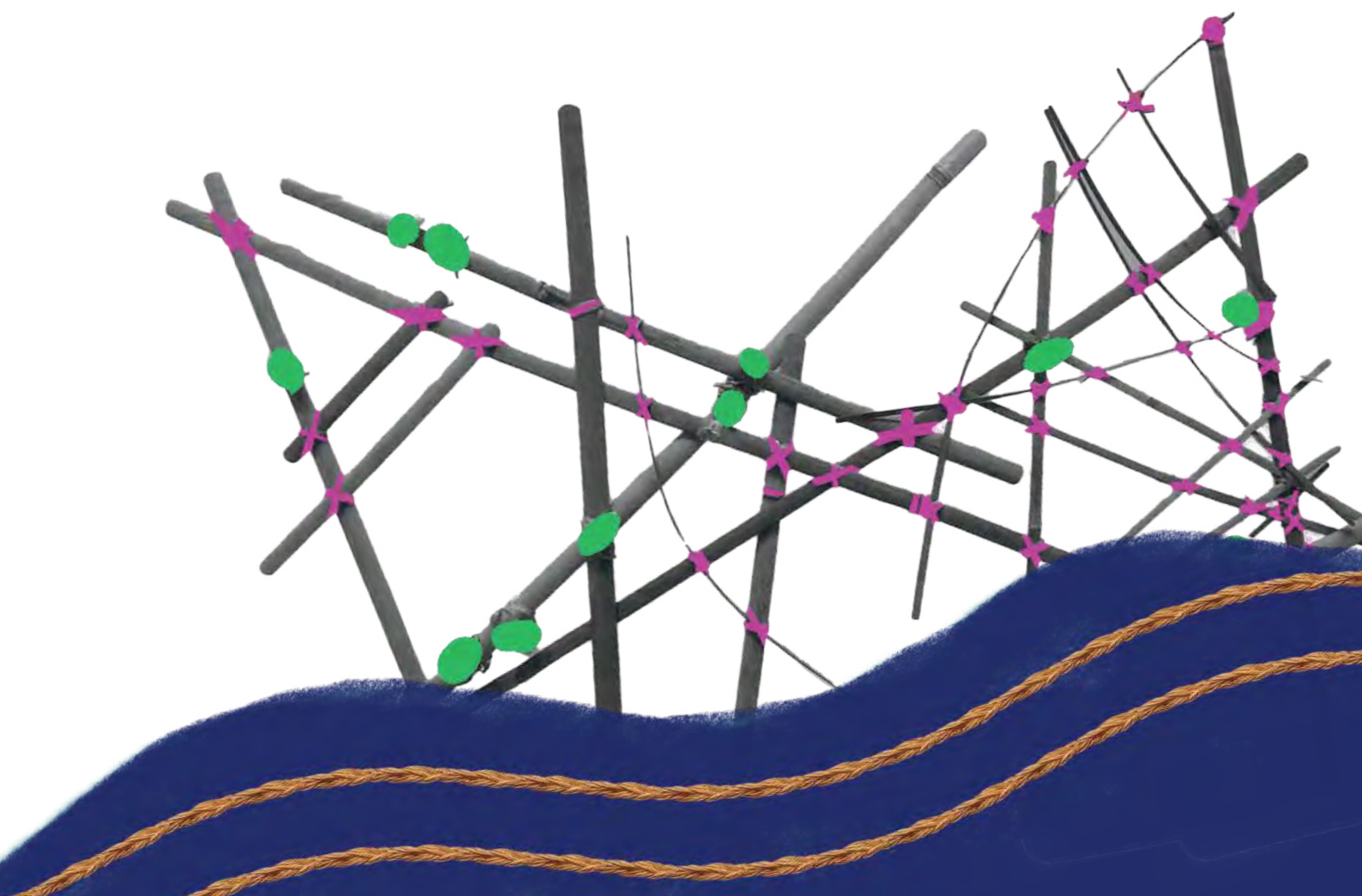
Even more concerning is the likely link between workforce rates and maternal and infant mortality rates. Based on available data, maternal mortality ratios, which measure the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, are highest in PNG (145 per 100,000 live births), Solomon Islands (104 per 100,000 live births), Kiribati (92 per 100,000 live births) and RMI (92 per 100,000 live births) in 2017.⁴⁴ Infant mortality rates, measuring the number of deaths of infants under one-year-old per 1,000 live births, are highest in Kiribati (40.1 deaths per 1,000 live births), PNG (35.9 deaths per 1000 live births), RMI (26.4 deaths per 1,000 live births) and Nauru (25.7 deaths per 1,000 live births).⁴⁵



Quality of service provision

Healthcare workers across PICTs have varying qualifications and knowledge to provide SRH services to diverse women. For example, many healthcare workers lack adequate knowledge about the options, uses and risks of contraceptives available to women and how best to deliver family planning services. The lack of technical skills and expertise extends to the ability to give appropriate contraceptive counselling advice, insert uterine devices or implants, and communicate with and manage adolescents. Healthcare workers may also lack a strong understanding of human rights, current laws and policies.⁴⁶

To improve the availability of quality healthcare services, UNFPA launched the Transformative Agenda for Women, Adolescents and Youth in the Pacific (Transformative Agenda), funded by PWL across Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Health Facility Readiness and Service Availability Baseline Assessments were conducted on 725 health facilities across all 6 countries through this program. The governments of Kiribati, Tonga and Vanuatu have leveraged the data to review and develop policies. In Kiribati, the data is being used to scale up family planning services and select health providers to receive training on providing family planning counselling. UNFPA also provides training that leverages toolkits, checklists and action plans that service providers can implement within their facilities. Furthermore, efforts have been made to ensure that every health facility has at least one health worker trained in adolescent-friendly and disability-inclusive SRHR.



Enabling environment

The legislative and policy-enabling environment for SRHR in the Pacific region includes the Moana Declaration (2013), which emphasises the importance of SRHR in sustainable development; the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development (2013), which promotes comprehensive SRH services; and the Madang Commitment (2009), which focuses on improving access to quality reproductive health services. These regional agreements highlight the commitment of Pacific countries to advance SRHR and provide frameworks for policy development and implementation in the region.

Across the Pacific, however, there are still legal barriers and policies that do not support SRHR. These include restrictions on abortion, requirements of marriage to access services, criminalisation of same-sex sexual behaviour, absence of criminal penalties for gender-based violence and criminalisation of sex work in certain countries.

- While some countries in the Pacific allow abortion in certain circumstances, there are still legal restrictions on abortion throughout the region. The prevalence of unsafe abortion is a concern, but limited data are available to confirm its extent.
- Some Pacific Island countries have laws that require marriage as a condition to access SRH services, which can create barriers to access for unmarried individuals.
- The criminalisation of same-sex sexual behaviour exists in countries such as Tuvalu, Tonga and Solomon Islands, perpetuating discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- Several Pacific Island countries lack criminal penalties for gender-based violence, including marital rape. Domestic violence is not criminalised in certain countries, and sexual harassment is not criminalised in others.
- Sex work is criminalised in Tonga, Niue, Palau, Nauru and RMI, which can further marginalise and stigmatise individuals engaged in this profession and contribute to significant obstacles for individuals seeking appropriate care and support.
- In addition, some Pacific Island countries have restrictive policies related to the age of legal capacity (including the age of consent to sex and the age of consent to medical interventions), as well as privacy rights and access to medical records.

While some Pacific Island countries have adopted SRHR policies, many of these policies are outdated. Assessments of SRHR programs in some countries have revealed that the integration of SRHR into development plans is not fully implemented. For example, a 2022 review of relevant policies in Tonga highlighted the absence of a national sexual and reproductive health strategy.⁴⁸ While certain aspects of policy and legislation in Tonga enable contraception and family planning, such as the availability of emergency contraception and no prohibition based on age, marital status or disability, there are gaps. For example, female condoms and implantable contraception are not included in the list





of essential medicines. Furthermore, Tonga lacks legislation mandating the integration of comprehensive sexuality education into the national school curriculum, indicating a need for improved educational efforts in this area.

In response to this, UNFPA is supporting the development of reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child, and adolescent health policies in Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga and Vanuatu. These policies focus on disability inclusion, reproductive commodity security, and disaster risk reduction and specify that adolescents aged 13 and over can obtain contraception without parental consent. Tonga and Kiribati are awaiting approval of their policies, while Fiji and Vanuatu are finalising their policies. Communicating lessons about the effectiveness and impact of these policies may motivate policy reform across the region.



Recommendations

Pacific Women Lead aims to ensure that women and adolescent girls have improved access to quality healthcare services, with a focus on sexual and reproductive health. The program currently focuses on several pathways to achieving progress against this goal. These pathways include:

- improving inclusive access and use of SRH services
- changing social norms that limit diverse women and adolescent girls' access to SRH services
- improving collaboration with health ministries on SRHR services.

The following recommendations are based on the formative situational analysis and suggest areas of focus for PWL's programmatic efforts.

Improving inclusive access and use of SRH services

- Strengthen the integration of programs and services around adolescents' access to sexual and reproductive health and services. This could include supporting activities that promote and implement SRHR training and awareness for young girls aged 12–18, leveraging cultural values and community engagement, particularly within programs such as Pacific Girl.

Changing social norms that limit diverse women and adolescent girls' access to SRH services

- Encourage partners to engage with cultural leaders, traditional leaders and faith-based leaders to advocate for the importance of supporting sexual and reproductive health and rights of diverse women and adolescent girls and promote greater acceptance of the need for inclusive and wide access to SRH services.
- Support activities and programs that promote greater awareness and sensitisation across healthcare workers about the diverse SRH needs of Pacific women and adolescent girls. Importantly, these programs should emphasise the universal right to SRH services regardless of a service provider's personally held belief system.

Improving collaboration within health ministries on SRHR initiatives

- Focus on strengthening data collection and highlighting the need for more impact stories about sexual and reproductive health, rights and services. This could include increased advocacy and support for improved data collection about SRHR needs and realities across diverse women and adolescent girls.





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Chapter 4

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Stakeholder consultations carried out by Joanne Kunatuba, Pacific Women Lead Enabling Services. Analysis and writing completed by Niketa Kulkarni and Nikki Bartlett, Clear Horizon Consulting.

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Introduction

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is broadly recognised across the Pacific as 'central to realise women's rights and gender equality'.¹ While efforts have been made to improve enabling environments and societal norms to support pathways to economic empowerment, there has been slow progress against related WEE outcomes. Pacific women are under-represented in the formal workforce, earn less money than men, face more workplace discrimination, have access to fewer financial services, enjoy less secure rights to land and have weaker economic safety nets to provide support during emergencies. This chapter aims to provide a deeper understanding of the current state of WEE across Pacific countries, focusing on aspects identified as areas of current or potential programmatic focus for PWL.

What is WEE and why does it matter?

Economic empowerment describes progress along a range of interconnected pathways and processes that influence equitable access to, control over and benefits from income, assets and other economic resources.²

Globally, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development identifies closing gender gaps that affect women's ability to access and control economic resources and activities as central to achieving gender equality (SDG 5). The positive relationship between WEE and other development goals is also broadly recognised. For example, the 2012 World Development Report describes the link between women's incomes and improved education and health outcomes for children due to women's heightened ability to spend on household needs.³ Conversely, unequal control over resources directly affects women's self-esteem, treatment and respect from family members, rates of gender-based violence, mobility outside the home and women's decision-making power.⁴

At a macroeconomic level, substantial research has demonstrated that WEE is necessary for achieving inclusive economic growth and prosperity. Economic analysis suggests that improving gender equity in labour force participation rates by 25% could add as much as USD3.2 trillion to the overall Asia-Pacific gross domestic product (GDP).⁵ On the flip side, gender inequality in labour force participation is correlated with per capita losses in GDP across the globe.⁶ Furthermore, lack of equitable and secure land tenure rights results in lower access to credit and inputs, leading to inefficient land use and yields, which can affect domestic food availability as well as export flows.⁷

However, the converse is not true – macro-economic growth alone will not reduce gender-based inequality.⁸ Instead, achieving WEE involves a complex web of cultural processes, practices and norms, policy frameworks, private sector commitment and a nuanced understanding of the political and economic climates in which Pacific women are living.





Scope and purpose

This chapter explores the status of WEE across the Pacific to inform future measures of progress related to PWL's goal of ensuring diverse women have more equitable access to resilient economic opportunities, including increased voice in economic decision-making.

As a formative situational analysis, this chapter seeks to provide a reference point against which to measure progress. Understanding the highly dynamic nature of WEE within the Pacific, it is critical to note that the findings are specific to 2021–2023. Unlike traditional situational analyses, however, this chapter also provides broader insights about context, situation and experiences to inform adaptations to program delivery. To this effect, the chapter concludes with recommendations for advancing current areas of program focus within the broader category of WEE.

Methodology

Data collection and validation

The findings described in this chapter were developed and validated in a staged process to ensure they incorporated the views and perspectives of diverse Pacific Island stakeholders and leveraged research conducted by substantive experts. Two primary methods of data collection were used.

- **Document review:** The review and analysis of relevant documents helped to scope existing knowledge, identify gaps, triangulate other data and provide useful context.
- **Stakeholder consultations:** PWLES staff organised and facilitated consultations with representatives of key WEE grassroots as well as funding organisations and individuals with specific relevant expertise.* The consultations included participants who were knowledgeable about disability inclusion and climate change and resilience. To the extent possible, the consultations explored differences and similarities across Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia. It is noted, however, that the focus of conversation often remained on Melanesia. The consultations were guided by a list of conversation topics, which was distributed to participants ahead of time. However, the conversations were allowed to flow organically based on the participants' background and interests.

PWL undertook 2 rounds of collective sensemaking workshops to ensure the findings were interrogated and validated by a wide range of stakeholders from the Pacific, including participants from DFAT. In the first workshop, 8 participants representing PWLES, SPC, authors and DFAT met to engage with the evidence and review the draft findings. In the second workshop, key findings were discussed with a further 70 participants representing Pacific CSOs, NGOs, DFAT and Pacific regional organisations. In addition, the findings were reviewed by a disability inclusion expert and a representative of the Australia Pacific Climate Partnership.

* The authors would like to give special thanks to all who gave us their invaluable time and candour to inform these reports.

Income generation

Formal economic opportunities

Conventionally, formal and semi-formal employment is regarded as having the greatest potential for achieving economic empowerment due to the amount and predictability of wages, heightened legal protections and favourable working conditions. However, most Pacific women remain excluded from the formal workforce. Table 6 provides available information about the latest labour force participation rates for the countries in which PWL has programming. According to this data, the gender difference in the participation rates is 13 percentage points lower in Melanesia, 24 percentage points lower in Micronesia, and 19 percentage points lower in Polynesia. These rates should be interpreted with caution since broader employment and economic trends can also affect overall employment potential.⁹

Nevertheless, it remains noteworthy that in no Pacific country are women formally employed at a higher rate than men. Young women are even less likely to participate in the formal economy.¹⁰ In 2017, youth unemployment rates were above 50% in RMI, Nauru and Tuvalu. Gender differences in access to quality education create early obstacles for women and girls' path towards economic opportunity.¹¹ Educational achievement for women is particularly poor in Melanesia, where only 45% of women receive secondary education.¹²

Table 6. Labour force participation rates

Country	Latest data availability	Female	Male
RMI	2019	27.9%	61.0%
Samoa	2017	31.5%	55.0%
Tonga	2017	38.4%	56.2%
Tuvalu	2017	39.7%	58.5%
Kiribati	2020	40.5%	77.8%
Vanuatu	2020	41.1%	51.5%
Fiji	2020	45.5%	82.6%
FSM	2014	46.2%	67.8%
PNG	2022	47.5%	47.7%
Tokelau	2016	49.9%	70.0%
Nauru	2019	52.0%	75.0%
Niue	2017	60.6%	77.4%
Cook Islands	2019	63.3%	77.8%
Palau	2015	74.4%	79.7%
Solomon Islands	2013	83.9%	87.9%

Women's entry into the formal workforce does not necessarily lead to gender-equitable opportunities and earnings. Instead, women in the formal workforce regularly face discriminatory gender norms and 'unconscious biases'. As a result, employed women are more likely to have lower-paid jobs than men. For example, across Melanesia, men typically earn 20% to 50% more than women because they are working in jobs that attract higher salaries.¹³ In Nauru, employers reportedly prefer to hire women for lower-paid service and clerical jobs and men for more technical or professional roles. A 2018 study found that although most employees and executives in Pacific exporting businesses were men, more women were being hired across all roles.¹⁴

Generally, Pacific women are under-represented in middle and senior management positions (29%),¹⁵ with most concentrated in human resources and administration functions, often considered 'women's roles'. Subregional trends show the representation of women in management is highest in Samoa (43%)¹⁶ and lowest in FSM (18.2%).¹⁷ While the Pacific has the world's lowest representation of women in national parliaments, the regional average of women directors on boards (21%) is above the global average (17%).¹⁸ A 2021 survey funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) found that of 22 organisations sampled in Samoa, 25% of chief executive officers and 33% of board directors were women, higher than the Pacific average of 13% and 21%, respectively, and higher than the global average.¹⁹ On the other end of the spectrum, the proportion of women in board chair positions is 0% in Kiribati, Niue and Solomon Islands.²⁰

Across the Pacific, formal work opportunities for women are often restricted to a small range of lower-wage service sector occupations, including domestic work, tourism, garment making and food processing.²¹ These sectors are often characterised by poor working conditions and low levels of worker bargaining power.²² For example, Pacific women are often employed in care-based sectors, which usually involve long hours, low pay, contracts that are temporary or without guaranteed hours, and difficult working conditions, including harassment and violence. Globally, these sectors were also the hardest hit during the COVID-19 pandemic, placing women at a greater risk of losing their jobs or having their hours reduced. An International Labour Organization (ILO) rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on employment in Samoa found that 64% of job losses in formal sector positions were among women.²³ Women in caring professions are also at a greater risk of contracting diseases, such as COVID-19, as frontline responders.²⁴

Within sectors such as agriculture and fishing, there are pronounced differences in the type of work women and men perform. In fishing, for example, men dominate in offshore commercial fishing employment, while women work more often in small-scale inshore fishing (e.g. coastal reef flats and mangrove areas).²⁵ Similarly, men tend to play a larger role in commercial agriculture, while women perform a greater share of shore-based harvesting and processing,²⁶ which overall provides a lower earning potential.²⁷ Since women are unlikely to be skilled in other areas of work, these trends heighten women's risk of unemployment from environmental disasters and climate change.

Policies related to women's formal employment

Across the Pacific, there is good evidence of progress in the development of gender-responsive employment policies that support maternity and parental leave,²⁸ promote women in leadership, subsidise childcare, enhance job security, eliminate harassment, and provide support to women employees who are victims of violence.²⁹ For example, the constitutions of many countries (e.g. Fiji, FSM, RMI, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) prohibit sex-based discrimination in accordance with CEDAW and other international commitments.

However, a recent ADB study of WEE legislation in 10 Pacific countries described important variations in legislative protections.³⁰ Laws prohibiting gender employment discrimination have been enacted in only 5 of the 10 countries. Only 2 countries mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value. Only 3 countries (Fiji, Kiribati and Samoa) have laws that specifically prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace.³¹ The widespread lack of comprehensive sexual harassment legislation deprives women of official avenues for seeking redress in cases of sexual coercion and exploitation. The countries that do have legislative protections for sexual harassment lack adequate support networks to guide women through protocols and procedures needed to prove their cases. The absence of a clear pathway to address sexual violations has resulted in a low level of redress. In 2015, the ILO reported a single case across the Pacific in Tuvalu, where a woman had successfully sued an employer for sexual harassment in the workplace.³²

Maternity leave is not provided in PNG, RMI, FSM, Palau and Tonga. Paid maternity leave is only available in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Samoa, and is provided for at least 14 weeks only in Fiji.³³ Dismissal of pregnant workers is only specifically prohibited in Fiji, Kiribati and Samoa.

Furthermore, across the Pacific, employment laws extend different protections to public and private sector employees related to maternity benefits, non-discrimination in hiring and equal pay for work of equal value.³⁴

Social norms prevent women's entry into the workforce

Pacific women are disproportionately responsible for domestic and care work. Those who have joined the labour force may suffer from a double workday as they remain responsible for most of the housework. Employed women in Fiji, for example, spend an average of 64 hours each week working at their formal occupation and at home. Employed men, on the other hand, spend an average of 49 hours per week working. In PNG, women work, on average, nearly twice as many hours as men. In Tonga, women work over 50% longer than men on non-economic activities each week.³⁵

The double burden of women is in part due to gendered cultural norms about the roles of women and men in the household. For example, Samoan gender norms dictate that men earn income and cash 'outside the home', while women meet domestic duties inside the home. In Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Palau, Niue, Nauru and Tonga, women are responsible for unpaid care of children and household members who are elderly, sick or with a disability, as well as other domestic duties, which they are expected to prioritise over economic activity. According to Vanuatu's 2020 Census, 66% of males and 70% of females who were unemployed cited domestic work as their main reason for not looking for work in the past week.

As families increasingly shift to urban centres across the Pacific, they leave behind their rural family and community





structures that would have supported childcare and other domestic responsibilities. With few informal and formal options available for urban childcare, women often find it difficult to participate in the formal workforce.

WEE is further affected by societal expectations encouraging early marriage and childbearing.³⁶ Global data estimates that each additional child decreases women's labour force participation by about 10–15%.³⁷ The level of SHRH directly affects women's ability to exercise informed decisions about if, when and how many children to have.

A few programs seek to change the attitudes and values that place the main responsibility for the home and care of children, the sick and the elderly on women and girls. Programs that promote positive role models for men as carers, such as the CARE 'family business' approach in coffee farming in PNG, have been an effective model to support men's involvement in unpaid care.³⁸ A mid-term review of CARE Vanuatu's Leftemap Sista II program found that a combination of WEE, gender-based violence and financial management content in workshops has the potential to create spaces for women to be heard in family planning.³⁹

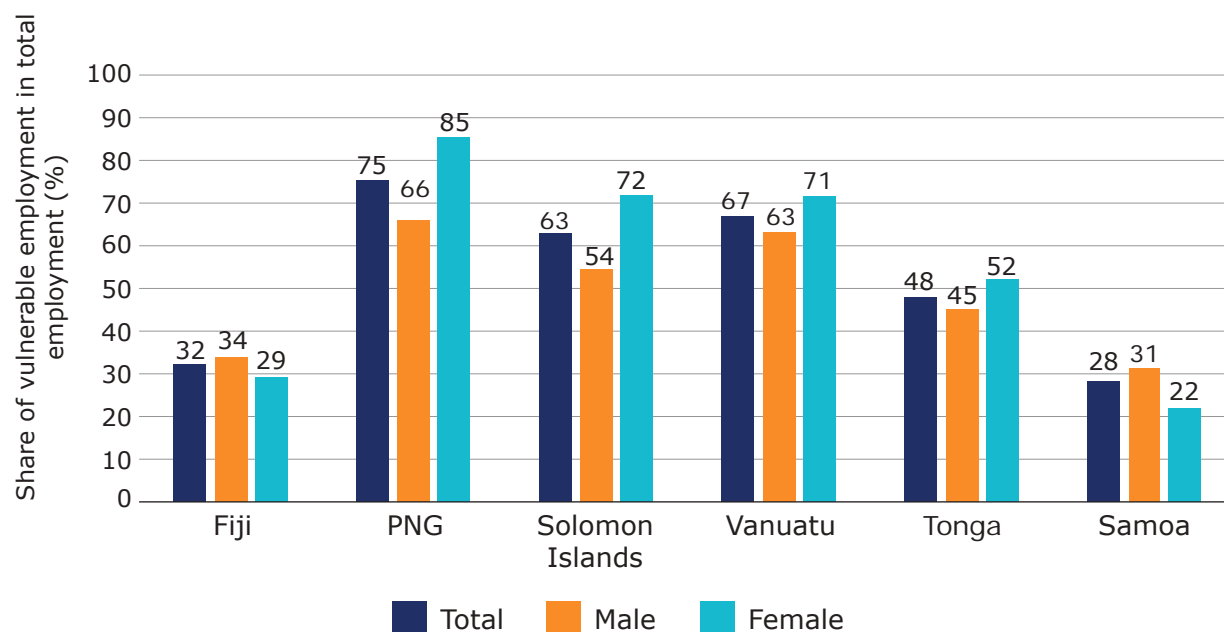
Informal economic opportunities

There is increasing recognition of the informal sector's potential to provide a pathway to resilient economic empowerment for women, particularly in response to the need for women to have flexible working conditions and low barriers to entry.⁴⁰ Informal economic opportunities can allow women to exercise economic agency and earn money in a way that satisfies their needs and situations.

For this reason, it's unsurprising that women are over-represented in the informal economy. World Bank data highlights the relatively high rate of vulnerable employment for Pacific women (Figure 2).⁴¹ The rates are particularly high in PNG and Solomon Islands, where over 70% of women are involved in the informal sector. Open markets remain the biggest and most visible part of the informal economy.⁴² Since about 70–90% of market vendors are women, market activity can be a significant potential driver of WEE.⁴³ A recent study on 3 markets in Solomon Islands found that for about 80% of the vendors, market sales provided the sole source of their household income and helped cover expenses related to food, education, transport and community welfare.⁴⁴ The annual turnover at Honiara Central Market in Solomon Islands is AUD13–19 million, with women responsible for 90% of this economic activity.⁴⁵



Figure 2: Vulnerable employment in select Pacific countries, by sex, World Bank 2022 data⁴⁶



While the informal sector provides opportunities to women who may not otherwise be eligible for formal employment, it often comes with lower pay, poorer working conditions and less security. These sectors are often not covered by policies and regulations, which limits the extent of protections and economic safety nets.⁴⁷ Women in the informal sector also suffer from poor access to financial services and limited transport and infrastructure services. Within agriculture, women perform a greater share of shore-based harvesting and processing, including subsistence farming.⁴⁸ This dependence on natural resources heightens women's vulnerability to changes in climate. Gendered barriers to participating in the paid workforce make it more difficult for women to diversify their livelihoods in response to natural disasters and climate change, contributing to gender inequity in climate resilience.⁴⁹

There are signs that Pacific countries are acknowledging the importance of extending protections to the informal sectors. PNG recognises the importance of marketplaces to drive progress against its ambitious economic and human development targets. Through its National Policy for the Informal Economy 2011–2015, PNG is committed to supporting market activities.⁵⁰ This includes the provision of sustainable support infrastructure, facilities and services, and effective management. However, lack of data affects evidence-based decision-making. PNG and Tonga conducted audits of their informal economy, but as highlighted by stakeholders during consultations, the exercise is difficult and resource intensive. Therefore, such data gathering activities are unlikely to be repeated.

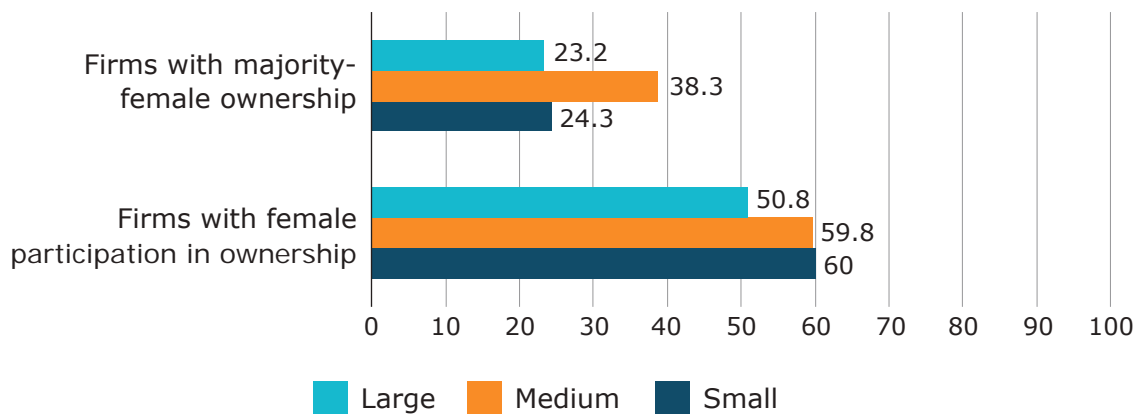
There are several examples of programs working to improve conditions for women working in the informal economy. For example, the UN Women's Markets for Change (M4C) program aims to ensure that rural and urban marketplaces in Fiji and Solomon Islands are safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory. Through partnerships, M4C aims to improve the socio-economic security of women market vendors and provide financial and business development opportunities. M4C coordinates with 21 market vendor associations across 4 countries. Through them, rural women farmers and market vendors are identified to participate in project trainings (i.e. leadership development, financial literacy, business management, agriculture value addition and protective cropping). M4C partners with ANZ Pacific, Vodafone Fiji and Digicel Pacific to support women market vendors in accessing digital and banking services. Recent data from M4C showed that over 700 rural women

market vendors in Fiji and Vanuatu experienced improved socio-economic security through increased income, savings or financial capital. After the training provided in Fiji, about 40% of the trainees interviewed reported improved socio-economic security and agency in financial decision-making in their businesses and households. They said they were now accessing gender-inclusive financial and social services and had increased their business and financial skills, such as starting and maintaining savings and record-keeping.

Formal entrepreneurship

The economic potential of advancing gender equality through micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) is substantial, as they are more likely to be owned by women and are often significant employers of women (refer to Figure 3).

Figure 3: Distribution of women's business ownership in the Pacific



Female-owned enterprises in the Pacific are typically in the services sector (retail, restaurant, hospitality and tourism, and handicrafts), and some are in information and communication technology (ICT) industries, as well as professional services such as legal advisory and accounting services.⁵¹ These industries are generally highly competitive and generate lower returns. Furthermore, 90.2% of MSMEs owned by Pacific women are in the informal sector.

Considerable efforts have been made to improve policies and regulatory frameworks supporting inclusive small business development in the region. This has included removing the requirements for women to receive their husband's signed endorsement of their business registration documents. Furthermore, efforts are being made to increase the convenience and accessibility of registration processes. In Fiji, staff are deployed to distribute registration forms and collect fees.⁵² Tonga has introduced an e-company register and a website to facilitate the registration and licensing of businesses. However, such online platforms require internet connectivity, which may not be available for remote communities. In addition, online registration requires basic digital literacy and access to computers or smartphones, which studies show women across the Pacific are less likely to have.⁵³

PWL supports several initiatives that aim to enhance the capabilities of female entrepreneurs. For example, through Women's Fund Fiji, PWL supports the Women Entrepreneurs and Business Council in Fiji. The council recruited 148 women from Suva, Nasinu, Nadi and Labasa to be part of the 7-month Academy for Women Entrepreneurs program, which supports women in formalising their businesses. Over 100 women

completed and graduated from the program over July–December 2022. Similarly, the Papua New Guinea Business Council for Women hosted a networking event for the senior executive women’s program in 2022.

Rise Beyond the Reef (RBTR) aims to improve women’s lives through ecologically sustainable income-generating projects that use traditional skills and materials to produce handicrafts sold domestically, regionally and, more recently, globally. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when retailing in local marketplaces was disrupted, RBTR established a website to sell handicrafts and goods globally. Being able to sell online helped the women’s collective to continue to earn an income when their traditional ways of selling were disrupted. RBTR reported that in 2023, women and small and medium enterprises earned more than FJD94,000 through arts and crafts income. This year, RBTR aims to exceed the number of women earning more than FJD1,000,000 through their program to date.

Persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities participate significantly less in economic work, with men having more opportunities than women.⁵⁴ Women with disabilities aged 20–39 are more likely to be in the bottom 2 wealth quintiles compared to men. This is influenced by underlying factors such as the age at which the disability began, family formation, survival rates and the role of women in income generation.⁵⁵ Across disability status, men are twice as likely as women to be employed, while women are more likely to be homemakers.

Persons with disabilities continue to face cultural prejudice and discriminatory barriers to education, vocational training and employment opportunities. Some of these include attitudinal barriers regarding their abilities, unequal access to schooling and discriminatory workplace policies and attitudes. Furthermore, women with disabilities suffer an increased risk of gender-based violence because they are often assumed to be incapable of fulfilling their culture-assigned roles as mothers, wives and unpaid community workers.

Evidence shows that women with disabilities are less educated, especially in resource-poor settings. In Solomon Islands, girls with disabilities attend school at half the rate of girls without disabilities. In Fiji, 49% of women and girls with disabilities do not attend school, as compared with 32% of men and boys with disabilities.





Persons with disabilities enjoy fewer legal protections. Only 8 countries in the Pacific have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and 5 other countries have signed but not ratified.⁵⁶ Where countries' constitutions do not include disability as a protected ground for non-discrimination and/or where countries have not acceded to the CRPD, women are particularly vulnerable. Specific legal barriers for women with disabilities can include lack of access to legal aid, lack of decision-making power related to reproductive rights, and gaps in facilitated access to court services and development programs.⁵⁷

Vanuatu's Ministry of Education and Training works with post-school education and training providers to implement a disability-inclusive approach. In line with Vanuatu's National Disability Inclusion Policy for the TVET (technical and vocational education and training) sector and with the support of Vanuatu Skills Partnership, training providers have developed and implemented disability inclusion action plans. These include raising awareness to promote opportunities for people with disabilities and improving accessibility, enrolment procedures and data collection. Trainers participate in professional development to strengthen their skills and confidence in teaching people with disabilities. These efforts have led to an increased number of people with disabilities participating in skills development opportunities across Vanuatu.

Do no harm

To improve WEE, it is important to consider the complex relationship with gender-based violence (GBV). Women's earnings can reduce household economic stress and improve women's self-esteem and bargaining power, all of which can reduce her risk of domestic violence.⁵⁸ Earning income also provides women with the means to leave an abusive relationship. However, research also suggests that women's increasing control over financial resources can challenge existing power dynamics within the household and 'may be resented by some men, who use violence to reassert their position of authority'.⁵⁹ A few studies across the Pacific have shown that women who earn their own income suffer an increased rate of physical and sexual violence from their partners.⁶⁰

Funded through the previous phase of the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program, IWDA partnered with the Department of Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University to develop an evidence-based Do No Harm Toolkit⁶¹ 'to support organisations working at a community level on WEE programming'.⁶² Two toolkits have been produced, one with a specific focus (Savings Clubs in Solomon Islands) and the other with a broader remit to support broad-based WEE programs to integrate approaches to address violence against women. The use of these toolkits is recommended to guide program design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.



Ownership and management of resources

Access to financial services

Recent demand-side research conducted in Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu through the Pacific Financial Inclusion Program demonstrates that women are more likely to be excluded from the formal financial system than men.⁶³ Financial competency studies in the region highlight that women have lower awareness, information and access to financial tools and products than men. Women's bank account ownership is generally equal to men's (Samoa and Tonga) or substantially lower (Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu). However, those with bank accounts are as likely as men to report savings. Instead of formal services, Pacific women widely participate in savings clubs, which can provide different forms of social protection for members. Digital financial services are fast evolving in the Pacific and are offered by financial service providers such as banks, microfinance institutions and mobile network operators. These providers use mobile phones, point-of-sale devices and networks of small-scale agents to offer basic financial services at greater convenience and sometimes at a lower cost than traditional banking. Most WEE projects under the PWL program focus on providing access to financial business training or helping women set up bank accounts.

Lack of access to financial services constrains the ability of women to engage in entrepreneurship. Studies show that access to financial services can help individuals start and expand businesses, invest in education, manage risk and absorb financial shocks. A 2020 study found that in Fiji and Solomon Islands, sociocultural norms require women to seek permission from their husbands before opening a bank account, which is often not granted.⁶⁴ Many small enterprises involving women are based on agricultural products, which are vulnerable to natural disasters. Women are not able to sufficiently access funds aimed at covering climate risk related loss.⁶⁵ As such, women have less income to meet the requirements to formalise their businesses. Research 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.

In recent years, digital technology has been used to improve the accessibility of financial products and services. In addition, online registration requires basic digital literacy and access to computers or smartphones, which studies show women across the Pacific are less likely to have.⁶⁶ In PNG, only 16% of women own a mobile phone. Even fewer have a smartphone, which is often required for mobile banking.⁶⁷





Access to economic safety nets

Participation in the informal sector, lower wages and lapses from full-time work often limit women's ability to participate in financial safety net schemes such as retirement funds. Regulatory impediments to women's access to retirement benefits include exemptions for employees in specific sectors and small businesses, limited coverage of the informal economy and restrictions on voluntary membership. Generally, women's retirement balances are lower than men's, partly because of minimum income thresholds. Women can also have trouble accessing their partner's benefits in the case of divorce or death.

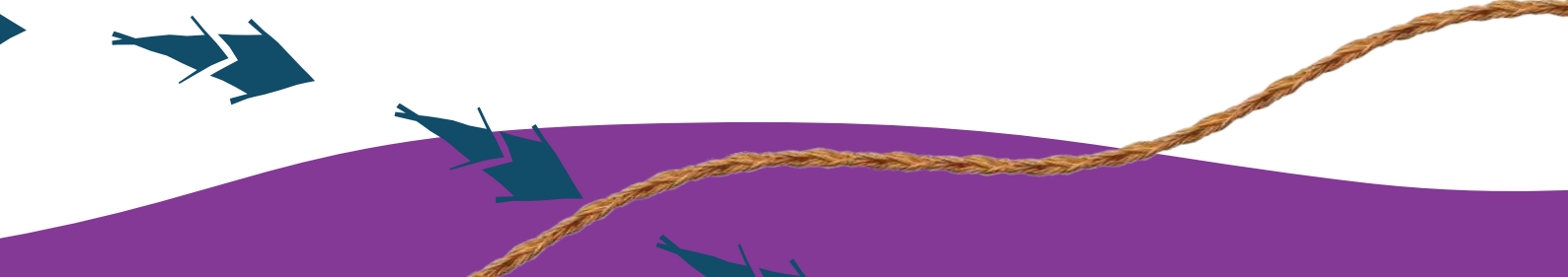
Retirement funds can serve as self-insurance policies, as most small businesses lack insurance coverage. After Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015, members of the Vanuatu National Provident Fund were allowed to withdraw up to 20% of their balance. Similarly, after Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2016, members of the Fiji National Provident Fund could withdraw up to 30% of their balance, which resulted in FJD275 million in withdrawals.⁶⁸

There are a few examples of inclusive reforms and programs:⁶⁹

- **Solomon Islands – youSave scheme:** Introduced in 2018 to allow those self-employed or working in the informal sector to participate in a voluntary savings scheme. In 2020, the program had attracted 18,858 members with a net contribution of SBD14.5 million. New registrations were boosted in late 2020 when the Ministry of Finance approved a 10% tax refund for youSave members using mobile top-ups for deposits and reduced the minimum deposit size from SBD10 to SBD5. This government commitment was designed to encourage the informal sector to remit savings into their accounts.
- **PNG – Eda Supa:** Introduced in 2015, Eda Supa, a subsidiary of the main retirement fund Nasfund, was established as a voluntary contribution platform for farmers, sole traders and small business owners otherwise not covered under the legislation. The fund accepts contributions as low as K20, including through a mobile phone app. In 2021, Eda Supa had recorded 35,302 members.
- **Vanuatu National Provident Fund:** The fund introduced an informal sector unit in 2019 to include informal sector workers, including market vendors, fishers, kava bar owners and participants in seasonal worker programs.

Financial literacy

Across the Pacific, women demonstrate lower levels of financial knowledge and confidence than men, directly affecting their ability to make appropriate financial decisions. In PNG, for example, research has found that women are 25% less financially literate than men.⁷⁰ Similarly, research shows that women in Fiji and Samoa have lower business literacy and skills than men.⁷¹ Furthermore, while digital processes are the most widely cited positive change to enable women's business and entrepreneurship, women in the Pacific are less likely to have access to a computer or a smartphone, and are less likely to have the digital literacy skills to use online platforms.⁷²



A few examples of Pacific-based programs aiming to improve financial capabilities and knowledge include:

- **Pacific Financial Inclusion Program:** Launched in 2008, the program has reached over 2 million Pacific Islanders and has worked with 6 Pacific Island countries (Fiji, PNG, Tonga, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) to develop national strategic frameworks to advance financial inclusion in line with the 2020 Money Pacific Goals. Fiji, PNG and Solomon Islands have made progress towards their commitment by initiating financial education programs.⁷³ This work continues under the Pacific Money Goals 2025 to further improve financial inclusion, with an emphasis on digital literacy.
- **ANZ MoneyMinded:** ANZ Bank's flagship financial literacy training is available in Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. It is offered in select countries via the UNDP M4C project.⁷⁴ The program is delivered by 'coaches' through in-person and online workshops that cover topics such as planning for the future, making money last until payday, needs and wants, budgeting and assertiveness, and learning to say no, which aims to enhance communication about financial matters within families and communities.⁷⁵ The training has also been adapted for specific community needs such as for family violence services or young entrepreneurs. An independent impact assessment of the program found that on completion, 96% of participants improved their financial wellbeing and ability to meet commitments day to day.⁷⁶
- **Women Accelerating Vibrant Enterprises in Southeast Asia and the Pacific program:** With the aim to bridge the financial and digital literacy gap, the program, supported by ADB's Women's Finance Exchange and financed by the Women Entrepreneur Financing Initiative, reached more than 200 women entrepreneurs via online training focused on financial management, technology and digital tools, and e-commerce.⁷⁷
- **Markets for Change:** Through established market vendor associations across Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Samoa, the program provides financial literacy and business management training to rural women farmers and market vendors. After the training conducted in Fiji, about 40% of the trainees interviewed reported improved agency in financial decision-making in their businesses and households. They mentioned that they were now accessing gender-inclusive financial services and had improved their financial and business acumen, particularly related to savings and record keeping.

Land tenure security

In many PICTs, women's property rights are limited by social norms, customs and legislation that hamper their economic status and opportunities to overcome poverty. Even in countries where women do most of the agricultural work, they are routinely denied the right to own the land they cultivate and depend on to raise their families. For example, Tongan law and traditional customs forbid land ownership by women.

Ownership of land and property empowers women and provides income and security. Without resources such as land, women have limited say in household decision-making and no recourse to assets during crises. In addition, the lack of title prevents women from using land as a guarantee for loans that are needed to start or expand a business.⁷⁸



Recommendations

Pacific Women Lead aims to ensure that diverse women have more equitable access to resilient economic opportunities, including increased voice in economic decision-making. The program currently maintains a focus on several pathways to achieving progress against this goal. These pathways include:

- changing social norms regarding women's economic empowerment
- improving access to resilient economic opportunities for diverse women
- enhancing Pacific government, civil society and private sector gender inclusive policies.

The following recommendations are based on the formative situational analysis as suggested areas of focus for PWL's programmatic efforts.

Changing social norms regarding women's economic empowerment

- Support the further roll-out of 'do no harm' research and associated toolkits (developed under the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program) to improve usage by PWL delivery partners, particularly those implementing WEE projects.
- Support the development of guidelines on women's economic advancement and WEE. These guidelines should adopt a holistic approach by including the impacts on women, their families and communities, and elaborate on the practical implications and outcomes.

Improve access to resilient economic opportunities for diverse women

- Explore the potential for UN Women's M4C program to support women in the informal sector to access and benefit from voluntary savings schemes, including greater advocacy to government(s) and super funds, etc.
- Enable the convening of more learning spaces to discuss innovation and best practices for WEE initiatives, such as CARE Vanuatu's Leftemap Sista II program.

Enhance Pacific government, civil society and private sector gender-inclusive policies

- Enable better linkages with the government regarding support and coordination of efforts. This may involve supporting data gathering activities to improve the availability of evidence for mainstreaming gender and disability analysis through national policies and frameworks seeking to remove barriers to WEE.



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15. Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI), [Leadership matters: Benchmarking women in business leadership in the Pacific](#), PSDI, Sydney, 2021, p 14.
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26. UN Women, [Women's economic empowerment brief for 14 Pacific Island Countries and Territories](#), 2022, p 13.
27. Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, *Economic empowerment*, Pacific Women Support Unit, Suva, 2020, p 1. 'Crops are cultivated separately by women and men, who reap different rewards with women's crops earning half that of men's.'
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31. In Samoa, the Labour and Employment Regulations 2016 prohibit discrimination and workplace sexual harassment against women in the workplace. Kiribati has drafted legislation on equal pay for equal work and on prohibiting workplace sexual harassment and sex discrimination.
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35. S Hedditch and C Manuel, [Gender and investment climate reform assessment: Pacific regional executive summary \(English\)](#), World Bank Group, Washington, DC, 2010, p 2.
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42. E Kopel, M Keen and A Ride, [Why local markets matter for Pacific security](#), Asia & Pacific Policy Society Policy Forum, 2021.
43. UN Women estimates between 75–90% of market vendors in the Pacific are women. UN Women Asia and the Pacific, [Women's economic empowerment](#), UN Women, 2018.
44. M Keen and A Ride, [Markets matter: ANU-UN women project on Honiara's informal markets in Solomon Islands, ANU Department of Pacific Affairs \[PDF 1.25MB\]](#), Department of Pacific Affairs, Australian National University, Canberra, 2018.
45. Keen and Ride, [Markets matter: ANU-UN women project on Honiara's informal markets in Solomon Islands, ANU Department of Pacific Affairs \[PDF 1.25MB\]](#).
46. World Bank, World Development Indicators [data set]
47. For example, in Solomon Islands, the Labor Act does not provide protections to domestic servants where many women work.
48. In Tonga, 83.2% of the population was engaged in subsistence work in 2018, of which 55.5% were women and 44.5% were men. In Solomon Islands, 71% of women and 51% of men were engaged in subsistence agriculture in 2013.
49. Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 'Information paper 3: Economic empowerment of women', Forum Economic Ministers Meeting, Port Vila, 10–12 August 2022.
50. Kopel et al., [Why local markets matter for Pacific security](#).
51. Asian Development Bank (ADB), [Leveraging trade for women's economic empowerment in the Pacific](#), ADB, Manila, 2019.
52. Asian Development Bank (ADB), [Women and business: Policy options for the economic empowerment of Pacific women](#), ADB, Manila, 2018.
53. ADB, [Women's economic empowerment in the Pacific region: A comprehensive analysis of existing research and data](#).
54. MF Utumapu, AM Tafuna'i, FR Me, AT Lemisio, S Baker, T Walsh and H Brown, [Gender and disability analysis: COVID-19 Samoa](#), CARE, 2022.
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56. Countries that have ratified include the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. States that have signed but not ratified include the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga. Niue has neither signed nor ratified. For details and dates, see: OHCHR, [United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies: UN Treaty Body Database](#), n.d.
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58. International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), [Do no harm research project report: Women in formal employment survey \[PDF 2.89MB\]](#), IWDA, 2018.

59. Mundkur et al., [Working paper: Linking women's economic empowerment, eliminating gender-based violence and enabling sexual and reproductive health and rights](#), p 13.
60. In Vanuatu, women who earned their own income were about 1.5 times more likely to experience physical or sexual partner violence in their lifetime than those who did not earn an income.
61. International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), [Do no harm toolkit: Briefing note](#), IWDA, 2018.
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66. ADB, [Women's economic empowerment in the Pacific region: A comprehensive analysis of existing research and data](#), p xiii.
67. Asian Development Bank (ADB), [In Papua New Guinea, financial literacy trainings are helping women-owned businesses to thrive](#), ADB website, 2023.
68. Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI), [A secure retirement: Leveling the playing field for women in the Pacific](#), PSDI, 2022.
69. PSDI, *A secure retirement: Leveling the playing field for women in the Pacific*.
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73. United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), *Pacific Financial Inclusion Program – phase II: Final evaluation report*, UNCDF, 2019.
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75. R Russell, M Stewart and M Khallouk, [MoneyMinded impact report: A focus on MoneyMinded online \[PDF 1.12MB\]](#), ANZ, 2020.
76. R Russell and J Kutin, [MoneyMinded impact report: Fiji \[PDF 1.42MB\]](#), ANZ, 2019, p 7.
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Chapter 5

WOMEN'S SAFETY

By 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki

'Today, the issues of human rights, gender-based violence and decision-making are high on the agenda of Pacific leaders, but there is still much work to do.'

Pasifika Rising

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Introduction

'If I am not safe, it means that my daughter is not safe and what I fear the most is that if things do not change, my granddaughter and great-granddaughters will think that feeling unsafe is normal, and my sons, grandsons and their sons will believe that making women feel unsafe is normal, things have to change ...'

Talatalanoa respondent
Regional Counselling Framework Meeting, Nadi, 2023)



Understanding women's safety

Women's safety in the Pacific, for the purpose of this chapter, requires an understanding of the overarching laws, policies, practices, strategies and approaches that are being used to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in all their diversity across the Pacific. CEDAW defined violence against women (VAW) as a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on an equal basis with men. It both grows out of and perpetuates women's subordinate status and the unequal power relations between women and men.

There is growing data on women's safety in the private space across the Pacific, with 13 Pacific Island countries having undertaken intimate partner violence prevalence studies covering physical, sexual and psychological violence experienced by women during the last 12 months and over their lifetime.¹ However, there is a lack of evidence-based research or data on women's safety in public spaces or during crises in the Pacific. For example, Fiji is the only country in the Pacific that has undertaken studies on sexual harassment in the workplace.²

While there is a lot of anecdotal evidence and data collected by NGOs on women's safety during and after crises, there is not a lot of evidence-based research done in this space.





The qualitative methodology used to collect data for this chapter was *talatalanoa* (informal conversations) over a series of 8 regional meetings held during 2023, mainly in Fiji. The regional meetings provided an ideal opportunity for the researcher and writer to use these spaces to engage in person with key gender-based violence (GBV) and ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG) experts and practitioners in the region – which would have otherwise been conducted through online platforms such as Zoom. *Talatalanoa* was held on the sidelines of the regional events and during workshops and side events where the theme of women’s safety was discussed.

This formative situational analysis aims to look at EVAWG strategies, approaches, programs and activities that are being used to ensure women’s safety in the private space (home). It includes a brief overview of EVAWG in public spaces and during and after crises across the Pacific. It will also provide an overview of what has and hasn’t worked well over the last decade and the urgent priorities moving forward.

Root cause of violence against women and girls

The root cause of violence against women and girls in all their diversity is gender inequality and power imbalances between men and women, girls and boys.³

Most of the *talatalanoa* participants agreed with the combined definition of the root cause presented above. A few participants further added that the root cause was ‘deeply rooted’ in patriarchy and the belief that women are subordinate to men or the culturally, religiously entrenched view that women can never be equal to men. More than half of the participants said they felt that many of the GBV/EVAWG practitioners they had come across in the region did not understand the difference between the root cause and the contributing factors of VAWG, nor were they able to articulate or communicate what the root cause was.

“

I was at a regional workshop, and when we talked about the root cause, everyone in the room was basically in agreement, but then the person sitting next to me whispered, ‘Yeah, but it’s also got to do with alcohol and drugs, well in my country anyway’ ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

”

“

I couldn’t believe that I had to debate with a person who was doing GBV prevention work about the agreed concepts around the root cause because she was adamant that the root cause was mainly due [to] cultural practices declining and that it had nothing to do with gender inequality ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

”

Language matters

EVAWG language over the last decade has been interchangeable. The terms violence against women and girls, gender-based violence, family violence, domestic violence, intimate partner violence and women's safety have been used across the Pacific. Women's safety is perceived as an umbrella term for both VAWG and GBV. The selective use of these terms by different groups has given rise to another set of challenges and often vigorous debates between actors. The Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women (PWNAVAW), a longstanding regional network, prefers to use the term VAWG. Others prefer to use GBV, while PWL uses the term women's safety.

“

The issue with the term 'GBV' is that it can be misused to be understood as gender neutral, where violence can be perpetrated against a woman or a man, girl or boy, in all their diversities. Whereas, when we say violence against women or women's safety, we are being clear about whom we are focusing on, and so we should because women in all their diversity are the ones who are disproportionately affected by violence and abuse ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, UNW/FWCC Pacific Regional Counselling Manual Training of Trainers, Fiji, 2023)

”

The PWNAVAW, in its 7th Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women Meeting outcomes document, reiterated the need to use globally accepted language:⁴

“

We call for policies and programs to use language that is focused on women's human rights and women's experiences of violence. This means using violence against women and girls rather than other terms that do not put women survivors at the centre.

”

The IPV prevalence studies have shown how women across the globe, including the Pacific, are disproportionately affected by physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. To address this, language matters.



There is a growing concern among EAWG experts in the region that the language and focus on EAWG, stemming from decades of protest and movement building around it, is becoming increasingly diluted. This has and will continue to have a direct impact on many EAWG programs and strategies shifting away from focusing on women in all their diversity and, therefore, naming and acknowledging the root cause of VAWG. The long-term impact is diabolical because it leaves room for gender inequality and power imbalances between men and women, girls and boys, to continue manifesting across all levels of society.

“

We've gotten to a point in our EAWG activism where we are questioned as to why we focus on women as if it's a bad thing and that we should look at it holistically ... they preferred we used the term family violence and work on strategies where families can live free from violence – that's okay, but someone else can do that. We need to focus on our core business, and that's based on the statistics and data that we have where [in] 80% of our cases women are the survivors and men are the perpetrators ... so yeah, we will continue working on eliminating all forms of violence and abuse faced by women and girls ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

”

The term 'women and girls in all their diversity' is used to ensure that all people who identify as women and girls are included, regardless of disability, location (such as rural or remote areas), ethnicity, socio-economic status, or being transgender.

“

I accept and use this concept of women in all their diversity, but my government doesn't because they don't agree with transgender women being identified as women and so it becomes a struggle for us to agree on this issue.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, We Rise Coalition, Fiji, 2023)

”



Women's safety in the private space

'Imagine living with a husband who beats you whenever he wants, whenever he's angry, whenever his family blames you for anything ... imagine being called the most degrading names and constantly told how much of a bad wife I am, a bad mother ... now imagine I live nowhere near counselling or police services and live in a very remote area, tell me, how are you going to help me?'

Talatalanoa respondent

Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific regional conference, Melbourne, Australia, 2023)

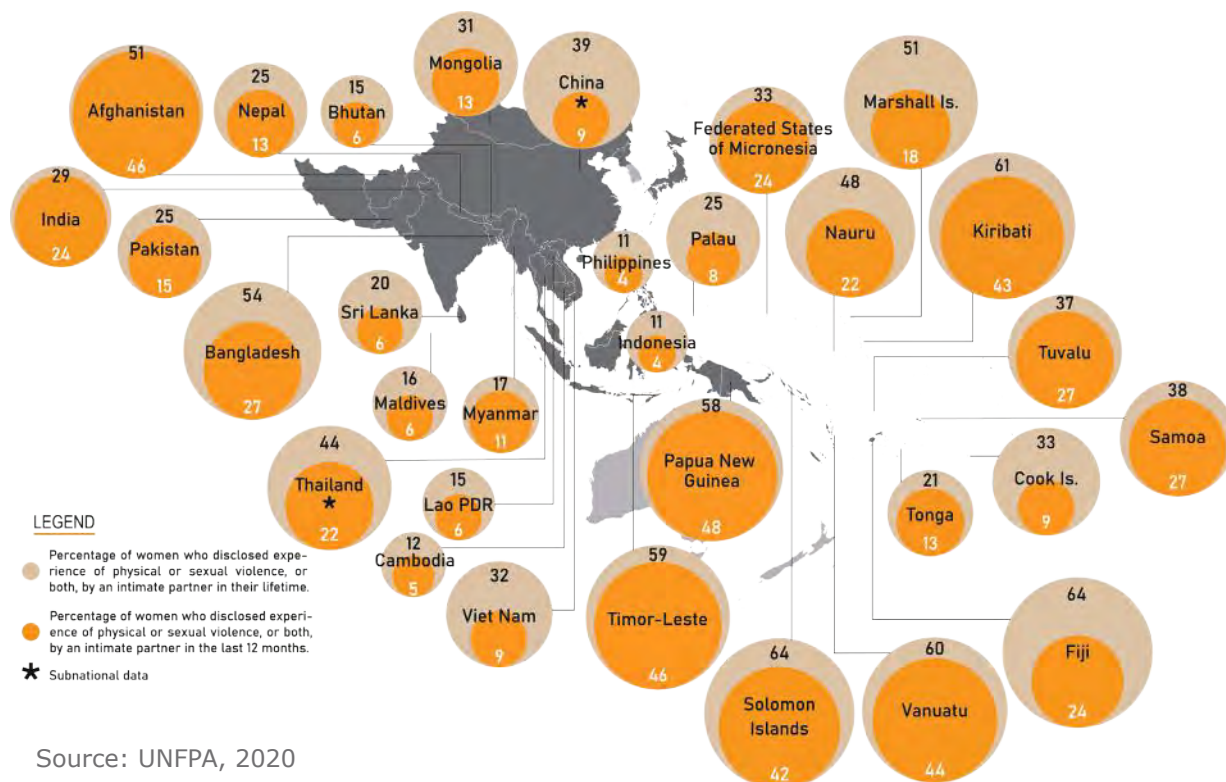


The story that is often told about VAWG in the private space has raised concerns in terms of the grave data that is presented on IPV prevalence studies from the region. Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji report that IPV physical and/or sexual violence has been experienced by more than 60% of their women during their lifetime,⁵ which is above the global average of 35%. Figure 3 shows the prevalence data as of 2020. At the time this situational analysis was written, a few Pacific countries, including Fiji, Vanuatu and Tonga, were preparing follow-up studies over the 2024–2025 period. Results from these studies should be available in 2026.





Figure 3: Women who experience physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, 2000–2020



Some of the key findings from existing prevalence studies show how women are more vulnerable in the private space and less capable of accessing help and support to exit violent relationships:

- In Fiji, an estimated 43 women are injured every day as a result of domestic violence. Of these women, one will be permanently disabled, 10 will lose consciousness due to the severity of the physical violence, and 16 will need healthcare for their injuries, which include broken or fractured bones, internal injuries or damage to eardrums or eyes.⁶
- In PNG, domestic violence injuries comprise 80–90% of injuries presented by women at health facilities. The Family Support Centre in Lae (PNG's second-largest city) supported 935 survivors of family and sexual violence over an estimated 2-year period. Of these, 768 were adults and 167 were children under the age of 18 years. Of the adult clients, 93% reported experiencing intimate partner violence.⁷
- In Vanuatu, 30% of women reported being sexually abused before the age of 15 years.⁸
- In Solomon Islands, of women who have ever been pregnant, 11% reported being beaten during pregnancy. Among these women, 18% had been punched or kicked in the abdomen when pregnant.⁹

Young women and girls in all their diversity are also experiencing violence and abuse in the private space. Cases of child physical, sexual and psychological abuse have a high incidence of happening in private spaces, such as family homes and extended family homes. Crisis centres across the Pacific have reported continually over the last 10 years that cases of rape, sexual assault and child sexual abuse are often perpetrated by someone known to, and trusted by, the young woman or girl.

For example, research carried out by Save The Children in 2023 across 5 Pacific countries (Solomon Islands, PNG, Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu) documented that in Fiji, girls are most vulnerable to child sexual violence (92% of cases, according to Fiji Police Force statistics).¹⁰ In PNG, the majority of sexual assault victims under 16 years of age were girls, with 87.8% of the perpetrators known to the victims; fathers and stepfathers were the common perpetrators.

Access to justice

All countries in the Pacific have developed their own gender equality/gender equity policies, which have EVAWG as one of their key gender priorities. Many countries have gone further to develop specific EVAWG/domestic violence laws:

- **Vanuatu:** Family Protection Act 2008
- **Fiji:** Domestic Violence Act 2009
- **RMI:** Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act 2011
- **Palau:** Family Protection Act 2012
- **PNG:** Family Protection Act 2013
- **Samoa:** Family Safety Act 2013
- **Tonga:** Family Protection Act 2013
- **FSM:** Kosrae State Family Protection Act 2014
- **Solomon Islands:** Family Protection Act 2014
- **Kiribati:** Te Rau N Te Mwenga (Family Peace) Act 2014
- **Tuvalu:** Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act 2014, complemented by Tuvalu's Police Powers and Duties Act 2009 (which governs the powers of police to respond and act in cases of domestic violence)
- **Nauru:** Domestic Violence and Family Protection Act 2017, complemented by the Crimes Act 2016
- **FSM:** Pohnpei State Domestic Violence Act 2017.

In terms of mandated referral and service delivery frameworks, only a few countries in the Pacific have developed protocols:

- **Fiji and Tonga** both have National Service Delivery Protocols, which outline the referral process between key agencies that are required to work in partnership to end violence against women and girls. It ensures that survivors have access to timely and quality services and that perpetrators are held accountable and dealt with in accordance with the laws of that country.
- **Fiji** has a National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls 2023–2028.



- **Kiribati and Solomon Islands** have developed the SafeNet approach, a partnership between government, non-governmental organisations and faith-based organisations to provide support and assistance to women and girl survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. The services cover counselling, safe housing, social welfare assistance and legal advocacy.

Talatalanoa respondents indicated the critical importance of such protocols because they reflect the political will and commitment to elevate gender equality and equity and strengthen human rights, legal and policy frameworks in their respective countries.

“

To think that only a few countries have national instruments whereby [the] government and all sectors are held accountable to the survivor through a national mandate is unacceptable, especially with all the data we have on intimate partner violence ... what are our governments waiting for? Or just to have something in place that shows our governments are serious about EAWG in the Pacific ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, SPC Pacific Regional Counselling Framework, Fiji, 2023)

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“

We need national EAWG protocols in place in every Pacific country. It will help those on the frontline and in key agencies carry out their duties professionally and ethically, and this can have a major impact on women's value and status in society, and it will also ensure that male perpetrators are held to account and not escape with impunity ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, PWLES sensemaking workshop, Fiji, 2023)

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Response support services

The PWNAVAW is an EAW network established in 1992. At its last regional face-to-face meeting in 2016, before the COVID-19 pandemic restricted travel, representatives attended from Pacific organisations in 16 countries: Fiji, PNG, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, RMI, FSM, New Caledonia, West Papua, Kiribati, Bougainville, Nauru and Palau. The network's secretariat has been the FWCC since 1992.



The leading EAWG crisis centres in the Pacific are members of the network and other regional associations such as the Pacific Feminist Fund, We Rise Coalition and the Pacific Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights Coalition. EAWG services are available in almost all Pacific countries with varying levels of realisation.

The following is a list of EAWG crisis centres in the Pacific that are supported by PWL and that specifically follow protocols, guidelines and ethics that are survivor-centred, feminist and human rights-based:

- Fiji Women's Crisis Centre
- Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC)
- Women and Children Crisis Centre (WCCC) Tonga
- Punanga Tauturu (PT), Cook Islands
- Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre (KWCC)
- Solomon Islands Family Support Centre (FSC)
- Voice for Change (VfC), PNG
- House of Sarah (HoS), Fiji.
- Weto In Mour (A Place of Life), RMI
- Tongen Inepwineu Counseling Center, Chuuk, FSM

Other service providers in the Pacific facilitate counselling services; however, it is not clear whether their approaches use the survivor-centred approach, human rights-based framework and/or feminist principles. Tuvalu and FSM are both in the early stages of their development and have already expressed an interest in following the same trajectory as the 9 crisis and women's counselling centres named above.

Why does the survivor-centred approach matter? The survivor-centred approach has 4 key elements: confidentiality, safety, respect and non-discrimination. The approach places the rights of the survivor at the centre of all actions, where the survivor is treated with dignity and respect, their recovery is supported, risks of further harm are reduced, and the survivor's agency and self-determination are encouraged and supported. A survivor-centred approach establishes relationships between the survivor and the counsellor where the survivor's emotional and physical safety is paramount, and they are given tools to help them make their own decisions and take control of their lives again.

It has been accepted globally as the best-practice standard for crisis counselling and is mentioned in the first of 11 practice standards under the Pacific Regional Gender-Based Violence Counselling Framework draft (2023).

Together, the body of reflective work in the PWNVAW, the organisational policies, ethics and standards of the 6 crisis centres, the counselling guidelines of the Pacific Island governments, and the intergovernmental discussions and strategic prioritising of domestic violence counselling in the Regional Working Group have been references used to build the content of the regional framework. The regional GBV/EVAW counselling framework thus consolidates best practices for survivor-centred, rights-based, safe counselling services contextualised to the Pacific Islands region.¹¹





“

I, myself, have worked as a counsellor in 2 different organisations. In one organisation, it was general counselling and there wasn't a focus on women or girls. It was just for everyone, and so if the perpetrator came for counselling, I would take up the case and undertake counselling. It wasn't until I joined the centre that I got the opportunity to undertake specialised EAWG counselling and then given the opportunity to undergo the counselling under assessment ... it took me about 8 sessions before I was approved to continue [on] my own. When I think back to when I used to do counselling for victims at my previous job, there were big, big gaps, and I am ashamed to say it, but I think I even did more harm to the survivors I was counselling ... don't get me wrong, I had empathy, I was listening and practising my paraphrasing and attending, etc. But boy, I lacked the knowledge around respect for survivors' dignity and self-determination, practising non-discrimination, understanding how to unpack power dynamics and gender inequality ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, UNW/FWCC Pacific Regional Counselling Manual Training of Trainers, Fiji, 2023)

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Table 7 provides an overview of the services provided by counselling centres in the Pacific that follow the survivor-centred, rights-based, 'do no harm' principles:

Table 7. Overview of services provided by counselling centres in the Pacific

Country and organisation	Counselling using HRBF/SCA	Safe housing	24-hour helpline	Legal services	Health services	Economic support for survivors
Fiji (FWCC)	*	**	*	*	**	*
Fiji (HoS)	*	**		**	**	
Vanuatu (VWC)	*	**	*	*	**	*
Solomon Islands (FSC)	*	**		*	**	*
Cook Islands (PT)	*			*	**	
Tonga (WCCC)	*	*	*	*	*	*
Kiribati (KWCC)	*	**	*	*	**	
PNG (VfC)	*	**		*	**	
PNG (KWP)	*	**		**	**	

Key:

* currently provides the service at the centre

** does not provide the service at the centre but refers to the relevant service

Using safe housing services operated and run by external agencies is not ideal; however, it is the next best option when there are no other safe options. The Women and Children Crisis Centre in Tonga has operated its safe house since 2009. When the safe house is at capacity, the centre uses other local accommodation providers, with whom they have established a relationship, to provide rooms for low-risk clients, while medium-risk and high-risk clients are accommodated at the safe house.

“

We were adamant that we had our own safe house because of the risks and harm that can be done if the safe house is run by [the] government or an entity that has no survivor-centred approach knowledge or background.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

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Prevention strategies

EVAWG in all their diversity is an adaptive challenge where the solutions require learning. Learning is a process that will take time as it involves transformative attitudes, mindset shifts and behavioural changes. An example is the Pacific Male Advocacy Program, designed by Pacific men and heads of Pacific crisis centres to address Pacific contexts and realities that support the exercise of male power and control over women and girls' lives. The program covers 4 phases of learning, with each phase taking 6 to 7 days to complete. The entire program must be taken over 1.5 years, with male participants completing assigned behaviour and attitude change tasks in between each phase. While the program may be seen as a technical solution, the design of each session carefully and strategically addresses unequal power, male privileges and masculinities.

“

Undertaking this program has been a real eye-opener for me. It has completely changed the way I view women ... At a young age, I was always taught that once I was older, I would look for a wife who would know how to cook for me and wash my clothes and give birth to my children ... This program has challenged me in so many ways to a point where I see my wife as my equal ... At the same time, a strong reminder about how not to view men who support EVAWG. The label 'male champions' is just wrong on so many levels. It means you haven't addressed the root cause of violence: men's privilege and power.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

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The strategies and solutions to address VAWG have often focused largely on technical solutions or the symptoms of VAWG rather than the cause. While the root cause has been widely conferred by EAWG/GBV experts and practitioners across the Pacific, there is still a growing number of practitioners who detract from the root cause by identifying contributing factors as the leading root cause of violence, i.e. alcohol, drugs, financial struggles, poverty, social media, extended family interference, global development, and deteriorating cultural and religious practices. This contributes to the increased use of strategies and solutions that are mostly technical and fail to address attitudes and behaviours.

“

There was a program that was run by an organisation in my country that focused on understanding GBV as an issue for both men and women and where women can be just as violent as men ... Women and men were then taught how to control their anger, being taught strategies around breathing techniques and how to walk away or hitting the wall but not each other ...

(Talatalanoa respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

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“

One program focused on teaching men about women’s menopause and how to understand women’s moodiness so that they wouldn’t be violent against women but rather understand why women are in bad moods ...

(Talatalanoa respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

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The following list outlines what EAWG prevention programs or activities should focus on to be able to dismantle unequal power and discriminatory social norms, which are the root causes of VAWG:

- Focus on the experiences of violence, abuse and harmful practices faced by women and girls in all their diversity.
- Prioritise the ‘do no harm’ approach.
- Develop specific approaches for different age groups.
- Promote women’s human rights and gender equality/equity.
- Use a human rights-based framework.
- Ensure co-design and co-accountability with local experts on the ground.
- Ensure ownership and implementation are led by local experts.
- Challenge impunity and ensure perpetrators are held accountable.
- Emphasise an intersectional and feminist approach.

Several EVAWG prevention strategies have been carried out by sports associations, faith-based organisations, government institutions, private sector and NGOs across the Pacific. Some of these strategies have been successful in challenging entrenched discriminatory social norms, attitudes and practices that justify the use of VAW, while other strategies have been unable to disrupt unequal power dynamics, sexist standards, behaviours and practices.

“

I really enjoyed all the hype coming out of sports associations and their promotion of gender equality because I come from a family where they strongly believe that girls and women should not play rugby ... but over the last few years, I have seen some of my family members have a change of heart, and it's because of both the visual and verbal messaging and campaigns they developed and the way they have continued to promote women's rugby in my country and have never stopped the momentum ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, PWLES sensemaking workshop, Fiji, 2023)

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“

I believe that once the churches are on board full force, then there will be a massive transformation in the way society perceives women ... but churches first need to undergo training and guidance in this EVAWG so that they speak the same language that we speak or sing from the same song sheet because they have so much impact and power over the people of the Pacific ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

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“

There needs to be a serious revival of the women's movement ... it feels like it's starting to die a natural death, not so much in Fiji but elsewhere across the Pacific and definitely in my country because when the women's movement is inactive, strong prevention strategies that are aligned with feminist principles diminish and then we start to see prevention strategies that do nothing but support the continuance of the status quo ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

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Women's safety in public spaces

'We need to do more on sexual harassment, research, policies, laws – just like how we did around the domestic violence research and legislation ... need to accelerate our efforts to push for sexual harassment laws in all workplaces, in all Pacific Island countries ...'

Talatalanoa respondent

Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific regional conference, Melbourne, Australia, 2023)



Violence and abuse targeted and perpetrated on women in all their diversity in public space include all types of sexual, physical, economic and psychological assault and abuse. It can happen on streets, in and around schools, public transportation, workplaces, parks, public toilets and other spaces in urban, rural, online and conflict/post-conflict settings.¹²

There is also the issue regarding the rapid pace at which technology-facilitated GBV/VAW is growing, significantly exacerbating traditional forms of GBV/VAW that typically happen in private spaces into both technology-facilitated private and public spaces. For example, sexual violence perpetrated against a woman by her husband behind closed doors is now being perpetrated against her through her private messenger apps, as well as threats to expose personal and private sexual images of her to online public spaces.

While we could cover a vast area regarding women's safety in public spaces, this chapter will focus on sexual harassment in public spaces.

As mentioned earlier, there is not a lot of data or evidence-based research on women's safety in public spaces across the Pacific. However, there has been research undertaken in Fiji on sexual harassment in the public space and at the workplace, initiated and carried out by FWRM. A study conducted in 2022 looked at the impact of sexual harassment on female journalists.¹³ Some of the key findings raised red flags about the severity of sexual harassment from a study of only 42 respondents:

- The level of harassment at the workplace and in the reporting field is high, with up to two-thirds of respondents reporting incidents occurring at least sometimes. More than 80% of the respondents indicated they had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace.

- The sexual harassment is predominantly verbal but also often gestural. Physical harassment is common as well.
- Only 40% of the respondents lodged complaints about sexual harassment in the workplace, partly due to feelings of embarrassment.
- Of the reported cases, just over 50% resulted in a warning for the offenders, 17% in termination and 12% in suspensions.

Access to justice

According to the ILO:¹⁴

- Fiji has developed legislation that addresses sexual harassment and provides remedies for victims. Individuals can bring sexual harassment complaints to the employment mediation service and tribunal in Fiji. The legislation requires all employers to have sexual harassment policies; however, there is uncertainty about whether this legislation is strictly enforced.
- In other countries, such as Kiribati and Solomon Islands, criminal law can be used to address certain aspects of sexual harassment in the workplace, such as sexual assault.
- PNG, Tonga and Solomon Islands have public service policies prohibiting sexual harassment.
- RMI has public service codes of conduct prohibiting behaviour that would cause unreasonable distress to another employee. Although sexual harassment is not specifically mentioned, the overall prohibition in these codes of conduct could cover it.
- Tuvalu is the only country in the Pacific where a victim has successfully sued her employer within a formal court system after being sexually harassed at work.

Response support services

Despite many PICs not having national sexual harassment policies and/or legislation, crisis centres across the Pacific provide counselling support for those who have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace or any other abuse or violence perpetrated against the survivor in the public space.

“

I believe all sexual violation and abuse is the most under-reported crime when it comes of all forms of violence against women and girls, and this includes sexual harassment. It's worse for women and girls with disabilities ... I know it happens everywhere. The problem is it remains under-reported because so many women who experience it end up blaming themselves for what happened. There is also a sense of shame [in] reporting sexual harassment when the working environment supports it and where it has become common practice in the workplace ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, UNW/FWCC Pacific Regional Counselling Manual Training of Trainers, Fiji, 2023)

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Prevention strategies

Some notable initiatives have been undertaken in this area, which are discussed below.

- The 'Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls in all their diversity' is a 10-year global initiative, with PNG participating from the Pacific. The evaluation report stated that Port Moresby, PNG, noted a reduction in the prevalence of sexual harassment in public transport.
- Markets for Change is a 6-year Pacific regional initiative aimed at ensuring that marketplaces in rural and urban areas in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory environments, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.¹⁵

“

I was involved in the Markets for Change project, and I could see a significant improvement to women's safety ... For example, the sleeping quarters that were built for women only as a safe place to rest and not have to travel back to her village well into the night, which was already so unsafe ... going to the bathroom to wash up and have that privacy meant so much to the women ... I was selected as a leader by the women and so I took on the role seriously and I would encourage the female stall owners to speak on issues that they were concerned about ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

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- Pacific crisis centres include sexual harassment and women's safety in public spaces in their awareness sessions and training topics. For example, the crisis centres in Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga provide training on the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment for infrastructure projects. There is still a lot of work to be done with women and girls with disabilities, as noted by many of the respondents, since it's a difficult space to undertake prevention awareness.

“

This is one area where we don't have the expertise, and that's why it's important that we reach out to the disability organisations in our country to help us understand and design how we can do better in this area of work ... For example, we ran an awareness session on EVAWG to members of one of our local disability organisations and what ended up happening was that the carers came as well and we know that it is highly likely that the carers are also the ones perpetrating the violence and abuse on persons with disabilities ... so we need to change our approach and do better ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

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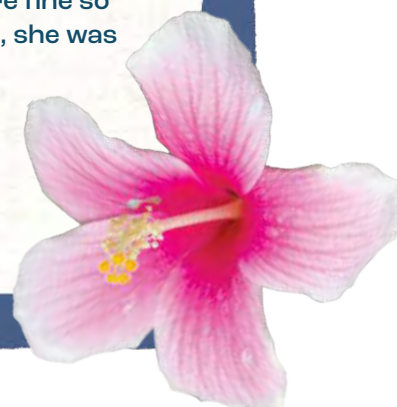


Women's safety during and after crises

A survivor shared with me that during the COVID lockdown, she gave signals to her landlord that she needed help when he called outside the house for the rent to be left at the door. She slipped a note in the envelope with the money, the landlord called the police and when the police arrived they kept their distance and called from outside ... the husband stood at the front window and called out, told the police that they must have the wrong house because they were fine so they returned without even checking in on the wife, she was beaten again after they left.'

Talatalanoa respondent

SPC Pacific Regional Counselling Framework
Regional Working Group, Fiji, 2023



Crisis centres throughout the Pacific documented ample anecdotal evidence around VAWG being exacerbated during and after crises, confirming that women and girls in all their diversity are at high risk of physical and sexual violence and abuse during and after a crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic:

During a crisis, existing gender inequalities are magnified, with women having considerably less autonomy and mobility, leading to increases in family violence. Other contributing factors include financial insecurity, job loss, crowded living conditions and longer periods of time inside together due to quarantine and social isolation. The general acceptance of physical violence in many Pacific Island countries can lead to violence and abuse in times of crisis being accepted and excused due to 'stress'.¹⁶

Many of the *talatalanoa* respondents shared stories of how exhausted they were after the COVID-19 lockdowns in their countries.





“

Everyone thought it was a great time to stay at home and catch up on sleep and whatnot, but that wasn't true of us. We were so busy doing our psychosocial support and distributing goods to women-led households, widows and clients. I felt like our work increased double and even threefold at times because I remember just being on my feet a lot more than I was used to ... We got to see firsthand the vulnerable situations that women and girls were living in, and it was difficult for us to just turn around and close down our services until the pandemic was over because we knew a lot of women and girls depended on us to get our services out to them ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific conference, Fiji, 2023)

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“

It was during the volcano and tsunami aftermath that we identified some of our most high-risk cases due to the isolation that was happening. Some of the worst cases of child sexual abuse that I had ever come across was reported during this time ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, UNW/FWCC Pacific Regional Counsellor Manual Training of Trainers, Fiji, 2023)

”

Access to justice

Almost all crisis centres reported that accessing justice was challenging and difficult during crises. This was more evident during the COVID-19 lockdown, when women could not travel into town to access justice or seek help. The restrictions around movement made it more challenging and riskier for women.

“

One of my clients was denied access beyond her village COVID post because her husband's relatives were the ones standing the COVID posts, and when they asked her where she was going, she said she needed to go to the hospital because she wasn't feeling well and they told her to go back home and call the hospital and they will instruct what to do. She couldn't give them the real reason because then they would tell her husband, so she returned home and was later able to send us a message for help, and we went out to her village to pick her up using our COVID essential services status ... she wanted to go straight to the police ... we then provided counselling and support and referred her to our safe house ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, UNW/FWCC Pacific Regional Counsellor Manual Training of Trainers, Fiji, 2023)

”

During crises, women and girls with disabilities face a higher risk of violence and abuse and accessing justice is an even greater challenge. Anecdotal evidence from organisations of persons with disabilities shows that women and girls with disabilities who are abused and discriminated against could become extremely isolated during crises, making it more difficult to report and leave the violent and abusive environment.

“

There is no national strategy looking at addressing women and girls with disabilities during crises. It's a shame when you think about it, but it's a reflection of where we are at in terms of political will. Just not enough done, in my opinion, and yet she suffers.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

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Response services and prevention strategies

All crisis centres confirmed that they continue to provide counselling support to survivors of violence and abuse during and after crises. Specialised counselling support to women and girls with disabilities, women and girls living in remote and rural areas, and transgender women require accelerated efforts.

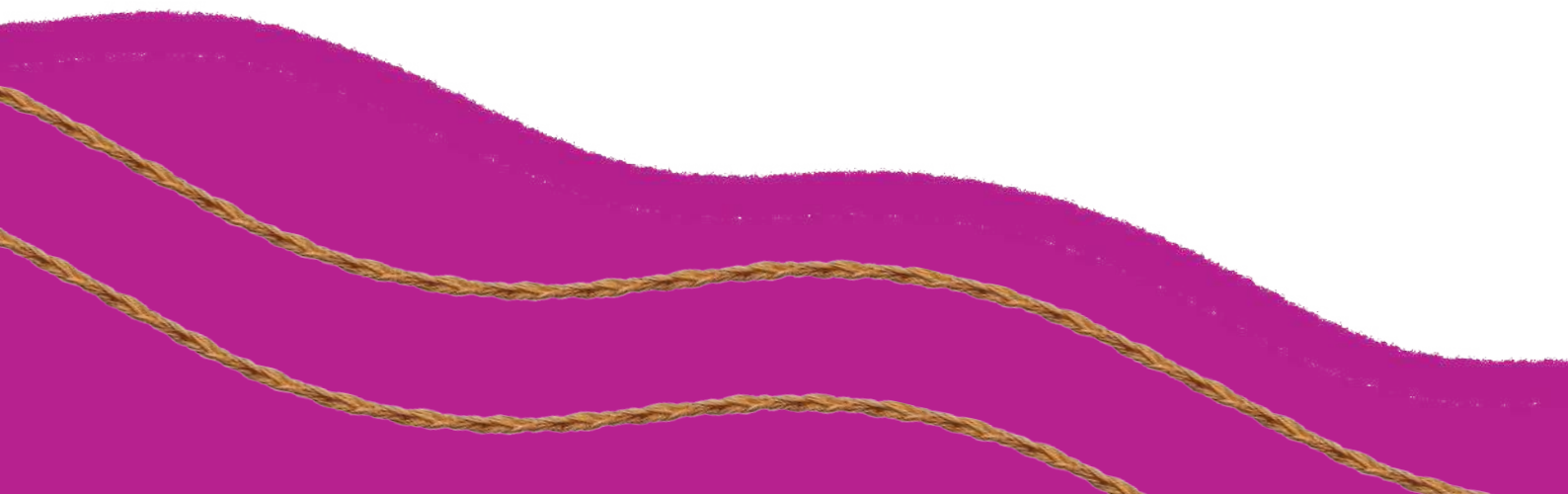
Not much has been done about developing prevention strategies to create safer spaces for women, girls and children in all their diversity during and after crises in the Pacific. Most of the *talatalanoa* respondents agreed that this is an area that needs focused and invested development.

“

Specialist EAWG organisations like crisis centres and organisations of persons with disabilities and transgender organisations need to co-design what would work in their contexts. It's the only way to do [it]; no outsider expert can or should do this.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

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Approaching ending VAWG as an adaptive challenge

‘We are approaching the marking of 30 years of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration [and Platform for Action] soon in 2025, and looking at where we are at, there is so much we have achieved as a region, but there is way much more that also should have been achieved by now. It’s time to shake things up because, at the rate we are going, it’s really a disgrace when you think about it – some of the issues we are talking about today, I heard this 20 years ago, and we’re still talking about it ...’

Talatalanoa respondent
Women Deliver 2023 conference, Kigali, Rwanda



The Pacific region’s story on realising women’s rights in terms of women’s safety – ending all forms of VAWG in all their diversity – has reached new heights over the last decade. The rapidly increasing impacts of the climate crisis, social issues arising from the seasonal worker program, and the exacerbation of violence and technology-facilitated abuse of women and girls in all their diversity have pushed the Pacific to think and act urgently.

The Adaptive Leadership framework provides the following concepts to consider how to address what has been covered in this formative situational analysis as an adaptive challenge:

Determining what practices are core to the future and what are obstacles. Some practices have not been able to mobilise change at the individual, family and community levels as well as across organisations, societies and systems. These practices need to be reviewed or stopped. Those practices that have provided evidence of shifting social norms and behaviours should be continued.

Running smart experiments and testing new practices. Being open to new

innovative ways but remaining steadfast in the understanding that the root cause of VAWG/GBV is gender inequality and power imbalances between men and women can start conversations on using new approaches.

Promoting diversity, inclusion and engagement during planning and co-design can inspire new visions and strategies, particularly for the LGBTQIA+ community and persons with disabilities.

Integrating new practices and allowing people across the organisation or system to execute. EVAWG/GBV experts have identified working in silos as one of the key barriers to integrating new practices and maintaining a gate-keeping approach to EVAWG. The rapidly growing traditional forms of violence via non-traditional methods (online, climate crisis, seasonal worker program) means new practices need to be integrated and cross-collaboration and partnerships expanded to accelerate joint efforts to achieve women's safety: EVAWG through the realisation of women's rights.

Social norms

While VAW/GBV is a global pandemic experienced by both the Global North and Global South countries, the Pacific story often leaves many confused due to most Pacific Island countries declaring that they are predominately Christian nations. Adding to the confusion is the notion that the Pacific is tucked away in a tiny corner of the global map. Often, the worldview of the Pacific is of coconut palm trees swaying in the breeze with islanders peacefully living side-by-side, with no major conflicts or wars and where women are enjoying the same freedom and rights with men.

The term 'beneath paradise' – famously coined by FWCC – challenges these romanticised views of the Pacific and opens up the Pacific's vulnerabilities to the outside world. The reality is voiced through Pacific women's stories and lived experiences in a predominantly patriarchal region. A stark example of this is that almost all institutions reflect leadership as a role reserved for men: home, extended family, village/community, church, local-level governance and national parliaments.

“

At home, men are the ones who make the final decision, and they also decide on how our resources are to be used and money spent ... this is a huge struggle for us women where we experience violence just because we try to save money to put food on the table, but rather he spends it on grog.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, UNW/FWCC Pacific Regional Counsellor Manual Training of Trainers, Fiji, 2023)

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For a region that is largely Christian, biblical texts are also narrowly interpreted, focusing on women's submission and men as the head of the wife and the household, contributing to the justification of using violence as a form of discipline. Moreover, biblical texts that support gender equality are left out either deliberately or ignorantly, adding to the misconception that gender equality is un-Christian.

“

We as women have grown up our whole lives hearing the biblical teachings that wives must be submissive to their husbands and that men are the head[s] of families and households, but we were never exposed to the part of the same passage that demands that husbands must love their wives just like how Christ loves the church so much so that he should be willing to die for her ... so what we have been taught our whole lives from the Bible has been selective and not the whole truth ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

”

Pacific countries have developed national policies on advancing gender equality/equity, passed legislation dealing with domestic violence, and developed and endorsed national pathways for GBV counselling and referral (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tonga). Most of the *talatalanoa* respondents agreed that while the laws, policies and national pathways are salient to the realisation of women's rights and ensuring women's safety, the biggest challenge, which is largely immeasurable, is working on women's and men's individual beliefs, attitudes, abilities and opportunities, social norms and attitudes.

EVAWG/GBV counsellors from across the Pacific were asked what is meant by social norms and attitudes that cause VAWG/GBV to continue. The following is a summary of the responses:

- Violence against women can be justified, especially if she oversteps the line.
- Sexual harassment is normal, and it is generally accepted in the Pacific.
- There is no such thing as marital rape because husbands have the right to demand sex from their wives.
- Girls should be virgins before they get married.
- Wives who cannot give birth are devalued.
- Girls should aspire to become wives and mothers.
- Women and girls should do the household chores (washing, cleaning, cooking, taking care of children, looking after the elderly).
- It's typical for men and boys to misbehave and be sexually inclined.



- There is a certain way women and girls should dress, always modestly and never exposing body parts that could lead to rape or sexual harassment.
- Men can drink and socialise after hours with their friends, but women should return or remain at home to take care of chores.
- Wives and mothers should be submissive to their husbands.
- Husbands and fathers are the head of the household and make the final decisions.

There are substantial challenges in undertaking strategies focusing on social norms and attitudes that justify VAWG/GBV and reinforce gender inequalities, particularly at the individual, family and community levels.

“

We have dealt with families who would prefer to protect their family name over the safety of their daughter, or what about families who no longer value their daughters after being raped because losing her virginity is the issue, not the fact that she was raped ... these are the types of mentality and norms we have to deal with all the time ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific Conference, Fiji, 2023)

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The most effective strategies for addressing these negative social norms and attitudes, according to Pacific crisis centres, have been:

- **(Individual) Survivor-centred counselling that works on empowering the survivor** by unpacking and addressing negative social norms that have made her believe she is to blame for the violence perpetrated against her.

“

A lot of work goes into the counselling session where the survivor is given the support to confront the negative social norms that have made her believe it was always her fault ... it is a long, hard journey, but if done right, it is the best feeling in the world to see what I term as the transformation of the victim to a survivor and walking with her, at her pace, to make decisions that give her power and control over her life ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, UNW/FWCC Pacific Regional Counsellor Manual Training of Trainers, Fiji, 2023)

”

- **(Family) Multi-media programs and initiatives addressing negative social norms, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate VAWG/GBV.** While this was identified as one of the most powerful ways of challenging and shifting social norms, it is hugely under-utilised.





“

We had a radio program that focuses on shifting negative social norms and practices that support gender inequality and VAWG, but it was only funded for a short period of time, and then we waited another year or so before we found more funding to do some more, but when it was running so many people in our community complimented how the programs made them think about issues and some even said how they changed their perspectives on some issues ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

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Most of the respondents agreed that well-developed and carefully designed multi-media programs that are survivor-centred and human rights-based are one of the best methods of reaching the private domain of the family.

- **(Community) Programs delivered at the community level** where family members can join and participate, such as community-based workshops, women’s groups learning circles, and community youth and male leaders’ workshops.

“

Specialised programs for children are critical, especially if they are not learning about gender equality at school. So, community-based programs for children are a great way for children to learn that all little girls and boys are of equal value and that they all deserve to live happy lives that are free from violence, abuse and discrimination ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

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- **Adaptive and transformative training that covers and interconnects VAWG in all its forms, gender equality, equity, and human rights and delivered by crisis centres** (FWCC, VWC, WCCC Tonga, KWCC, Solomon Islands’ FSC) that have the skills, practical experience and knowledge on gender relations, genderisation and women’s human rights in the Pacific context.



“

There are a lot of different training and workshops that have been conducted on these topics and mostly by foreigners from countries who have no idea about how the Pacific works, let alone our own countries, and sometimes they are just full of PowerPoints and technical jargon and lacks powerful, transformative discussions to get to the root cause of VAWG and GBV. But, you know, as I say this, there are also local trainers who take on delivering gender training but lack the skills and in-depth knowledge and can do more harm than good ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

”

- **EVAWG/gender/human rights advocacy workshops for specific groups: men, boys, women, girls, youth, churches, and key agencies run by crisis centres or skilled facilitators.** These advocacy workshops focus on VAWG/GBV as non-Christian, non-cultural practices and naming VAWG/GBV as a human rights violation, linking it to national legal frameworks and how EVAWG/GBV is a community mobilisation activity with advocacy and lobbying tools provided for advocates who want to continue working in EVAWG/GBV.

“

I attended the male advocacy training in Fiji and my own country, and it has made me the ending violence against women and girls, gender equality and human rights advocate that I am today. The advocacy training challenged my views about women and girls, and my wife and daughter were the ones who noticed the change in me first, and ever since then, I have never turned back. Every man should undertake this training ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

”

- **Women's safety understood in the EVAWG context.** It is often portrayed as an isolated issue in accessing resources. On the contrary, this is one of the biggest mistakes of the last 2 decades in the Pacific.



“

Ever since we started separating work on ending violence against women from getting more women into decision-making and women's economic empowerment, we have lost our overall focus on women. If we don't approach women's rights as inalienable and interdependent, then we have failed women because what we are saying to women is that as long as you earn money, you will be okay, but we all know that is not true. She has to have access to counselling as well as resources such as education opportunities, land and housing as well as access to good health services to be able to fully enjoy her rights and meaningfully be empowered and be free of violence ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific conference, Fiji, 2023)

”

EVAWG and GBV experts across the Pacific region agree on the need for more sustained efforts to address EVAWG as a holistic issue that crosscuts all other women's rights issues. In Tonga, for example, EVAWG practitioners say it is impossible to talk about EVAWG if you do not talk about men's power and privilege over land and resources. In Fiji, 39% of women must ask for permission from their husbands before seeking healthcare for themselves. Women living with intimate partner violence are subjected to economic abuse, where 28% had husbands/partners who either took their savings or refused to give them money.¹⁷



Recommendations

- Acknowledge and accept across all levels and intersections of EAWG work and engagement that the root cause of VAWG is gender inequality and power imbalance.
- Use language that is focused on women's human rights and women's experiences of violence.
- EAWG is not a technical problem with a technical solution with short-term funding. It requires a long-term investment of multi-year core funding support to crisis services that follow best practice approaches (survivor-centred and human rights-based) and should not have to be concerned about year-to-year funding.
- Support and fund adaptive challenge-based prevention programs.
- Incorporate the concept of 'diverse women and children' as accepted language and a concept that was coined in the Pacific.
- Develop a standard definition of 'other' survivors of violence.
- Use survivor-centred and human rights-based approaches in GBV counselling services as the benchmark for assessing the number of organisations that use this approach, in addition to the 9 mentioned.
- Support other services not affiliated with PWNVAWG to align their counselling services to global and regional best practices. Building the capacity of service providers to adopt survivor-centred and human rights-based approaches should not be limited to PWNVAWG members only.
- Using a feminist approach means undertaking a gender–power and gender-relations analysis of the situation. This means unpacking the power dynamics of the relationship, focusing on counselling tools such as the power and control wheel and cycle of violence with the survivor so that she can gain a deeper insight into the root cause of the violence: inequality and power imbalance.
- Develop standing operating procedures and guidelines for addressing EAWG/GBV during disasters. Rather than establishing new services and separating GBV from GBV in emergencies (GBViE), existing survivor-centred services that use human rights-based approaches should be strengthened to carry out psychosocial support during emergencies. This reduces the risk and harm to the survivor, ensuring they are not exposed to unethical counselling and support services. For example, the following established GBV service providers are capable of providing GBViE services at a national scale; however, they continue to be told that GBV is separate from GBViE:
 - » Fiji Women's Crisis Centre
 - » Vanuatu Women's Centre
 - » Women and Children Crisis Centre Tonga.

If these approaches to EAWG/GBV service delivery are adopted, then services will organically cater to women, girls and children from diverse backgrounds without any discrimination.





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Chapter 6

PACIFIC OWNERSHIP

By 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki

'Part of the challenge is related to the misconceptions of gender equality and the disconnect between global approaches to women's rights and equality and policy implementation in local contexts.'

Dr Yvonne Te Ruki-Rangi-o-Tangaroa Underhill-Sem

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Introduction



Pacific ownership of gender equality at a global level

Over the last 8 decades, there have been ongoing efforts to support and increase Pacific ownership. SPC, established in 1947, and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), established in 1971, have been actively engaged in driving Pacific regionalism and development on Pacific terms. Pacific countries have been navigating their independence and self-governance since 1962, when Samoa gained independence, except for Tonga, which was never colonised. Most of these Pacific countries did not experience any major problems or challenges in gaining independence.

CSOs in the Pacific have also been ardently lobbying and advocating for Pacific ownership and calling for the decolonisation of donor and aid development. The nuclear tests conducted in the Pacific in the 1950s gave rise to a Pacific CSO movement, which analysed how the tests would affect the political landscape of the Pacific, focusing on RMI, Johnston Island, Christmas Island and French Polynesia.

Then there is the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women and Girls, formed in the early 1990s, which strongly advocates for the recognition of women's rights as human rights and the need to prioritise ending all forms of violence, abuse and discrimination faced by women and girls in the Pacific.

However, despite the momentum in striving to achieve Pacific ownership at a global level, there remain experiences of colonial approaches and power imbalance.

“

In the last decade, more so in the last 5 to 6 years, there is a strong feeling that Global North organisations, in particular donors, have started to be more forceful in dictating ways of working rather than listening to their partners on the ground, despite the Paris Declaration, Busan Partnership and Cairns Compact ...

(Guttenbeil-Likiliki, 2020)¹

”

These commitments are focused on ownership and partnership between development players and countries:

- **The Busan Partnership:** Ownership of development priorities by developing countries. Countries should define the development model that they want to implement.
- **Paris Declaration:** Developing countries set their own strategies for poverty reduction, improving their institutions and tackling corruption.
- **Cairns Compact:** Leaders agreed that national development plans were matters for national governments to determine.

Pacific ownership of gender equality at a regional level

For the purpose of this formative situational analysis, the focus is on Pacific ownership of gender equality commitments at the regional level among Pacific governments, Pacific CSOs and other key development and humanitarian stakeholders working or operating within the Pacific region. This chapter will focus on the strategies and approaches used to promote Pacific ownership of gender equality commitments between SPC, PIFS and its key stakeholders: Pacific governments and Pacific CSOs.

Pacific ownership of gender equality is framed by the following national, regional and global commitments:

- National gender policies and legislation
- Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration
- Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights (2018–2030)
- Framework for Pacific Regionalism
- The SAMOA Pathway
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- Commission on the Status of Women
- International Conference on Population and Development
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- Human Rights conventions



The qualitative methodology used to collect information for this chapter was *talatalanoa* (informal conversations) over a series of 8 regional meetings held during 2023, mainly in Fiji. The regional meetings provided an ideal opportunity for the researcher and writer to use these spaces to engage in person with key gender equality experts and practitioners in the region – which would otherwise have been conducted through online platforms such as Zoom. *Talatalanoa* was held on the sidelines of the regional events and during workshops and side events where the theme of Pacific ownership of gender equality was discussed.

The researcher/writer acknowledges that articulating Pacific ownership, which is one of the outcome areas of PWL, was challenging. There were many ways in which this outcome area was interpreted and analysed. It was therefore critical that the *talatalanoa* was focused on seeking what types of collaboration, cooperation and mutual sharing were taking place to ensure Pacific ownership of gender equality. The *talatalanoa* respondents were also encouraged to look at power and the dynamics at play and how power could be shared in holistic and equal regional partnerships.



Exploring concepts



Pacific

Talatalanoa respondents were asked to share their thoughts on the meaning of the term 'Pacific', and the responses were clear and unwavering:

Western Pacific includes PNG, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, and Fiji – it is also categorised as the Central Pacific.

Northern Pacific includes Kiribati, RMI, FSM, Guam, Nauru, Wallis and Futuna, New Caledonia, and Palau.

Eastern Pacific includes the Cook Islands, Tahiti, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Easter Island, Niue, Tonga, and Samoa.

Australia/Torres Strait Islands and New Zealand are also part of the Pacific; however, they have power and access to resources and opportunities and therefore dynamics between Australia, New Zealand and the rest of the Pacific is evident.

The Pacific is surrounded by the ocean, and therefore Pacific people are ocean people – referencing Teresia Teaiwa's words, 'We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood ...'

The Pacific is diverse – often grouped as one; however, the vast variety of culture, languages, geographical locations, political journeys and economic status should always be acknowledged because it explains to the 'outsider' how a one-size-fits-all strategy, program or intervention cannot be applied to the Pacific as a whole.

“

I get really tired of being grouped as the Pacific in many situations, as if all countries of the Pacific are basically the same because that is the mentality held by many. There are times when the Pacific does come together to discuss issues and to come to an agreement on those issues and have a regional position, such as our Forum Leaders Meeting. But at the same time, Pacific Island countries also have their individual priorities and issues, and that is decided at a national level because we are still individual countries ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific conference, Fiji, 2023)

”

“

I think that is the problem we have had with advancing gender equality in the Pacific. We have focused on blanket solutions to apply across the Pacific, but we need to re-look and re-evaluate how we are doing things at a regional level that is impacting the outcomes at a national level ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific conference, Fiji, 2023)

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“

... the funny thing is, I don't think the women of each Pacific country have ever been given the opportunity to come up with homegrown solutions. It's always been dictated by outside agencies who believe they have the solution for 'the Pacific' and there is where the problem starts ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Pacific Conference, Fiji, 2023)

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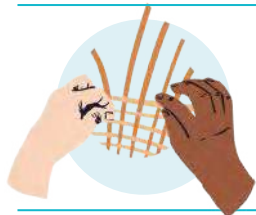
Ownership

Most of the *talatalanoa* respondents said they understood the term 'ownership' to refer to decisions made by Pacific people and countries about issues directly relating to their overall development.

Ownership is defined by:



Co-design and co-accountability, where Pacific partners are leading with regional partners.



Pacific partners have a voice and are engaged in the process from the beginning to the end.



Decolonised approaches, where local knowledge, expertise and skills are acknowledged and sought after. Resources developed are available in the local language (dialects).



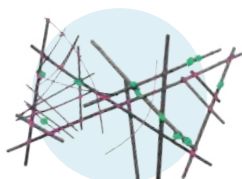
Diversity, inclusion, engagement and relationship nurturing among Pacific partners and regional partners are prioritised.



Local ownership of all development processes.



Consultations and participation of Pacific communities.



Pacific solutions, where Pacific communities identify technical and adaptive challenges and solutions based on their knowledge and expertise.



It is not a cut-and-paste nor a tick-box process. It is easy to fall into the trap of development buzzwords such as locally led, locally owned and localisation.



There was *talatalanoa* among some respondents who asked, '**What if the locally led solution is not a solution that is considered best practice or one that is based on the human rights framework**, but it is what the community knows will work?'

Talatalanoa respondents from civil society articulated that 'ownership' is strongly linked to inclusion and engagement. They shared that when they did not feel included or engaged in national efforts to achieve gender equality, they perceived ownership as being primarily held by the government.

“

So, where do you draw the line? For example, for decades there has been a lot of investment focused on building the capacity of national women's machineries to mainstream gender across all government ministries and departments. Do we need to revisit the goal of gender mainstreaming? Is gender mainstreaming what we want? If so, how do we do this, that is, through national women's machineries only? Or are there other opportunities? Pacific ownership also encourages robust *talatalanoa* among all key stakeholders and partners and not just led by one entity ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

”

“

A lot of the gender mainstreaming activities are led by the government, with very little input from the NGOs who work directly on gender issues and in communities ... But we feel that the government claims ownership of gender awareness, policies and activities, so there is a disconnect with us on the ground ... sometimes I feel the slow progress is because the government doesn't want to open up and work with us ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

”

“

Activities that we carry out are separate to government, and so we always look like we are working against each other..

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific conference, Fiji, 2023)

”



Regional partnerships

PIFS and SPC are the 2 leading regional partners in the Pacific that have mandates to help support Pacific governments and Pacific CSOs to achieve gender equality. PWL uses two strategies to support regional partnerships:

Strategy 1:

Linking, learning and collective action supports genuine partnerships and strategies for change in social norms and gender equality outcomes. Regional partner respondents provided the following examples:

SPC

- PWL Governance Board and Youth Working Group
- SPC Gender Community of Practice
- SPC Women in Leadership program
- Triennial Outcomes implementation and monitoring

PIFS

- Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders Meeting
- PIFS/SPC CROP Women of the Wave leaders' dialogue
- Pacific Disability Forum engagement
- Regional conference COP27
- Commission on the Status of Women
- Disability Regional Framework (PIFS/SPC/PDF)



Strategy 2:

Technical support, training, coaching and mentoring are critical. It supports greater gender mainstreaming and gender equality outcomes for Pacific governments and development partner sector programs. *Talatalanoa* respondents provided the following examples:

SPC

- Regional Working Group
- Pacific Prevention Summit (2023)
- SPC Gender Flagship
- PIFS/SPC gender mainstreaming for governments, e.g. Progressing Gender Equality in the Pacific Triennial preparations
- Collaborative program-level monitoring, evaluation and learning sensemaking spaces to inform program decision-making
- Gender Equality Framework for Micronesia
- Heads of Government meetings (e.g. health, education, transport, culture)
- Grantmaking in thematic areas of leadership, health (SRHR), women's economic empowerment and women's safety
- Women's economic empowerment, including Women in Business Symposium and WEE Roundtable
- PWL at SPC Grants call (Stream A)
- PWL Governance Board Draft Guidelines for Board Discretionary Funds.



Dialogue with regional partners included reflection on the following questions:

- What is each partner's specific role in boosting gender mainstreaming opportunities?
- Is mainstreaming gender through women/gender-focused ministries the only option?

Talatalanoa respondents (comprising about 60% from the civil society space and 40% from the government) were asked who they identified with as their regional partners to achieve gender equality. The responses were mixed:

- 35% identified SPC
- 20% identified PIFS
- 45% identified UNW Pacific
- 55% identified DFAT
- 5% identified other UN entities
- 5% identified other organisations

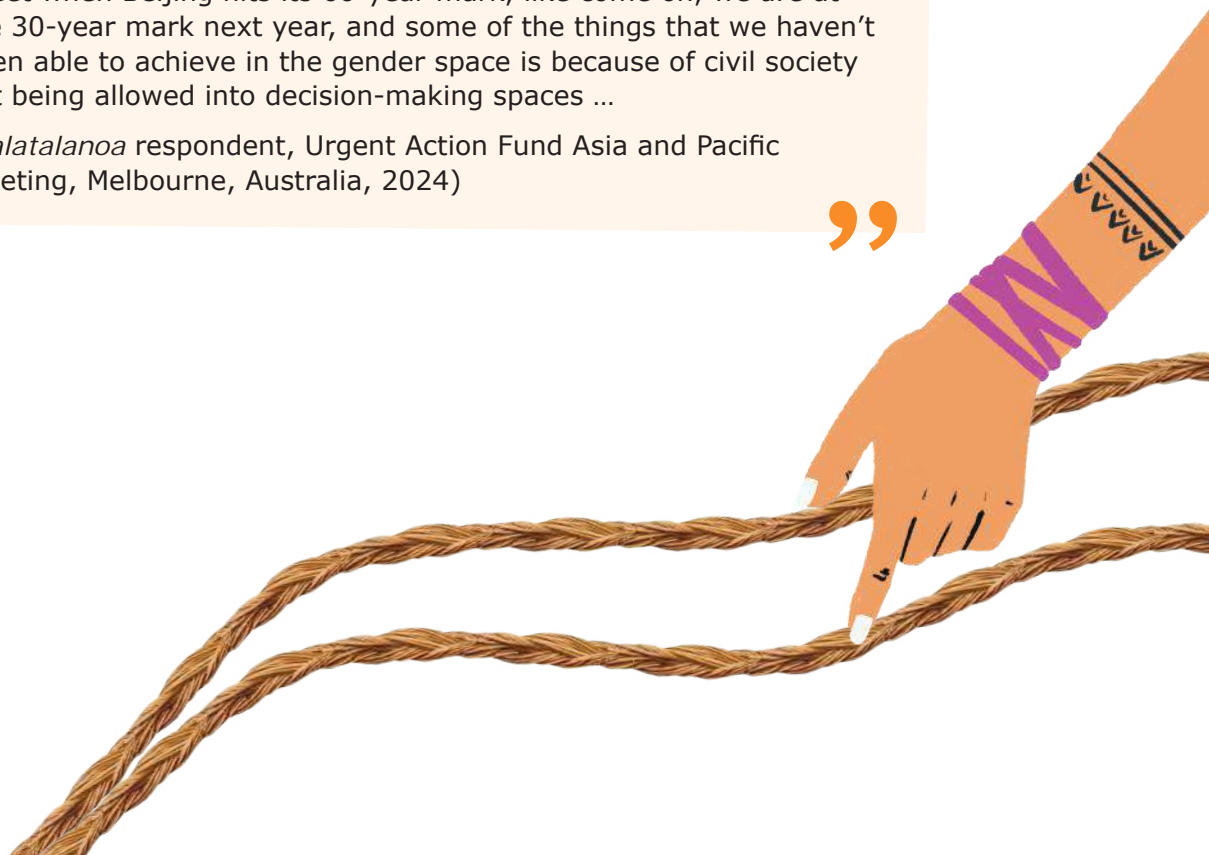
SPC and PIFS were seen as the leading regional partners in achieving gender equality, particularly through initiatives such as the Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018–2030 and the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. However, many respondents also identified other organisations as regional partners. UN Women Pacific and DFAT received the most acknowledgement, possibly because many civil society respondents viewed SPC and PIFS as 'government only' regional partners.

“

If we want to accelerate efforts in achieving gender equality, I can't emphasise this any more than I always have: You need civil society to be an equal partner, otherwise we will be singing the same song sheet when Beijing hits its 60-year mark, like come on, we are at the 30-year mark next year, and some of the things that we haven't been able to achieve in the gender space is because of civil society not being allowed into decision-making spaces ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Urgent Action Fund Asia and Pacific meeting, Melbourne, Australia, 2024)

”



Promoting accountability

‘We strive for effective, open and honest relationships and inclusive and enduring partnerships—based on mutual accountability and respect—with each other, within our sub-regions, within our region, and beyond.’

One of the values of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent



PWL’s end-of-program outcome for Pacific ownership and effectiveness of regional gender equality efforts is robust engagement, cooperation and mutual sharing between regional partners and intergovernmental organisations to deliver gender equality commitments.

Indicators of success call for collaboration between regional partners for gender equality outcomes and accountability for gender equality and women’s human rights at the regional and national levels. Conversations with respondents regarding these indicators led to interesting discussions, which are summarised in the following reflection questions:

- Pacific-led and locally led are becoming development buzzwords that need to be unpacked and understood – in reality, how different are these terms and practices from Pacific ownership?
- How do regional partners understand Pacific ownership and what are some examples they can share that show how Pacific ownership is a key priority?
- How do regional partners collaborate on gender equality commitments and priorities for the Pacific, and how do they incorporate or plan to incorporate co-design with Pacific governments and Pacific CSOs?
- How can Pacific CSOs increase their presence at intergovernmental meetings and be included in future co-design, such as at the Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting and other Pacific Islands Forum regional ministerial meetings?
- There needs to be a paradigm shift from accountability to co-accountability so that Pacific regional partners, governments and CSOs can be held accountable for gender equality and women’s human rights at the regional and national levels.



Robust engagement, cooperation and mutual sharing

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The use of the word robust means we need to up our game with gender equality. It's not about going with the tides anymore; it means crashing against some big waves, and it may also mean going against the tide ...

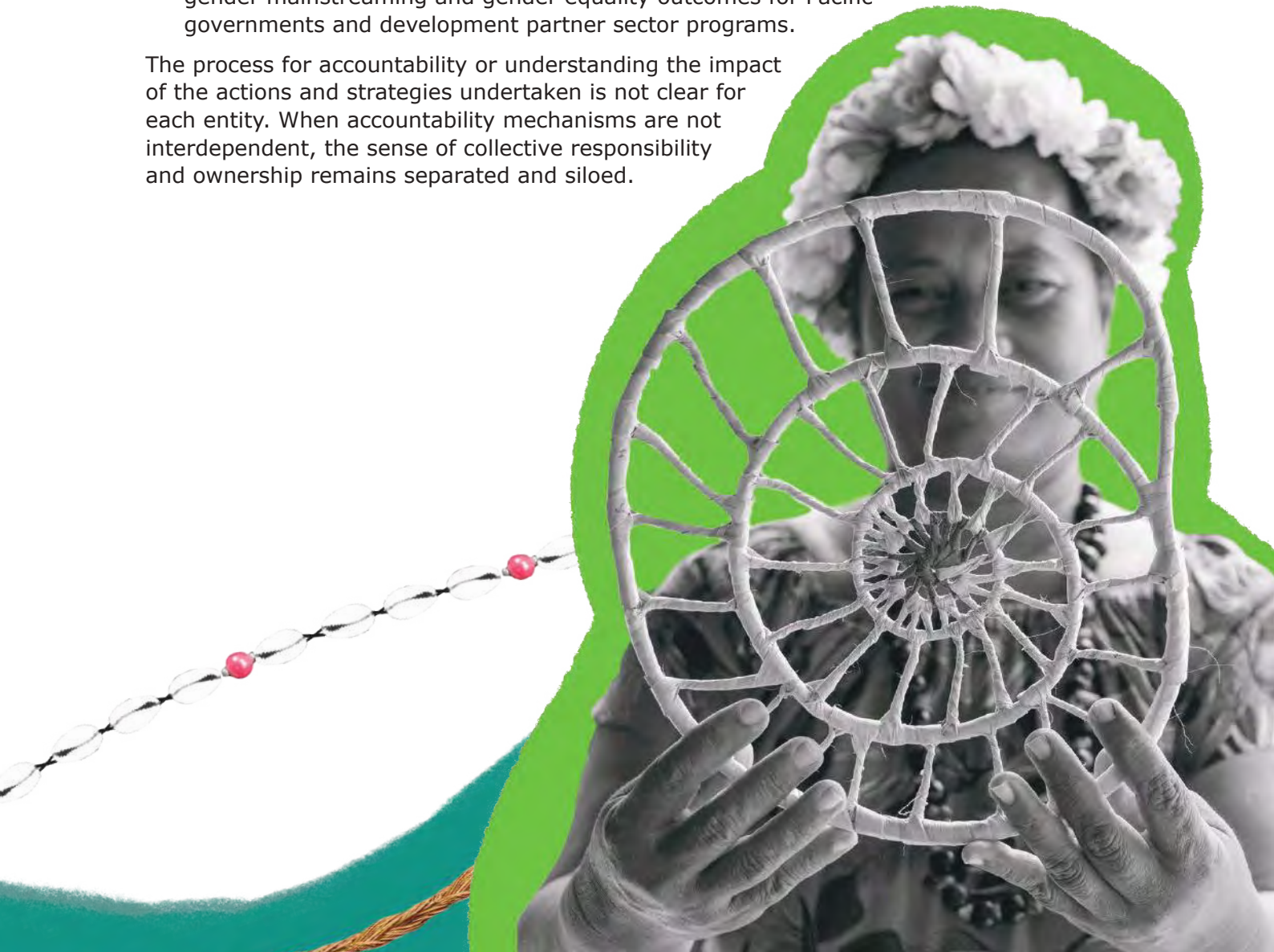
(*Talatalanoa* respondent, PWL Annual Reflection and Analysis Workshop, Fiji, 2023)

”

Regarding robust engagement, cooperation and mutual sharing, most of the respondents said that Pacific regional partners, governments and CSOs needed to shift from individual partner accountability to co-accountability in their work to achieve gender equality. This was despite the examples provided by regional partners about their key roles:

- Linking, learning and collective action to support genuine partnerships and strategies for change in social norms and gender equality outcomes.
- Technical support, training, coaching and mentoring to support greater gender mainstreaming and gender equality outcomes for Pacific governments and development partner sector programs.

The process for accountability or understanding the impact of the actions and strategies undertaken is not clear for each entity. When accountability mechanisms are not interdependent, the sense of collective responsibility and ownership remains separated and siloed.



“

... an example that I could give is with the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. I know that there is a review of it and that there is a team going around each of our countries to gather feedback. But I didn't know about the time they came to my country and only heard after when I saw it on the news ... how did they select people to attend because I consider myself a gender equality advocate in my country ... but also I would like to read a report about how the countries are doing in the Pacific compared to mine because the last report I read was about 2012–2016 data. We need to be more accountable about what we do and how we report ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Prevention Summit, Fiji, 2023)

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During the discussions about the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration and the revised Pacific Platform for Action, most of the respondents said they found it difficult and at times confusing to use these tools to track gender equality in their countries because of the lack of regular data and reporting provided under both. Ownership was also seen as weighing heavily on national women's machineries and governments.

“

I actually have no idea what my Women's Ministry is doing and how they are reporting on our national gender equality commitments ... we have our own national gender policy, but I rarely see any reports about annual progress towards gender equality ... they always ask us for our data, and we have given it, but then we don't know what they do with it as we haven't seen an annual report from them ... yet they claim to be the gender experts in gender equality in my country, but I know what we do here contributes a lot to the achievement of gender equality, but we are not nationally recognised for what we do. It's like our Women's Ministry looks down on us, but we are doing the work, day in, day out ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Third Pacific Feminist Forum, Fiji, 2023)

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There were also several concerns raised about the impact of not having co-accountability:

- Dilution of language. For example, some Pacific governments are now trying to block the use of the term 'women in all their diversity' despite this concept being led and supported by the Government of Vanuatu at the Triennial Conference of Pacific Women.
- Increasing misconceptions and disinformation around sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Increasing misconceptions and disinformation around LGBTQIA+.
- Attempts by some governments to refrain from the use of the terms 'feminist' or 'women's human rights' as it comes across as too threatening for male leaders in government and parliament.
- Governments removing responsibility from funding local programs, initiatives and activities that work towards gender equality.
- CSOs and government ministries/departments taking on gender equality without any expertise in gender and therefore doing more harm to women and girls and reiterating misinformation.
- Irregular reporting on gender equality progress.

Key values and call to action required

Regarding robust engagement, cooperation, mutual understanding and shared power, *talatalanoa* respondents agreed that shared values are needed to uphold this outcome. Several respondents referenced the values of the 2050 Strategy of the Blue Pacific Continent, highlighting a few that could be applied to regional gender equality efforts:²

- We recognise regional cooperation and our shared commitment to work together, as an important platform for achieving the greatest benefits for our people.
- We strive for effective, open and honest relationships and inclusive and enduring partnerships—based on mutual accountability and respect—with each other, within our sub-regions, within our region, and beyond.

A few respondents mentioned the Revitalised Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, which calls for 'stronger commitment at all levels to the revitalised Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Declaration on Achieving Gender Equality and urge new transformative partnerships and investments with all stakeholders that will guarantee lifelong learning, health and wellbeing of all Pacific peoples, particularly for women and girls in all their diversity'.³



Nurturing the vā

‘Nurturing the vā [relationships] requires partners to develop integrative partnerships based on equality, diversity and inclusivity. It should promote shared values, standards and power between all partners ...’

Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships (2020),
Developing Equitable Partnerships Model



Successful strategies and approaches

Talatalanoa respondents agreed that when strategies and approaches to achieve gender equality were based on nurturing the vā, these resulted in the best outcomes.

Nurturing the vā or relationships is a strong component of Pacific culture, encompassing principles such as respect, mutual trust and reciprocity. However, it is seldom used because of competing Western processes and systems of partnerships. Nurturing the vā calls for ensuring that all partners prioritise space and time to work on building and valuing relationships with each other. To achieve Pacific ownership of gender equality through strengthened regional partnerships, nurturing the vā needs to be at the front and centre of all efforts.

“

In the Pacific, relationships is what defines us – how we treat and care for each other and how we act and behave ... nurturing the vā among Pacific regional partners working together to achieve gender equality is what we need to do because there are some partners who are only welcomed in some spaces and other spaces that they are completely left out and that’s not reflective of nurturing relationships ...

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, Pacific Feminist Fund MEAL workshops, Fiji, 2024)

”



The respondents highlighted several successful strategies and approaches, which are summarised below:

- Involve key gender equality partners in all key decision-making spaces at the national and regional levels (governments, CSOs, PIFS, SPC), which means a reduction in closed-door meetings.
- Give gender equality CSOs and regional networks the opportunity to participate and engage meaningfully in debate. For example, the Pacific Islands Forum Reference Group to Address Sexual and Gender-Based Violence that focuses on supporting member countries to increase their efforts towards addressing and ending sexual and gender-based violence, and the SPC Regional Working Group on developing a regional counselling framework for the Pacific that aims to establish ethical principles and practice standards.
- Strengthen and support a definition of Pacific ownership to be one that promotes Pacific regional partners working closely with Pacific governments and Pacific CSOs.
- Use co-design and co-accountability approaches where regional partners work collectively, rather than separately, with governments and CSOs to progress gender equality.

“

It makes complete sense because we all support and work towards the Pacific Platform for Action, the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, SDGs, CEDAW and Beijing [Platform for Action] ... both governments and CSOs ... what we need to do is return to a collaborative partnership, commitment and effort because working in silos from each other slows the work down in achieving our gender equality commitment.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, PWLES sensemaking workshop, Fiji, 2023)

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This could be in the form of developing processes for closer collaboration between Pacific regional partners, Pacific governments and Pacific CSOs at the national and regional levels. It will require political will at the highest level. An example of this was provided earlier with the Pacific Islands Forum Reference Group, an independent high-level group of experts established by the Forum Regional Security Committee to guide the Forum Secretariat and support Forum members' efforts to implement the 2009 Forum Leaders' decision to address sexual and gender-based violence in the region. It no longer exists; however, the idea behind its establishment was supported by both the Pacific governments and CSOs.

The Reference Group comprised:

- Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, Solomon Islands
- Solicitor General, Kingdom of Tonga
- Director, Women's Division, Ministry of Internal & Social Affairs, Kiribati
- Deputy Director-General, SPC
- Fiji Women's Crisis Centre
- Program Specialist EVAW, UN Women Pacific.



There is also a need for caution when setting up gender regional working groups to ensure that the appointments to these groups include both Pacific gender experts and non-experts with high political status. It is important to ensure that the 'gender experts' have expertise in the specific theme or subject for which the group has been formed. With this setup, the members can learn from each other and ensure they are fully committed to achieving gender equality across the Pacific. They can provide sound advice, guidance and support to Pacific Island countries in their efforts to achieve gender equality and address challenges.

Determining, running, integrating

The Pacific region has gained a lot of success in achieving gender equality. Some examples are provided below:

- Samoa's constitutional amendment ensures women hold 10% of seats in parliament if they are not elected under the general election due to gender social norms, behaviours and beliefs.
- 14 Pacific Island countries have passed domestic violence legislation.
- Most Pacific Island governments have endorsed national policies on advancing gender equality. PIFS reported an increase by Forum member countries in the following areas:
 - » seats held by women in parliament
 - » seats held by women in local government
 - » the number of women taking up senior management roles in the public sector.

However, there is still a long way to go to achieve gender equality.

“

Although we say there is an increase, the increase is still minimal, and most of us haven't even achieved at least 10% in parliament. The increase is still very minimal, and I know we should celebrate it, but it's not good enough for working on this for 20 years.

(*Talatalanoa* respondent, PWLES sensemaking workshop, Fiji, 2023)

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**Determining what practices are core to the future and what are obstacles.**

Understanding what has been stalling national and regional progress towards achieving gender equality and ending those practices. For example, working in silos and keeping the government separated from CSOs. Acknowledging past and current practices that worked well and continuing those practices. For example, regular reporting on gender equality progress and having high-level expert groups comprising representatives from regional partners to achieve gender equality: governments, CSOs, PIFS, and SPC.

Running smart experiments and testing new practices. Being open to strengthening collaboration among Pacific regional partners, Pacific governments and Pacific CSOs. Collaboration based on co-design and co-accountability.

Integrating new practices and allowing people across the organisation or system to execute. Regional partners supporting new ways of working by involving both government and CSOs from the outset to co-design and co-create.

If these steps are taken, more robust collaboration, cooperation and mutual sharing can be achieved, and the unequal power dynamics among regional partners can be addressed by adopting and applying strategies around shared power.



Recommendations

‘[we need] accelerated actions and measures to strengthen the participation of all Pacific peoples, particularly women and girls in all their diversity, at all levels of leadership and decision-making, and strengthen national systems to promote and mainstream gender equality and inclusivity.’

2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent



1. Acknowledge that the Pacific covers countries located in the Northern Pacific, Eastern Pacific and Western Pacific, as well as Australia/Torres Strait Islands and New Zealand, noting varying power dynamics among Pacific countries and territories.
2. Acknowledge that ownership is based on Pacific diversity, inclusion and engagement from the beginning. This includes co-design, co-accountability and decoloniality.
3. Strengthen and increase the visibility of collective regional partnerships between SPC, PIFS, Pacific Island governments and CSOs. By doing so, national efforts to achieve gender equality will accelerate and gain momentum.
4. Clarify definitions: What do we mean by the terms ‘Pacific ownership’ and ‘regional effectiveness’? Who is involved in this?
5. Revisit the ‘end-of-program outcome’: Is gender mainstreaming what we want? If so, how do we do this (i.e. only through women’s ministries or through other opportunities)? What is realistic within the funding timeframe?
6. Leverage the resources that are available in the Pacific, including youth and CSOs.
7. Develop a handbook that outlines the agreed-upon language regarding gender equality commitments made at various regional and global spaces for Pacific regional partners, governments and CSOs. For example, the Commission of the Status of Women Pacific Statements, Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, and Pacific Islands Forum regional meetings and outcomes documents.
8. Develop country and regional gender equality snapshots from 2000–2010 and 2010–2020 based on current reports. Then, develop a process and mechanism for collating annual data from country-based gender equality committees made up of regional partners, governments and CSOs. Incorporate co-design and co-accountability.



9. Support the establishment of an online hub that collates gender equality progress across all Pacific countries. This includes providing support to partners for data collection and analysis.
10. PIFS/SPC to identify further opportunities for collaboration, including with other CROP agencies. Some suggestions already identified and/or underway include:
 - PLGED & PPA reporting and tracking
 - Triennial Conference of Pacific Women convening and implementation of outcomes
 - Regional Gender Coordination Group and Gender Working Group
 - Gender statistics work
 - 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent and its Implementation Plan
 - Global processes at the Convention of the Status of Women, Conference of the Parties, Conference of State Parties.

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1. OL Guttenbeil-Likiliki, [Creating equitable South-North partnerships: Nurturing the vā and voyaging the audacious ocean together](#), IWDA, Melbourne, 2020.
 2. Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), [2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent](#), PIFS, Suva, 2022.
 3. Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), [Revitalised Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration \[PDF 7.55MB\]](#), PIFS, Suva, 2023.



Chapter 7

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Stakeholder consultations carried out by Joanne Kunatuba, Pacific Women Lead Enabling Services. Analysis and writing completed by Niketa Kulkarni and Nikki Bartlett, Clear Horizon Consulting.

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- 168** Potential drivers for gender mainstreaming
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Introduction

The importance of 'mainstreaming' a gender perspective through policy and governance efforts was universally recognised in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing as a critical strategy for achieving gender equality. The Beijing Platform for Action advises that all policies and programs should incorporate gender analysis to ensure that all multi-sectoral development processes – which might otherwise be acting, advertently or inadvertently, to perpetuate gender stereotypes and inequalities – are instead actively contributing to the realisation of gender equality in all spheres of life.¹

Mainstreaming perspectives from women and girls with disabilities is a relatively newer focus, with similar aims of promoting inclusion and addressing barriers to equal enjoyment of rights and services. Discrimination, stigma and frequent exclusion from gender-related development activities present a heightened risk of policies and programs not extending benefits (or inadvertently harming) women and girls with disabilities.

Pacific countries have diverse policies promoting the empowerment of women, girls, and persons with disabilities, with varying degrees of implementation. Many countries are currently reviewing their policies, but they often lack baseline data or evidence for context-specific gender or disability analysis. Although there has been progress in integrating a gender perspective into national development and sector plans in these countries, effective policy implementation often faces challenges due to insufficient budgets and political will from government across key sectors,² calling into question whether gender mainstreaming efforts are appropriately enabled across Pacific policy and governance structures and institutions. This chapter provides a current state assessment of various elements of an enabling environment that can appropriately support and motivate gender mainstreaming across the Pacific.

Practically speaking, what is mainstreaming and why is it important?

Gender and disability mainstreaming processes can help integrate diverse perspectives throughout policy and program development to improve the likelihood of equitable outcomes. For example, Pacific women often experience the double burden of unpaid care work at home in addition to their more visible activities of earning income outside the home. Well-intentioned WEE discussions that do not incorporate perspectives and experiences of women's experience may miss aspects of their private lives (such as unpaid care work) and lead to policies with limited efficacy. Similarly, policies aiming to increase women's access to sexual and reproductive health services may not consider the heightened stigma and risks faced by women with disabilities seeking reproductive counselling and contraception.³

Mainstreaming efforts can also help identify potentially harmful consequences to diverse groups that would not have otherwise surfaced. For instance, research has highlighted the inadvertent effect that women's financial independence may have on intra-household

power dynamics, which 'may be resented by some men, who use violence to reassert their position of authority'.⁴ Research in Vanuatu, for example, found that women who earned income were about 1.5 times more likely to experience physical or sexual partner violence in their lifetime than those who did not earn an income. Incorporating gender analysis early into policy development may help identify such potential negative impacts and ensure the policy considers necessary mitigation tactics.

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A government needs to take into account the fact that citizens' needs, resources, constraints and opportunities are largely determined by sociocultural constructs (including gender) and that, consequently, it needs to take those constraints into account when designing policy. Failure to do so will lead to ineffective and inefficient policies.⁵

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Effective mainstreaming can also help ensure that gender and disability are embedded in policies and practices that are not primarily focused on achieving gender equality, disability and social inclusion related outcomes. For example, social protection programs' effectiveness could improve by applying gender and disability mainstreaming practices. Data shows limited outreach of various social protection programs to women and persons with disabilities due to a lack of understanding of the need to target marginalised persons within the household proactively.





SPOTLIGHT

Gender mainstreaming and climate change

Climate change affects women and men differently due to existing gender inequalities. Effective gender mainstreaming might help policymakers identify and address the gender-specific impacts of climate change. For example, women and girls face increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence during and after disasters. They experience increased workloads, such as travelling longer distances for water and firewood. This limits their opportunities for education and livelihoods due to the additional responsibilities. Moreover, women have limited access to information that helps them prepare for climate and disaster events, as they are less likely to have access to mobile phones, which are increasingly used for weather warnings.⁶ In addition, women are more likely to perform a significant share of shore-based harvesting and small-scale fishing, while men are more often engaged in large-scale commercial agriculture and fisheries. These differences place women at a higher risk of unemployment and economic vulnerability from environmental disasters and climate change. Appropriate analysis would also reveal the differential challenges in accessing land, financial resources, and decision-making processes related to climate change.⁷ These risks are heightened for women with disabilities.⁸

Progress has been made in considering women and persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction and climate change policies. The Pacific Framework for Resilient Development (2016–2030) provides guidance for civil society, national governments, regional organisations and donors to ensure an inclusive and human rights-based approach to addressing climate change and disasters. This framework emphasises the importance of considering the needs and rights of women and people with disabilities in line with international frameworks and agreements.⁹ At the national level, examples include Fiji's Climate Change Act, which highlights women's rights, the rights of older persons and persons living with disability, and children's inalienable right to a healthy environment.¹⁰ It also focuses on youth, groups and communities living in vulnerable and marginalised situations. Additionally, the Solomon Islands Climate Change Policy promotes gender equity and the involvement of various groups.¹¹ Specifically, Section 1.6 recognises that climate change will affect everyone in Solomon Islands now and in the future. It states: 'The implementation of this policy shall ensure gender equity, and the involvement of men, women, youth, children and persons with special needs'.¹² Finally, FSM's efforts towards achieving SDG 13 on combating climate change maintains a specific focus on women, youth and marginalised communities.¹³

There are several promising practices for enabling gender and disability mainstreaming in climate change disaster risk reduction policies. In Vanuatu, the head of the Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs was engaged as a technical negotiator on gender and climate change for Pacific Small Island Developing States at COP27 in 2022. In Samoa and the Cook Islands, organisations of persons with disabilities were invited to provide guidance to revisions of national disaster management plans.¹⁴

Nevertheless, there is still work to be done. It is essential to recognise the interconnectedness of these areas and ensure that efforts are coordinated to effectively address the needs of women and persons with disabilities. Strengthening resources and capacity at the national level is important to enable women's ministries to contribute meaningfully to national forums and governance systems, such as national disaster management committees, for managing and addressing disasters and climate change impacts.

Equally, meaningful involvement of women's NGOs and coalitions of organisations focusing on gender equality, disability and social inclusion is essential in the development and implementation of climate change and disaster policies and legislation.¹⁵ These organisations play a crucial role in advancing climate knowledge, accessing climate and disaster risk information, and advocating for policy reform. Furthermore, flexible climate and disaster risk finance is needed for local organisations focusing on gender equality, disability and social inclusion. These resources are crucial in driving climate and disaster-resilient action at the local level.¹⁶

While there has been an increase in consultations with organisations of persons with disabilities, these engagements often fall short in terms of genuine inclusion. Meaningful engagement of women and men with diverse disabilities is necessary in the design, implementation and evaluation of disaster risk reduction and climate-related policies and programs.¹⁷

Scope and purpose

This chapter seeks to inform future measures of progress related to PWL's goal of supporting Pacific governments and development partners that are implementing programs and policies that support gender equality.*

As a formative situational analysis, this chapter seeks to provide a reference point against which to measure progress. Understanding the highly dynamic nature of gender mainstreaming across Pacific governments and development partners, it is critical to note that the findings are specific to 2021–2023. Unlike traditional situational analyses, however, this chapter also provides broader insights about context, situation and experiences to inform adaptations to program delivery. To this effect, the chapter concludes with recommendations for advancing current areas of program focus within the broader category of gender mainstreaming.

Methodology

Data collection and validation

The findings in this chapter were developed and validated in a staged process to ensure they incorporated the views and perspectives of diverse Pacific Island stakeholders and leveraged research conducted by substantive experts. Two primary methods of data collection were used.

- **Document review:** The review and analysis of relevant documents helped to scope existing knowledge, identify gaps, triangulate other data and provide useful context.
- **Stakeholder consultations:** PWLES staff organised and facilitated consultations with representatives of key Pacific government agencies and development partners, as well as individuals with specific relevant expertise. The consultations included participants who were knowledgeable about disability inclusion and climate change and resilience. The consultations were guided by a list of conversation topics, which was distributed to participants ahead of time. However, the conversations were allowed to flow organically based on their backgrounds and interests.

A collective sensemaking workshop helped ensure that the findings were interrogated and validated by stakeholders from the Pacific, including participants from DFAT. In this workshop, 8 participants representing PWLES, SPC, authors and DFAT met to engage with the evidence and review the draft findings. In addition, the findings were reviewed by a disability inclusion expert and a representative of the Australia Pacific Climate Partnership.

* Development partners include DFAT, UN agencies, SPC and other organisations that fund project work under Pacific Women Lead.



Are Pacific countries appropriately enabled for mainstreaming?

Framework of analysis

Successful mainstreaming efforts require a supportive enabling environment characterised by the 6 elements described below:¹⁸

Legal and policy framework

The extent to which gender equality and mainstreaming commitments are in place through the ratification of relevant international human rights treaties, the existence of constitutional and legislative provisions, and government policy mandates.

Political will

The extent to which action is taken on stated gender equality commitments, and action is formalised within systems and mechanisms to ensure mainstreaming is sustainable.

Organisational culture

The extent to which staff attitudes and organisational systems and structures either support or marginalise gender equality as an issue.

Accountability and responsibility

The extent to which commitments to gender mainstreaming can be traced and monitored within organisations, and the mechanisms through which individuals at different levels demonstrate gender equality outcomes.

Technical capacity

The extent of skills and experience that organisations can draw on to support gender mainstreaming and human rights mainstreaming initiatives across and within their operations and programmes.

Adequate resources

The extent to which human and financial resources are sufficiently allocated and applied in relation to the scope of the task of mainstreaming.



This framework will be used to understand the current strengths and weaknesses of the enabling environment across the Pacific for mainstreaming. The stocktake of gender mainstreaming capabilities across 15 PICTs identified consistent improvements in legal and policy frameworks but variation in the levels of political will across ministries. The stocktake also recommended more focused attention on improving organisational culture and accountability measures. Finally, the stocktake revealed inadequate technical capacity in gender mainstreaming across ministries and limited allocation of financial and human resources. These findings are detailed below.

Legal and policy frameworks

International human rights instruments

Most Pacific countries considered for this situational analysis have ratified the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.¹⁹ The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by all countries. Most Pacific countries have also aligned their national strategies to key international and regional policy frameworks, including the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005–2015. Only 7 countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Regional frameworks

There are several regional policy frameworks which identify mainstreaming as an effective tool for achieving inclusive and equitable outcomes. These include the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED), the Pacific Platform for Action (PPA) on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights, and the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PFRPD).

Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration

The PLGED, announced at the 43rd Pacific Islands Forum in August 2012, establishes the Pacific's renewed commitment 'to lift the status of women in the Pacific and empower them to be active participants in economic, political and social life'.²⁰ It provides strategic direction for advancing gender equality by directing leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum to pursue gender-responsive government programs and policies through gender mainstreamed processes and decision-making that include:

- Strengthening consultative mechanisms with civil society groups, including women's advocacy groups, on key budget and policy issues of national and sub-national governments.
- Adopting measures to accelerate women's full and equal participation in governance reform at all levels and women's leadership in all decision-making.
- Advocating for increased representation of women in private sector and local-level governance boards and committees (for example, school boards and produce market committees).²¹

An independent review of the PLGED was conducted in 2021 on the themes of governance, relevance, impact and effectiveness, collaboration, and sustainability.²² On the positive side, the review cited examples of the PLGED being successfully used as a policy lever. For example, DFAT used it to justify a AUD320 million pledge to the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program through its 2012 gender equality initiative.



However, the review also pointed out the limited success the PLGED had in motivating effective gender mainstreaming efforts across the region. Despite explicit acknowledgement of the value of the PLGED, the review identified several challenges, including weak ownership by governments, regional organisations, civil society and the private sector. It also identified limited accountability, a lack of a mechanism or process for reporting progress, and inadequate technical capacity and resources.

The Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights

The Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018–2030 sets out the priorities and actions for advancing gender equality in the Pacific region, developed and agreed upon by representatives from all PICTs. It provides a framework for coordination, collaboration and monitoring of gender mainstreaming efforts in regional organisations and member countries across 4 strategic themes:

- mechanisms to promote the advancement of women
- women's legal and human rights
- women's access to services
- women's economic empowerment.²¹

The PPA identifies mainstreaming as a critical strategy for ensuring that all policies, programs and services delivered by government, regional agencies and civil society benefit women and men of all ages and situations and address their diverse concerns, needs and priorities. The PPA also states that mainstreaming efforts should include strengthening the capacity of national women's machineries to conduct gender analysis to enhance guidance on diverse sectoral policies.

The Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The PFRPD is a regional framework that was adopted by the Pacific Islands Forum in 2016. It provides guidance on how to mainstream disability into development planning and implementation in the Pacific Islands. While the PFRPD primarily focuses on the rights and wellbeing of persons with disabilities, it also recognises the importance of considering gender perspectives and addressing gender disparities within disability-related policies and programs. The PFRPD highlights the specific challenges and barriers faced by women and girls with disabilities in the Pacific based on 'common assumptions and widely held beliefs about their statuses and capacity both as females and as persons with disabilities'.²³



National legislation

Several Pacific countries have policies promoting gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion, as detailed below.

Country and organisation	Counselling using HRBF/SCA	Safe housing
Fiji	National Gender Policy	Comprehensive framework for gender mainstreaming in all sectors of government and civil society.
FSM	Strategic Development Plan (2004–2003)	Emphasises the mainstreaming of gender issues into decision-making, policies and strategic development plans. The plan includes a gender matrix to guide gender-related work and covers disability inclusion.
Kiribati	Kiribati Vision 20 (KV20)	Highlights gender as a crosscutting issue and commits to mainstreaming gender in government policies, plans, budgets and programs. ²⁴ The country also recognises the importance of disability inclusion as a crosscutting issue.
RMI	National Gender Mainstreaming Policy	Addresses capacity gaps and aims to reduce gender-based violence while promoting women's equitable participation in decision-making. Objectives include strengthened institutional capacity to deliver gender-responsive programs and services, safeguarded family wellbeing, elimination of gender-based violence, equitable participation in, and benefit from, economic development, and equitable participation of women and men in decision-making. ²⁵
Nauru	Republic of Nauru National Sustainable Development Strategy	Focuses on promoting a just society that recognises and respects women's rights, encourages equal opportunities and integrates gender considerations across all sectors. ²⁶
Solomon Islands	Constitution and the National Development Strategy	Supports gender mainstreaming and acknowledges the importance of improving services for people with disabilities.
Tonga	National Policy on Gender and Development ²⁷	Outlines 5 priority outcomes covering gender mainstreaming in government policies, programs and services, addressing domestic violence and sexual reproductive health and rights, promoting WEE and participation in decision-making, and addressing gender-related challenges in natural disasters, environmental issues and climate change.



In RMI, the National Gender Mainstreaming Policy has motivated a review and revision of legislation and policies across the government. This has been followed by the specification of more gender-responsive procedures and practices. However, for the most part, mainstreaming policies have not resulted in significant changes to measures of gender equality in leadership or economic control.²⁸ As mentioned by one stakeholder who was consulted, 'The paperwork is good. The level of implementation is a different story.' Analysis across the remaining elements of the enabling environment for mainstreaming provides a lens into some of the challenges preventing the consistent application of mainstreaming policies and frameworks.

Political will

Political will refers to the extent to which gender mainstreaming has been embedded within policy systems and decision-making processes. It provides a measure of the sustainability of mainstreaming efforts.

Various governments have demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting gender equality and addressing gender disparities within their policies and decision-making frameworks. In Fiji, the Parliament's Standing Orders have been instrumental in facilitating gender mainstreaming. For example, Standing Order 110(2) mandates that parliamentary committees utilise gender-based analysis when scrutinising legislation or carrying out oversight functions.²⁹ This requirement aims to ensure that committees appropriately assess the impacts and benefits of proposed measures on both men and women equally. By incorporating this analysis into their activities, Fiji's parliamentary committees are actively working towards gender-responsive legislation and policies. Similarly, Samoa's Cabinet Development Committee has taken a significant step by making gender analysis a prerequisite for all aid project proposals.³⁰ By incorporating gender analysis into project designs, Samoa aims to enhance the role of women and promote gender equality across various sectors.

However, efforts to prioritise gender equality often face competition from other pressing priorities due to varying degrees of awareness and recognition of gender equality as a critical component across all national goals.³¹ Furthermore, implementation of gender-responsive laws and policies is very slow, demonstrating low levels of political will of senior decision-makers due to lack of awareness and, in some cases, active resistance.³²

Demonstrations of political will related to disability inclusion have been scarcer. Over the past 6 years, governments have increasingly engaged and sought input from



organisations of persons with disabilities in developing disability-specific and general policies and programs in the Pacific, aligning with Article 4.3 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, while significant progress on disability inclusion has been made, there is a significant lack of effective regulations that guarantee non-discrimination, reasonable accommodation, and accessibility in mainstream sector investments.³³

Organisational culture

There are promising examples of supportive organisational culture across the Pacific. For example, the importance of gender equality has been heightened through dedicated offices or ministries responsible for gender issues, which include gender mainstreaming as part of their mandate. In Solomon Islands, the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs is specifically mandated to work on gender issues and has policies to support gender mainstreaming.³⁴ In Fiji, gender focal points have been established across government agencies.³⁵ Most countries have a disability focal point/desk officer; however, there is limited evidence of their collaboration with gender focal points.

However, these dedicated women's ministries face significant challenges in effectively implementing gender mainstreaming objectives. For example, the National Women's Department (NWD) is responsible for gender mainstreaming work in most countries, but it often lacks the necessary status, resources and capacity to carry out its mandate effectively.³⁶ The capacity of national gender machinery varies, ranging from small offices to larger units, and their status within the government hierarchy can also vary.³⁷ In many cases, the NWD is located in less strategic ministries.³⁸ Even when the NWD holds the status of a ministry, it is often under-resourced and historically marginalised, with limited influence over government policies. The limited status and resources undermine the mandate of the national coordinating unit, hindering effective gender mainstreaming efforts.

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In Tuvalu, there are 4 people that are constantly in meetings. They are consulted, but it's not clear to which extent the institutions have changed their views, rather than just a few people. I was speaking with Palau last week, and they moved the gender office to the PM's office. They are moving to a place where they have more opportunity to have wide influence.

(Consultation participant)

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Furthermore, while the percentage of women in Pacific parliaments has almost doubled over the last decade, there is still a notably low percentage of women representatives in national legislatures (8.5%).³⁹ To address this issue, a few Pacific governments have introduced temporary special measures to provide seats for women, with limited success at the national level, such as in Samoa (10%) and PNG's Autonomous Region of Bougainville (8%). In 2013, Vanuatu introduced a 30% quota for women's representation in municipal governments. Additionally, while there is a growing number of women in the public service in RMI, men still dominate the most senior positions.



Despite the promotion of political participation for persons with disabilities in the CRPD and the PFRPD, there is limited evidence of their engagement in political processes. According to a UN Women brief on the leadership and political participation of women with disabilities, there is a lack of official data on their representation in political decision-making, highlighting a gap between commitments and actual action.⁴⁰

Accountability and responsibility

Effective monitoring and reporting frameworks are also essential for capturing lessons from gender mainstreaming initiatives and facilitating the identification and replication of successful approaches in different contexts.

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Countries have lots of policies. But if we don't have any accountability, gender perspective will just disappear. It's the countries eventually who need to report. They already struggle to report for CEDAW, etc. We need to be careful to propose mechanisms that can bring together these reporting commitments.

(Consultation participant)

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The PPA has been used as a tool for tracking progress against the outcomes outlined in the PLGED. In one consultation, it was mentioned that the PPA was more widely recognised and used than the PLGED due to its practical measurement framework. Additionally, the Triennial Conference of Pacific Women hosted by SPC has provided a forum for reviewing progress against the PPA and using the evidence to reflect on obstacles preventing the further advancement of women.

At the national level, there are positive examples of processes to improve accountability for achieving gender mainstreaming goals. For example, as mentioned earlier, Samoa's Cabinet Development Committee requires the inclusion of gender analysis in all aid project proposals, therefore ensuring that gender-related outcomes are considered to receive funds.

Nevertheless, across the Pacific Islands, accountability mechanisms appear to be weak. While the Department for Women's Affairs can enhance capacity and contribute to gender equality knowledge, it often lacks the authority to direct mainstreaming across all government ministries. This responsibility typically falls within the public service administration agency, which establishes accountability mechanisms. Unfortunately, such mechanisms are rare in Pacific governments. In Solomon Islands, however, permanent secretaries have a gender mainstreaming key performance area as part of their job descriptions, which includes indicators such as a gender strategy in ministry plans and appointing a gender focal point, aligning with the Public Service Commission code of conduct's zero-tolerance policy on workplace harassment. In addition, multiple existing reporting requirements stretch the limited resources available. One consultation participant recommended the development of a 'basic report card that won't take too much effort', but also noted the need to ensure that the content is accurate and of high quality.

Technical capacity

There is often a disconnect between commitments to gender mainstreaming and the technical capacity to effectively implement these commitments.⁴¹ The stocktake reports highlighted a lack of capacity to undertake gender analysis and data collection and analysis. These inadequacies constrain efforts to improve gender responsiveness and inclusiveness across diverse policies.

The lack of sex-disaggregated data is a significant concern as it hinders the ability to make gender-responsive policy decisions.⁴² Monitoring efforts can bridge this gap by collecting and analysing sex-disaggregated data to inform policies that address gender-specific needs and promote gender equality. While Pacific governments are making progress in collecting standardised national disability data, the effective use of this data remains a challenge.⁴³ Similarly, more evidence is needed to effectively integrate gender into climate change mainstreaming and adaptation. Enhanced monitoring technical capacity strengthens data collection, analysis and evaluation to enable the development of evidence-based policies and strategies that effectively address the gender dimensions of climate change, leading to more equitable and sustainable outcomes.⁴⁴

Providing parliamentarians with access to expert analysis based on sex-disaggregated data enables them to make informed decisions that consider diverse gender experiences and needs.⁴⁵ Nuanced data may provide insights into gender disparities, allowing policymakers to identify gaps, address inequalities and develop targeted interventions to promote gender equality.

To address the lack of technical skills and expertise, it is necessary to invest in government focal point training programs focused on disability inclusion and budgets. This training should not only enhance knowledge about disability rights and inclusion but also provide guidance on how to effectively allocate financial resources to support disability-inclusive initiatives. Additionally, improving public financial management budget reporting, including disaggregation of data in budget documents and thematic reporting, is crucial for conducting comprehensive disability inclusion expenditure analysis and ensuring accountability in resource allocation.⁴⁶



Adequate resources

Resources for gender mainstreaming across Pacific countries are generally insufficient despite the adoption of gender policies and strategies by most countries in the region.⁴⁷ National women's offices receive budgets that are less than 1% of national appropriations, which limits their capacity to integrate and implement gender priorities effectively.⁴⁸ Similarly, the allocation of core budget support for disability inclusion is below 0.15% of GDP in most Pacific countries (as per 2018 data), except for Fiji, Tuvalu and Kiribati, which leads to a reliance on external assistance to develop disability-specific services.⁴⁹

There is a pressing need to adequately resource the implementation of gender policies and strategies at the national level, particularly to address the challenges faced by women with disabilities.⁵⁰ However, there is a significant data gap regarding budget reporting, hindering the analysis of disability inclusion expenditure. Improved public financial management, including disaggregated data in budget documents and thematic reporting, is necessary to address this gap.⁵¹

One good practice example is Fiji's introduction of gender-responsive budgeting, which was supported by the Cabinet and piloted for the 2020–2021 National Budget with 8 line ministries.⁵² This approach incorporated gender-responsive budgeting principles into budget submission templates and provided training and ongoing support throughout the budget process. By adopting this approach, Fiji was able to address the immediate impacts of COVID-19 by supporting women-owned and women-led businesses, providing cash transfers to informal workers (including those in microenterprises owned by women), and considering the gendered impacts of the pandemic through a dedicated working group.⁵³ To increase women's voices and access to services and resources, the Fiji Government undertook initiatives such as redesigning training programs for women to be more inclusive. These initiatives demonstrate the potential of gender-responsive budgeting to strategically allocate resources and address gender disparities in government priorities.



Potential drivers for gender mainstreaming

Regional organisations

Nine Pacific regional institutions with diverse mandates ranging across social, economic, political and environmental issues have joined under the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP).⁵⁴ Their work spans from grassroots efforts to legislative support for international policy commitments and often involves diverse stakeholders.

These realities place the CROP in an excellent position to demonstrate leadership in gender mainstreaming. The CROP, as a council with broad disciplinary, geographic and political reach, is ideally placed to model change, build capacity and influence member governments to address this issue in a more holistic manner using multidisciplinary and integrated approaches.⁵⁵

While there is opportunity for all CROP agencies to model and advance gender mainstreaming as a mechanism for achieving gender equality across diverse sectors, SPC⁵⁶ and PIFS⁵⁷ have significant mandates for gender equality and are key strategic partners of PWL, placing them in an excellent position to demonstrate leadership in gender mainstreaming.

The Pacific Community

SPC is the principal scientific and technical regional organisation supporting development across the Pacific. It has a strong focus on crosscutting issues, such as gender equality, climate change, disaster risk management and human rights, and is guided by a deep understanding of Pacific Island contexts and cultures.⁵⁸ SPC's Human Rights and Social Development Division focuses on gender equality and disability inclusion, among other things. Through this division, SPC is the key implementing partner of PWL, ensuring that Pacific priorities and leadership drive gender equality in the region.

SPC has adopted the PLGED and the PPA, and its 2022–2031 Strategic Plan notes gender mainstreaming as a key pathway to gender equality. SPC established a Gender Mainstreaming Unit to provide technical support to SPC staff and partners on gender mainstreaming. It also hosts the Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, a forum for Pacific women to network and identify measures for the advancement of women.

In terms of leadership and technical capacity, over half of SPC's current executive management team is female, with one woman sitting at the senior executive level. Additionally, one executive position has been





given to the Principal Strategic Lead of Pacific Women and Girls to drive gender equality and empowerment across the Pacific region. Acknowledging the lack of similar gender representation across regional, national and sub-national institutions, SPC (with PIFS and the Pacific Islands Development Program) proposed the Women of the Wave Network, which has been endorsed by all 9 CROP heads. This network aims to support women employees across CROP agencies to promote active participation in leadership, decision-making and politics.⁵⁹

SPC also provides technical advisory and capacity-building support to improve gender mainstreaming across sectors. For example, SPC has advanced gender mainstreaming within the fisheries sector, both within SPC and across Pacific government ministries that are responsible for fisheries. A team of specialists focusing on gender and fisheries is based within the Fisheries Division and the Human Rights and Social Development Division, supporting and providing research, guidance, capacity building and technical expertise on gender inclusion in the fisheries sector. This coordinated approach within SPC has led to several analyses and research baselines on gender and fisheries, as well as practical guidance and tailored tools such as the Pacific Handbook for gender equity and social inclusion. Additionally, training, mentoring and learning events are offered to fishery staff within governments and to USP marine science and fisheries students.

SPC has several initiatives aimed at increasing knowledge and capabilities related to mainstreaming. For example, it recently released a Pacific Gender Mainstreaming Training Kit, which includes modules on gender equality, gender analysis and gender mainstreaming.⁶⁰ SPC also supports gender mainstreaming and the availability of gender-disaggregated statistics through its Progressing Gender Equality in the Pacific project (PGEPP). Finally, SPC undertook several stocktakes to assess the capacity of governments to mainstream gender across policies, programs and practices.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

PIFS supports coordination, political dialogue and decision-making on regional action to harness opportunities and mitigate challenges for the people of the Pacific, guided by the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (2014).

Similar to SPC, PIFS has adopted the PLGED and the PPA and has demonstrated a strong commitment to gender equality through numerous initiatives. However, the PIFS 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, which highlights gender equality as a critical goal, does not mention gender mainstreaming. PIFS has spearheaded several efforts to promote and support gender mainstreaming action through the CROP Gender Working Group (1998), the High-Level Reference Group on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (2009), and the Regional Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (2011). However, these mechanisms are currently inactive. It is unclear whether this is due to a lack of technical and/or financial capacity or other issues.

The 2021 Annual Report highlights a few promising efforts to improve the inflow of gender perspectives in the organisation and model effective mainstreaming. For example, PIFS invited young women leaders to *talanoa* with Secretary General Meg Taylor about various challenges and opportunities related to their leadership roles and trajectories. In addition, a gender specialist was brought on board to provide technical advice on Pacific policies and practices. Finally, as mentioned earlier, PIFS supports the CROP Women of the Wave Network to increase the quality of female leadership and networking opportunities across the region. In 2023, DFAT was finalising a new funding relationship with PIFS to extend their gender mainstreaming work.



Donors

Furthermore, the requirements outlined in international instruments and the priorities of major donors have significantly influenced gender inclusion work. International agreements and conventions have provided a framework for governments to promote gender equality. Major donors have prioritised gender-responsive programs, providing financial and technical support to initiatives demonstrating a commitment to gender inclusion. Consultations revealed slight skepticism about the degree to which gender-responsive policymaking reflects the government's responsiveness to donor funds rather than genuine commitment to gender equality. One respondent shared, 'The political will goes a lot with the money. There are more sectors willing to integrate the gender perspective, but it's very much driven by donors.'

Civil society support

CSOs, advocacy groups and feminist movements have been instrumental in raising awareness about the importance of gender equality. This heightened awareness has led to shifts in attitudes and behaviours, fostering a greater understanding of the need for gender equality and the inclusion of all genders. For example, 2 major sectoral gender mainstreaming initiatives in the last 5 years are the regional course on Gender and Macroeconomics organised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Pacific Gender and Climate Change Toolkit for climate change practitioners, which was developed in a partnership between GIZ (German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH), SPC, SPREP (Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme), UNDP and UN Women.





Recommendations

Pacific Women Lead aims to ensure that Pacific governments and development partners are implementing programs and policies that support gender equality. The program focuses on several pathways to achieve progress against this goal, which include:

- increasing resources allocated to addressing gender issues
- improving the capacity of Pacific governments and intergovernmental organisations in gender mainstreaming
- improving accountability for gender equality and women's human rights at regional and national levels.

The following recommendations are based on the formative situational analysis as suggested areas of focus for PWL's programmatic efforts.

Increase resources allocated to addressing gender issues. Capacity strengthening training for public financial management systems to help bridge the gender and disability inclusion data gap by including disaggregated data, by gender and disability, in budget documents and thematic reporting.

Support efforts to improve the capacity of Pacific governments and intergovernmental organisations in gender mainstreaming. Support the rollout and implementation of SPC's gender mainstreaming toolkit.

Support efforts to improve accountability for gender equality and women's human rights at regional and national levels. Advocate for a regional implementation framework with measurable targets to hold Pacific governments to account for gender mainstreaming capacity strengthening.



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