



BEIJING+25:

A summary of the review of progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Pacific Island countries and territories



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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BPA	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CROP	Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific
GBV	gender-based violence
HIES	household income and expenditure surveys
ICT	information and communication technology
NCDs	non-communicable diseases
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
PICTs	Pacific Island countries and territories
PLGED	Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration
PPA	Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality
RRRT	Regional Rights Resource Team
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
STIs	sexually transmitted infections
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

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FOREWORD

It is an honor for me to introduce the regional overview of progress in 25 years of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) in the Pacific region. In celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it is time to take stock of implementation in the Pacific region. This is in terms of what more must be done to achieve the full and equal participation of women in our societies in all areas, taking into account their diverse circumstances – where they live, how old they are, etc. – to ensure their inclusivity at all levels. Much has been achieved but more needs to be done in order to realize the world envisaged in 1995, one in which each woman and girl can exercise her freedoms and choices, realize her rights, live free from violence, go to school, participate in decisions and earn equal pay for equal work. The BPfA endures as one of the most influential international policy frameworks for women’s human rights.



Dr Hilda C. Heine
*President, Republic of the
Marshall Islands (2016-2020)*

As I read this report, I reflected about what we can demonstrate in terms of real results that show progress towards the goal of “gender equality, development of peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity” as stated in the Beijing Declaration. The report highlights very clearly that there is much to celebrate. Investments that increase access to health services and education for women and girls are showing positive outcomes. Most Pacific Island and countries and territories have conducted robust and rigorous research on the high prevalence of violence against women and girls, with the results and evidence used successfully to lobby governments to enact domestic violence legislation. More women are active in the labor force and, in some nations, social protection systems support them to balance their reproductive and productive roles. Some nations have implemented measures to increase the number of women in leadership and decision-making and, despite our dissatisfaction with the results of our electoral reform campaigns, the number of women elected to political office at national and sub-national levels has increased in some countries.

We have, however, still a long way to go to see parity in decision-making. While advocates and government gender offices are making effective use of gender data and sex disaggregated statistics to promote gender equality, we still lack some critical information to build the case for gender inclusion in environmental management, paid and unpaid work and universal health coverage.

Across the region, there has been a general increase, slight in some cases, in government budgetary support for national gender offices, although the overall amount in relation to the total budget is still very low. International development assistance for gender equality has generally increased. Noteworthy is the 10-year AUD 320 million Australian Government commitment to improve the political, social and economic opportunities of women living in the Pacific region, supporting the implementation of the 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration.

While the victory cries from 1995 are, in some ways, beginning to sound a bit hollow, we are unwavering, despite the fact that our challenges are now broader. The region is in a climate crisis, the scale and magnitude of which was not anticipated in 1995; in the space of one generation, low-lying islands have disappeared or become uninhabitable across the region. The increasing intensity and frequency of natural disasters has resulted in considerable cost to the people affected, as well as to governments and the private sector. Moreover, almost all nations are experiencing a non-communicable disease epidemic, and our women and girls are increasingly at risk because of obesity, poor nutrition and lack of physical exercise. We are beginning to implement child protection and early childhood development programs to improve outcomes for children, but there is still a long way to go.

The age composition of our populations is changing and, while we still have very high rates of fertility and very young populations, there is an increasing proportion of elderly women, often widows, who need support. Unfortunately, across the region, violence against women and children is endemic and intergenerational, and this is a priority concern that we are all trying to address because it insidiously undermines our sustainable

development efforts. We have born witness to terrible acts of violent extremism in the region that none of us ever imagined or thought possible, and there is ongoing social unrest in some nations, although processes of peace and reconciliation are continuing. In some Pacific nations, indigenous women continue to strive for recognition of their inalienable rights.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the significant achievements of civil society organizations and the feminist movement in advancing the BPfA. When we as governments become stymied in bureaucracy, we are quietly confident in the knowledge that non-state actors will mobilize to influence decision makers through their constituencies.

Gender equality is a collective moral and human imperative, so we strive to truly leave no one behind. In order to reflect critically on Beijing+25 and on what more must be done to close the gender gap in the 12 critical areas of concern, SPC has compiled this report from country progress and SDG reports, consolidating progress, reflections and learning about realizing the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action in Pacific Island countries and territories. I commend not only the authors and direct contributors, but all of us in our ongoing efforts to collectively raise our Pacific voices in regional and global discussions, measuring progress against gender equality commitments.



Dr. Hilda C. Heine

President, Republic of the Marshall Islands (2016-2020)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a summary of the review of the regional Beijing Platform for Action +25. It summarises areas of progress in fulfilling commitments to achieving gender equality in the Pacific Island region and challenges to achieving it. The issues raised should promote dialogue among governments, civil society actors, development partners and Pacific Island women and men about strategic actions to accelerate progress. Specifically, the report presents some of the most significant advances in, and barriers to, the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in 12 critical areas of concern.

Poverty

Women and men experience poverty or deprivation differently and violence against women exacerbates their multiple dimensions. Poverty and hardship also vary from rural to urban areas and female headed households struggle more in terms of access to land, livelihoods and well-paid employment. The region requires improved social protection systems that are accessible to women of all ages and abilities.

Education

Countries have made commitments to universal access and free education at least to the end of primary school. Gender parity has been achieved, or nearly so, at primary level in most countries. Initiatives to make curricula gender-responsive have started in a few countries but require ongoing investment and enhanced teacher training. Many countries have introduced policies to ensure that girls can complete their education even if they become pregnant as adolescents but social stigma and family pressure may still cause these girls to drop out. Concerns about safety from sexual harassment and assault can prevent rural girls from attending boarding schools to complete their secondary education.

Health

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for women of all ages, diversities and abilities remain an area of challenge in the Pacific region. Maternal health indicators have improved across almost all countries but the unmet need for contraceptives, adolescent pregnancies and addressing the SRHR needs of women with disabilities remain problematic. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are epidemic in the region, with associated disabilities and mortality. Women bear a disproportionate share of the burden of caring for family members while falling victim to NCDs themselves.

Violence against women

Violence against women is high in the Pacific region and is both a symptom and driver of gender inequality. Increasing regional coordination and development of integrated service protocols are gradually improving services for survivors but large numbers of women do not report violence due to fear of stigma or further retaliation. Challenges include finding the means to adapt political and development programming cycles to the scale and scope of the effort required.

Women and armed conflict

The Pacific region has no current armed conflicts but in recent history Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands experienced armed struggles internally. In both instances, women played their traditional role as peacemakers, bringing parties together to negotiate issues and truce. Women have, however, continually been excluded from formal negotiations to establish ceasefires and terms of peace.

Women and the economy

While many Pacific women are entrepreneurial by necessity and are heavily involved in various ways in micro-enterprises and the informal production of goods for subsistence, in the formal labour force and in business, rural

women have fewer opportunities. Across the region, the public sector is the largest employer of women and women in urban areas are more likely to be in secure paid employment than rural women. Women's economic empowerment is an ongoing area of work in the region and recent efforts to engage rural women more actively in different levels of agricultural and handicraft value chains are showing positive results. The Pacific region sees continuing challenges linked to access to collateral and credit and other financial services, although a number of collaborative development initiatives are improving financial literacy and inclusion.

Women in power and decision making

At all levels and across countries, gender power dynamics disadvantage women as decision makers. Individual relations and competencies temper this generalisation, and there are exceptions, but socio-cultural norms in the Pacific region still see men as the 'natural' spokespeople for families, communities and governments. Women's participation in decision-making is, however, progressing at community levels, in public service and in civil society organisations but, at the national political level, women still hold few seats and temporary special measures are used by only a few countries.

Institutional mechanisms

All Pacific governments have established national machineries to promote gender equality and are making commitments to integrate gender across sectors through institutional mechanisms. These commitments are linked to changes in legislation and policy that require central and line ministries to implement gender responsive development. However, gaps in accountability mechanisms, limited technical capacity to do gender analysis and prepare gender responsive budgets continue to hinder progress. From 2009 to 2015 the Pacific Community, in collaboration with Pacific Island countries, undertook stocktakes of national gender mainstreaming capacity. The findings of each stocktake were used to create benchmark indicators for measuring progress. The stocktakes were also used as the basis for planning national mainstreaming approaches, which are being implemented in a number of countries with technical assistance from SPC's Progressing Gender Equality in the Pacific programme.

Regionally, the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) provides policy guidance and technical assistance to 16 developing member states and territories. The Social Development Program (SDP) of the Pacific Community is the technical lead on gender, and plays a key role in the CROP Gender Working Group, advocating for and advancing gender mainstreaming through the mandates of CROP's eight member agencies.

Human rights of women

With the exception of Tonga, all Pacific Island governments have made commitments to CEDAW. Palau has signed the convention and twelve other states have ratified it and are working to revise discriminatory legislation and promote gender equality. However, limited investment in gender mainstreaming and women's human rights demonstrates a gap between stated and demonstrated political will of leaders. A number of governments have explored or are exploring the establishment of national human rights institutes and the Pacific Community houses the Regional Rights Resource Team, which provides technical assistance on CEDAW implementation across the region. RMI's parliament passed the region's first Gender Equality Act in September 2019.

Women and the media

Women comprise more than 45% of Pacific reporters, but mainstream media coverage of gender issues and of women as role models in leadership, community service and business continues to be limited. The rapidly changing media landscape and widespread use of the internet on mobile phones has both positive and negative effects. Many gender equality civil society groups are using internet-based media to develop alternative narratives that challenge patriarchal social norms and offer young women increased agency. At the same time, online exploitation of women and children, cyber-bullying and sexual harassment are becoming more common.

Women and the environment

Increasing impacts of climate change are being felt across the region and women are becoming highly involved in disaster risk reduction and adaptation initiatives. As climate change emerges as a new area of policy and programming, gender inclusive standards and practices, are supporting women to lead and demonstrate their capabilities to their communities and peers. The climate change crisis is a major concern for women in the Pacific region as it is already threatening livelihoods, homes and citizenship.

The girl child

Due to the fact that Pacific cultures are traditionally hierarchical with youth and femaleness denoting lower status, girls face multiple barriers to equality. They are at high risk of sexual abuse within families and from strangers. In some subregions, girls can be kept out of school to help with heavy household workloads or to protect them from perceived threats at boarding facilities. In other subregions, women and girls are supported to attend school but are concurrently expected to fill traditional family roles as a priority over other life options. A number of civil society organisations are, however, working to give girls options and increase their ability to network, share experiences and advocate for policy changes that will allow them to more fully exercise their rights.



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BACKGROUND

In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women attended by over 17,000 participants from 189 UN member states, unanimously adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPA) as the global agenda to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The BPA blueprint, with its strategic framework and key actions for realising gender equality in twelve critical areas of concern, forms the global framework for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

Progress towards implementing the BPA is reviewed and appraised every five years through national, regional and global processes, with the next review in 2020, a year which will also mark the 25th anniversary of the Declaration and Platform for Action (BPA+25). The 64th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2020 will review and assess the implementation of the BPA and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the United Nations General Assembly prior to the culmination of the review process in a one-day high-level meeting during the United Nations General Assembly in September 2020.

In preparation for the 1995 Beijing conference, delegates from 22 Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) met in Noumea in 1994 and endorsed the collective principles and a plan of action to advance gender equality in the region – The Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (PPA). On International Women’s Day 2019, Pacific women celebrated the 25th anniversary of the PPA. Since 1994, there have been two substantial reviews of the PPA, one in 2004 and the second in 2015. The current version was endorsed by the ministers for women in 2017 as the Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights 2018–2030.¹ Its primary objective is to accelerate the implementation of gender commitments in order to achieve gender equality and the promotion and protection of the human rights of all women and girls. It incorporates regional and international instruments for promoting gender equality, including the 2012 Pacific Leaders’ Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as commitments made by PICTs to progress gender equality.

The PLGED, endorsed by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in 2012, is particularly important. This high-level declaration sets out specific policy actions to progress gender equality “in the areas of gender-responsive government programmes and policies, decision-making, economic empowerment, ending violence against women, and health and education”. Other commitments include national gender policies, the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, the SAMOA Pathway, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Progress towards implementing the PPA is monitored and evaluated at the triennial conference of Pacific women.

The regional BPA+25 review and appraisal of the implementation, summarised in this document, will inform the global BPA+25 review in 2020. It includes an assessment of current challenges affecting the implementation of the BPA, the achievement of gender equality, and the empowerment of women in the Pacific region.

Methodology

The report is a summary of the detailed review of the Beijing Platform for Action that drew from national review reports on BPA+25 and responses to the UN Women surveys provided by 12 PICTs.² Other national reports, including Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) voluntary national review reports, national statistical survey reports and analyses, outcomes documents from regional conferences on gender equality issues, and data from SPC online databases, as well as resolutions and recommendations at the regional level, were also consulted.

1 <https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/wordpresscontent/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PPA-2018-Part-I-EN2.pdf>

2 Beijing+25 reports used as of 1 October 2019: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. In addition, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Nauru, Palau, Tonga and Vanuatu shared their Voluntary National Reports on the Sustainable Development Goals, which include supplementary information on gender issues.

The summary also reiterates some challenges and issues from the Beijing +20 report that remain relevant as areas for continued action and includes some information that is additional to the full report. This added information is intended to clarify some contextual and technical issues on institutional mechanisms for gender equality, the status of legislation supporting gender equality, and country information for countries that did not report to the Beijing +25 process. For both reports, the full report and this summary, supplemental information has been drawn from climate change reporting, monitoring reports on the Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration, and government and development partner websites, as well as from the Pacific Regional Information System (PRISM).

It should be noted that this summary report and the full review are not exhaustive. Many Pacific Island women and men are working at all levels to promote gender equality across the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action. Due to remoteness, lack of access to technology and limited capacity for reporting, not all this positive change has been captured here. Additionally, national policy and reporting systems are not optimised to fully capture and analyse sex-disaggregated data. As a result, some gender issues and outcomes remain invisible in both quantitative and qualitative reporting.

The Pacific region: challenges and progress

The Pacific region includes a myriad of cultures, languages, and ethnic groupings. It is diverse in terms of geography, natural resources, social systems and colonial contact experiences. Each country has also had unique experiences transitioning to political and economic systems that differ from their historical practices. What is common, however, is the prevalence of male dominated systems of decision-making, even in countries with matrilineal systems of lineage and inheritance. This creates a commonality of gender disadvantage across the region, although it may be manifested in diverse ways.

Gender, culture and age are three social organising principles that have intersected over time to entrench gender roles, stereotypes and expectations. Culture is revered in the Pacific and establishes a rich historical heritage kept alive in ceremonies, the arts, and family dynamics. Culture has contributed to social stability and secures access to land for many groups. Culture has also perpetuated harmful discriminatory practices against women and girls. This is fully explored in the final chapter of the full BPA+25 report for the region.

The remoteness and isolation of the region has historically inhibited information sharing and equitable distribution of services. Urban and rural women in the Pacific have different opportunities to access education, employment and support services.³ Women and men in remote and rural areas are more likely to be subject to strict gender roles and divisions of labour and have fewer education and employment choices. In addition, women in rural areas are more vulnerable to poverty than men and have limited access to justice if they are subject to violence, harmful traditional practices and discrimination (RRRT 2013).⁴

Transport infrastructure is expensive and limited, and while communication infrastructure is advancing, many communities and islands still have intermittent access to basic services such as electricity, safe water supplies, sanitation, adequate housing. Mobile phone ownership varies from country to country but has seen steady increases and phones are the main method used to access the internet.

Despite multiple challenges, the past 25 years have seen significant advancements in gender equality policies and legislation in the region. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals as well as regional agreements have established standards and indicators that are facilitating progress.

3 Individual chapters reference available data from surveys and censuses in the region.

4 See also 2016. Government of Australia. Conflict management and access to justice in rural Vanuatu. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/conflict-management-access-justice-rural-vanuatu.pdf>

These indicators and processes have guided integration of gender equality objectives and measurements into a number of regional and national policies and data systems. At the same time, the region is hampered by a shortage of rigorous and accessible development-oriented research on gender and power relations. Good quality, evidence-based research is critical to effective and efficient development planning and implementation of action on critical areas of concern. Collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data is improving but persistent gaps make it difficult to track progress.

National legislation against violence against women has been developed in 13 Pacific Island countries and is pending in Niue.⁵ Numerous countries have also revised discriminatory legislation on citizenship, divorce and marital property and have restructured business regulatory systems to support gender equity and equality across sectors.

Disability is a cross cutting issue in all of the critical areas of concern. Eleven Pacific island countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of for Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and there is increasing attention to gender-differentiated experiences of persons with various types of disabilities.⁶ The full Beijing+25 report for the Pacific region includes an additional chapter on gender and disability issues.

Despite the raft of commitments, progress to achieving gender equality in the region has been slowed by structural and underlying social, cultural and economic barriers. These include: (i) harmful social norms and exclusionary practices; (ii) gender equality not being systematically integrated into legal and policy frameworks; (iii) limited resourcing for addressing gender inequality issues; (iv) limited capacity within governments to develop and implement gender-responsive policies and programmes; and (v) weak leadership in terms of mercurial political will to address gender equality beyond rhetoric – actions do not necessarily follow from words.

Challenges remain in financing and implementing the gender equality commitments that are now on paper. While most countries have institutionalised women's machineries, they are consistently underfunded and generally marginalised from national planning and budgeting processes. At country and regional levels, *stated* political will for gender equality is not adequately *demonstrated*. A continuing lack of accountability mechanisms for gender equality policies means that failure to meet commitments has few consequences for decision-makers.



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5 Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development. Available at: <https://pacificwomen.org/stories-of-change/niues-progress-towards-family-law-legislation/>

6 As of 2018, 11 Pacific Island countries have ratified the CRPD (Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Tuvalu, Vanuatu) : http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/final_sdg_report_2018_print_.pdf

AREAS OF CRITICAL CONCERN

In the Pacific region, the PPA provides ongoing guidance for tailored implementation of the BPA. The PPA provides a structure for regional monitoring of progress, which takes place during the Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, and the associated meeting of Ministers responsible for gender equality. Further, the Triennial Conference outcomes influence priority setting by national governments and civil society organisations, regional organisations and development partners.

Critical area A: Women and poverty

The Pacific Island region has seen minimal progress in reducing women's poverty since the preparation of the Beijing+20 report. Women remain more at risk of hardship than men and they are more likely than men to be engaged in vulnerable employment. Women who experience intimate partner violence – which is high in the Pacific – are often subject to economic deprivation or neglect by their partners, including having limited access to their own and family incomes.

Context and progress

As noted in the Beijing+20 report, women in the Pacific region are over-represented in informal, intermittent home-based income generation, subsistence food production and low-wage and low-skilled employment. As such, they are negatively affected by high food prices, inflation and environmental degradation.

Formal social safety-nets vary from country to country and it can be difficult for rural women and women with disabilities to access the application processes. At the same time, traditional systems of family and clan obligations are eroding due to rural-urban and international migration. This disproportionately increases the risk of economic and social hardship for older women and women with disabilities.

Many of the efforts to alleviate women's poverty in the Pacific region are initiatives funded by multilaterals, donors and non-governmental organisations. Women's savings clubs, financial inclusion initiatives, training programmes and cash transfer pilots are largely delivered with development funding. Some governments are increasingly integrating social protection mechanisms, but the lack of government ownership of the problem of gendered poverty is a persistent challenge in the region.

At the same time, women, especially rural women in Melanesia, play a critical role in keeping their families out of poverty. Their subsistence production of food and household goods such as baskets and mats provides an ongoing safety-net.

Measuring poverty and income disparity

In Pacific countries poverty is difficult to measure for several reasons, including the many ways in which benefits of communally owned land are distributed and the existence of traditional systems of social and family obligation. Poverty measurement at the individual level within households is currently not possible except through specifically designed surveys.

Across the region, poverty is most commonly measured by the number of people living below the national basic needs poverty line (Table 1). This is determined in each country by calculating the cost of a basket of food required to sustain a family of four on a basic diet per week or per month, plus an additional allowance to meet the cost of basic non-food expenditure. The most useful data on poverty and income inequality are obtained

through household income and expenditure surveys (HIES). Unfortunately, the surveys have been irregular, are not conducted in all countries, and do not use standardised formats. This makes regional comparisons difficult.

The Pacific Community's recent development of a standardised HIES instrument and procedures for use by national statistics offices in the region will significantly improve data collection to guide policy development. It will also enable more meaningful tracking of the spread and depth of poverty, and uncover some of its multidimensional aspects. Table 1 shows indicative poverty measurements for 12 countries and New Caledonia during the period 2006 to 2013.

Table 1: Percentage of the total population below the national poverty line and the share of the poorest quintile in national consumption

Country / Territory	Basic needs poverty (%)				Share of poorest quintile in national consumption (%)			
	Pre 2010		Latest		Pre 2010		Latest	
Cook Islands	2006	28.4			2006	9.0	2016	9.8
FSM			2013	41.2			2013	9.3
Fiji	2002–2003	39.8	2008–2009	35.2	2002–2003	5.9	2008–2009	5.4
Kiribati	2006	21.8			2006	7.8		
Nauru	2006	25.1	2013	24.0	2006	6.4	2013	12.2
New Caledonia	2008	17.0						
Niue	2002	13.0			2002	6.6		
Palau	2006	24.9			2006	10.2	2014	4.0
PNG	2009	36.9						
Samoa	2008	26.9	2013	18.8	2008	9.3	2013	9.8
Solomon Islands	2006	22.7	2013	12.7	2006	6.7	2013	4.6
Tonga	2001	16.2	2009	22.5	2001	9.4	2009	10.0
Tuvalu	2004–2005	21.2	2010	26.3	2004–2005	10.2	2010	8.1
Vanuatu	2006	13.0	2010	12.7	2006	7.4	2010	8.3

Source: SPC, Pacific Data Hub, <https://pacificdata.org>, accessed October 2019.

Percentages are rounded and sourced from each country's most recent household income and economic survey, except for Samoa, which is sourced from the Samoa Bureau of Statistics. Data for Cook Islands, Kiribati and Palau are for 2006; Fiji and New Caledonia 2008; PNG and Tonga 2009; Tuvalu and Vanuatu 2010; and FSM, Nauru, Samoa and Solomon Islands 2013.

Employment and unemployment surveys (EUS) are also useful sources of information on poverty in terms of income and earnings, but such surveys are also only done intermittently in some countries. The drawback of both HIES and EUS as measures of poverty is that they stop at the household level and do not disaggregate by the sex or age of household members, although some household surveys give attention to female-headed households with a view to tracking trends and interpreting the feminisation of poverty (SINSO 2015; NRHI 2018; CISO 2018). Their findings are briefly described below.

The Solomon Islands HIES report shows that 90% of households (87% in urban areas and 91% in rural areas) were headed by men, and that the remaining 10% of female-headed households were earning less than the male-headed households, contributing only 8% to the total national household income. The HIES also shows that more men than women (38% compared to 22%) were engaged as employees in both the public and private sectors in urban areas. The same pattern was found in rural areas, where 11% of men, compared with just 4% of women,

were engaged as employees. This may be interpreted as labour market bias in favour of males in both urban and rural areas of the country, but analysis also needs to consider women's multiple roles, including the demands of subsistence food production, household work, and caregiving, that constrain them from seeking employment.

The Cook Islands HIES (2015-2016) shows 18% of female-headed households in Rarotonga fell below the poverty line, compared with 24% of households headed by men. Households headed by women made up 32% of households in the lowest quintile (20%) of household expenditure in Rarotonga.

The Samoa HIES *Samoa Hardship and Poverty Report (2013–2014)* finds that “the gender dimension of poverty in Samoa is... subtle and mild.” The report cites minor differences between female-headed households below the food poverty line (2.9%) and male-headed households (2.8%) both above and below the poverty line. In terms of earnings, however, female-headed households are worse off. They have a lower average weekly salary and wages per capita than do male-headed households. Gender-based disparities are also reported to be significant in higher expenditure deciles, reflecting “the concentration of women in low paid jobs and junior positions”.

In the Pacific region, measurement of income and expenditure is difficult to capture and discuss without in-depth interpretation. This is illustrated by an example from Solomon Islands' HIES, which shows numerous disparities between rural and urban households. Urban households earned on average close to three times the average income of rural households, and twice the median and per capita income, indicating significant inequality in income distribution between urban and rural households. Urban households earned six times more income from wages and salaries than rural households, and household-based businesses in urban areas earned more than four times what rural-based household businesses earned. These figures need to be considered with the understanding that rural households produce much of their own food and goods through subsistence agriculture and fisheries, which has specific impacts on women and men's time and health. Additionally, HIES questionnaires may not fully quantify the economic burden borne by urban households in urban to rural cash remittances and provision of food and board to rural relatives migrating to urban areas to seek work or attend school.

Recently, work has been under way to develop instruments for more gender-sensitive and multidimensional measurements of poverty. The individual deprivation measure explores intra-household inequalities through separate interviews with each adult household member based on questions covering 15 dimensions. Fiji has been one of the pilot countries for this measurement tool and the national report found women have less agency in controlling life decisions:

Looking at the indicator-level analyses of sex by age, and sex by sector, allows us to draw some overall inferences about the gendered dynamics of deprivation in relationships in the sample. In general, regardless of age and location in terms of settlement type, women are more deprived than men in their ability to control major life decisions that affect them, such as whether to leave the house, seek health care, and freely associate with others. Despite this, women perceive personal support from family and friends at similar rates to men, occasionally feeling that they receive higher levels of support (such as older women), and sometimes lower levels of support (such as women in urban settlements) (Fisk and Crawford 2017: 91).

Social protection

Poverty and vulnerability to hardship are strongly interlinked, although in the Pacific region they have been partially offset by systems of traditional obligations among clan groups and extended families. With development, urbanisation and overseas migration, traditional safety-net systems are eroding, while formalised social protection systems are not changing fast enough to support newly vulnerable groups. Policy changes in some countries are leading to gradual improvements but tracking progress is difficult, due to limitations caused by weak sex-disaggregated data collection systems.

Country reports for Beijing+25 highlight examples of social protection programmes to support vulnerable, disadvantaged or marginalised groups within their populations. Some examples are listed below.

- Social protection schemes in Fiji, where women make up a narrow majority of beneficiaries of the Poverty Benefit (55%) and Social Pension (56%) schemes. Fiji also has a successful food voucher programme for rural mothers.
- In Solomon Islands, the establishment of the National Provident Fund youSave programme aims to provide social security through a long-term savings scheme and retirement fund for those working in the informal sector, the majority of whom are women. A support fund for victims, which will be set up under the Solomon Islands Family Protection Act, will also provide material support for victims of domestic violence.
- In Vanuatu, the majority (58%) of the recipients of the Ambae Cash Transfer [disaster] Response were women. Women vendors also dominated (81%) in Oxfam's recent cash transfer pilot to test the delivery of vouchers via mobile phone technology.
- Tuvalu has an expanded financial support scheme for persons with disabilities or their carers, and for the aged, seeing these protections as important in helping "to reduce poverty and hardship, and financially contribute to the burden of care work that is traditionally taken on by women". Tuvalu is also consulting publicly on a social protection bill that will extend coverage to babies, pregnant women, widows and school children.
- Kiribati has, or is introducing, age-specific social protections for men and women over 65 years of age, for children under six years of age with disabilities, and for male and female students identified as underprivileged. The schemes are designed to reduce marginalisation of these groups and, in the case of students, to allow them continued access educational opportunities. Social protections are also being introduced to provide specific allowances for men and women identified as living with disabilities.

Challenges and areas for action

Entrenching adequately funded anti-poverty policies into government planning and budgeting is an ongoing challenge. The 11th, 12th and 13th Pacific Triennial Conferences on Women have called on governments to strengthen social protection measures.

Outstanding work in this area will entail improvements to data collection and analysis systems to track age and gender-differentiated outcomes of social protection measures. In addition, adoption of individual poverty measurement methodologies will facilitate assessments of male and female poverty among different population groupings.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by delegates to the 13th Triennial Conference on Women:

- Strengthen social protection measures to support women's economic security throughout their lives.
- Ensure appropriate social protection measures for poor women and their dependents that provide cash and in-kind transfers, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of marginalised people

Critical area B: Education and training of women

The first Quadrennial Pacific SDG Report (2018)⁷ notes that there is a need to focus on “improving the quality and relevance of education and cognitive learning outcomes, where results such as literacy and numeracy have not made the expected gains for all”. The report also notes the “renewed focus on lifelong learning” but with priority attention on early childhood education and post-secondary education and training, and that “changes in approaches to learning will require new ways of teaching”.

Education and training affect girls’ and women’s life chances and choices. Ensuring gender equality in education and training is a pivotal strategy to support equitable achievement of human rights, enhance national development, reduce poverty and foster economic stability.

Context and progress

Policy and legislative change for gender equality in education

The Pacific Beijing+20 report identified persistent barriers to gender equality in education. These included the lack of gender sensitivity in education policies and legislation, and a clear disconnect between educational achievement and employment opportunities and outcomes.

Countries submitting Beijing+25 reports itemised a number of policy and legislative efforts to promote equitable access and gender-responsive education for male and female students in different life situations. Efforts to link education and training to labour market opportunities, and to address inequities between male and female graduates, are still limited in most countries, but there are some examples of good practice.

A key education objective noted in the Beijing Platform for Action is equal access to education. Pacific governments’ efforts to provide free and compulsory education have contributed to universal access and almost all countries are reporting gender parity in gross enrolments at the primary level. Wide variations in male/female gross enrolment ratios and completion figures across the region at secondary and tertiary level (Table 2) indicate that access is a complex socio-cultural, financial and geographic issue. Gross enrolment is a measure of the number of students attending school but it does not reflect drop-out rates, degrees of absenteeism or completion of a level of schooling. Data on school dropouts at secondary level are inconsistently collected, but they appear to show that girls and boys drop out for different reasons. For example, boys may drop out to take on employment rather than attend upper secondary school, whereas girls may drop out if they become pregnant, or are pressured to take on household or subsistence work for their families, or if there are concerns over their safety at boarding schools. Discriminatory attitudes can influence policies, practices and investments and affect the quality, delivery and uptake of education at each level of the system.



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⁷ <https://www.forumsec.org/sustainable-development/#1516227018956-218d804d-d76a>

Table 2: Key gender and education indicators

Country	Secondary school gross enrolment ratio (total enrolled as a % of official secondary school-age population)			Gender parity index (based on GER)	Female share of tertiary students (% of all bachelor's or master's students)	
	Male	Female	Year and source		% Female	Year and source
Cook Islands	64.0	78.0	2014 EMIS	122	74.4	2012 UNESCO
FSM	80.1	86.7	2005 UNESCO	108	--	--
Fiji	93.6	101.9	2014 EMIS	109	58.6	2014 UNESCO
Kiribati	62.4	81.0	2008 EMIS	130	--	--
Marshall Islands	101.4	104.4	2009 UNESCO	103	56.9	2002 UNESCO
Nauru	56.9	61.5	2014 EMIS	108	--	--
Niue	100.5	101.0	2014 EMIS	100	--	--
Palau	110.5	116.9	2014 EMIS	106	58.2	2013 UNESCO
PNG	24.6	23.6	2014 EMIS	96	--	--
Samoa	70.0	84.0	2015 EMIS	120	39.7	2000 UNESCO
Solomon Islands	48.9	50.6	2014 EMIS	103	--	--
Tonga	100.2	104.1	2013 UNESCO	104	30.9	1999 UNESCO
Tuvalu	67.0	87.0	2015 EMIS	130	--	--
Vanuatu	48.2	52.3	2014 EMIS	109	36.2	2003 UNESCO

Source: ADB, 2016, *Gender statistics: The Pacific and Timor-Leste*.

-- = not available

Data are from the national education management system (EMIS) or the UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, if national sex-disaggregated data were not available from EMIS.

Constraints to access

Adolescent pregnancy is an example of how attitudes and social norms are linked to education policy and access to education. Girls who become pregnant and are expelled from school (or are pulled out or drop out) are more likely to be disadvantaged throughout their lives than those who complete their education. There is a lack of transparency about the existence of educational directives regarding the expulsion of pregnant girls. Anecdotal reporting indicates that attitudes of teachers and school administrators, social stigma and family pressure result in pregnant girls leaving school. There are no similar pressures on the male partners in the pregnancy. Second chance education opportunities that allow students to return to complete the secondary curricula on a part time or intermittent basis are very limited in urban settings and non-existent in rural areas. Policy measures to reduce discrimination against pregnant girls are identified below.

- Samoa has joined Palau and Cook Islands in adopting a public school policy under which girls who become pregnant are no longer expelled but are allowed to continue their schooling, with the school providing support to the student during pregnancy and securing their return to school after childbirth.⁸

⁸ The policy change in Samoa followed advice from its Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development in 2015 as part of its role to protect the interests of children and the rights of women and girls.

- Support for young student mothers in Palau extends to tertiary level; Palau Community College has a day care centre on campus.
- Tuvalu has already changed its policy to allow the return to school of expelled pregnant teenagers after their babies are born.
- The Kiribati Education Act (2014) makes it illegal to expel pregnant students or to prevent young mothers from returning to school.
- Solomon Islands is currently reviewing its 2014 Education Act to address the same issue of re-entry to schools of girls expelled for becoming pregnant. Some schools in the country are reported to be already practising reintegration of pregnant girls. Solomon Islands National University also has a Second Chance Programme for adults and older adolescents who have dropped out of school.

Disability, economic hardship and geographic isolation all constrain children from accessing education. In recent years Pacific Island countries have introduced legislation, policy changes and in some cases subsidies to facilitate universal access.

Tuvalu's National Policy for Persons with Disability aims to improve access to education for women and girls living with disabilities.

Palau has an equal opportunity policy that includes access to education for persons with disability. In addition, the adult high school programmes offer out-of-school adolescents aged 18 and above the opportunity to complete their education.

In Fiji, both primary and secondary school education up to Form 7 is fee free. The government gives per capita grants to schools, with specific contributions to lower the cost of bus and boat fares, textbooks and other needs.

In 2009, Samoa made education compulsory, including early childhood education. In 2010, the government introduced free education at primary level, guaranteeing access to primary schooling for disadvantaged children. The scheme has now been extended to secondary schools.

Improvements in curricula and teacher training

Curricula revision, teacher training and professional development are areas where countries have struggled to make improvements. Budget shortfalls, staff shortages and technical capacity constraints mean changes to curricula can be slow. Population growth, teacher training time frames and filling teaching positions in remote areas can result in schools being staffed by teachers without formal qualifications. Training for public school teachers to work with children with disabilities is almost non-existent in the Pacific region and results in the isolation of disabled children in special schools that exist only in urban areas. Gender sensitising of curricula and teachers is an additional layer of effort that requires more funding and commitment, but there are some positive changes in the region.

- The elementary curriculum in Republic of the Marshall Islands is being reviewed, with assistance from SPC's Regional Rights Resource Team, with a view to including social citizenship values and an understanding of human rights obligations, gender equality, social inclusion, and nuclear weapons issues. The aim is to "connect gender and social inclusion, rights and responsibilities to Marshallese cultural values and practices in the school curriculum". The project will include training for teachers and will support schools in adopting policies against sexual harassment and bullying. The project document notes:

This curriculum initiative is aimed at creating a generation of 'social citizens'... able to claim their rights and also fulfill their responsibilities to other citizens and to the wider community. Building social citizens through formal education means instilling students with values of respect, dignity, care, consent, and responsible participation in the community. *The goal of this project is to address root causes of gender inequality and gender-based violence through formal education.*

- Kiribati is introducing similar curriculum revisions to integrate respectful relationships and positive gender norms into curricula for multiple grade levels. The aim is to promote transformational and generational changes that will enable children and young adults to internalise non-discrimination as a human right and end violence against women and girls.
- In Fiji, curriculum reform is focused on making education more relevant to the changing labour market and increasing returns from investment in primary, secondary and tertiary education. The introduction of the Healthy Living curriculum for primary schools and the Family Life curriculum for secondary schools has enabled the incorporation of gender-based violence into primary and secondary school programmes sensitively and appropriately. Secondary coverage includes gender-based violence and abuse, self-esteem, respect for others and themselves, preventive methods and actions, what to do if abused, who to trust, and post traumatic syndrome treatment.

Improving women's access to training

Fiji has been promoting women's enrolment in training courses for trades that have traditionally been male dominated. Since 2015, the government-run Technical College of Fiji has seen more women than men enrolling in agriculture, and women have also enrolled in construction and engineering programmes. Although there is a growing interest in technical, vocational education and training (TVET) as a whole and the numbers of women accessing TVET training in male-dominated areas has increased, the overall enrolment of women in technical and vocational colleges is only 34%. Of those women who do enrol, 60% stay on to complete their programmes.

In Tuvalu, as a step towards achieving gender balance and extending equal opportunities to women and girls, young women are increasingly being offered training and employment in non-traditional fields. In the last five years, young women have begun enrolling in maritime training, and the number of women entering police training has increased.

Challenges and areas for action

The above sections highlight progress on challenging issues but there are still problematic issues where more cross-sector approaches are needed.

Disabled children have fewer chances to access good quality education because school infrastructure is not always tailored to their needs and teachers lack appropriate training. Intellectually disabled children can be stigmatised and abused and families may choose to keep them at home where they are more protected but also more isolated.

In Nauru, despite education being made free and compulsory for all Nauruan children aged five to 18 years and the introduction of other incentives, including free lunches, transport and an attendance allowance of \$5 a day, there are ongoing problems with truancy, retention and pass rates. The average attendance rate across the education system in 2016 was 54%; in the following two years it fell to 44% in each year.

Children living in remote and rugged areas of Melanesia may be kept out of school or drop out due to the distances they must travel to reach a school and safety concerns created by floods and cyclones that damage roads and footpaths through challenging terrain. In addition, sexual violence against girls is an ongoing issue. Family concern that girls may be subjected to sexual violence from teachers, classmates or during their journeys to and from school, or when they attend boarding school have been reported in Papua New Guinea.⁹

9 2019. The Borgen Project website. Improving Girls Access to Education in Papua New Guinea. <https://borgenproject.org/improving-girls-education-in-papua-new-guinea/>

Recommendations

The 13th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women recognised that Pacific countries face cross-sector challenges to ensure gender equality in education. Delegates called on PICTs to act in multiple areas and continue to invest in, and share information about, good practices and positive change.

1. Review early childhood, primary and secondary education curricula, teacher education and student assessment to promote and guarantee gender equality and human rights and to challenge gender stereotyping and similar harmful norms.
2. Promote lifelong learning for women of all diversities and encourage and support young women to develop skills in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and economics, and gain qualifications that enhance their employment prospects.
3. Improve the educational environment for technical and vocational education and training to attract women, young women and girls into technical fields and apprenticeships, and adopt measures to promote and guarantee that all places of learning and work are safe for women, young women and girls of all diversities.
4. Increase women's access to ICT and digital services, including for women with disabilities and women living in remote areas.
5. Support government and regional organisations to undertake and implement gender-responsive budgeting.
6. Provide incentives for the private, not-for-profit and state sectors to train and employ women.
7. Support family life education that promotes gender equality, human rights, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).



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Critical area C: Women and health

Decades of reporting on Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals has shown improvements in most areas of maternal and child health. Sexual and reproductive health and non-communicable diseases (NCDs), however, continue to be areas of intense concern. The sexual and reproductive health of women with disabilities is often neglected. Low rates of contraceptive use, increases in sexually transmitted infections, and prevalence of sexual violence all contribute to poor sexual and reproductive health. Expectations that women are the main household caregivers for children and family members disabled by NCDs or other illness create overwork and put stress on their mental health. When combined with high levels of obesity among women themselves across the Pacific and associated high risk NCD status, their health is at high risk. Mental health and depression are largely unmeasured but surveys on violence against women indicate that women who experience violence are often depressed and may consider suicide.¹⁰ Limited attention to mental health and stigma associated with mental illness can prevent women from reporting problems.

Context and progress

Health policy and service delivery

A combination of improved health system policies, collaboration with donors and increased training of front-line health service providers have contributed to better maternal health across the Pacific. However, data collection on maternal deaths in remote areas and from home births remains problematic, as interpretation of causal factors can be difficult.

In other areas, in most Pacific countries, both health financing approaches and training of health workers are regularly reviewed. This is at least partially because the World Health Organization and UNFPA have built strong partnerships with national governments and with technical health agencies at the regional level. At the same time, there are ongoing challenges to mainstreaming gender sensitivity into health worker training and performance monitoring systems. Similarly, rigorous approaches to ensure primary care is holistic and wellness-oriented are limited. Positive changes are, however, being reported at the national level. Examples are listed below.

- Solomon Islands has a National Health Strategy 2016–2020, a National Reproductive and Child Health Strategic Plan 2016–2020, and a National Population Policy 2017–2026.
- Palau's national health policy mandates universal access to good quality health services for women and girls (15–18 years). Free or minimal cost health services for women and girls in Palau include primary health care, maternal health (ante- and post-natal), mental health, food security and nutrition, disability, sexual and reproductive health, treatment and rehabilitation for substance abuse, geriatric health, and HIV and STIs. Health workers delivering these services, most of whom are women, have received gender training. Palau also provides a medical programme for new mothers, regular medical checks for women and children in communities and schools, and discounts for medicine.
- RMI is actively improving reproductive health services with a view to providing good quality SRHR services in maternal and neonatal health, family planning, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, control of STIs/HIV and integration with other sexual and reproductive health programmes.
- Fiji's decentralised health system aims to improve doctor to patient ratios and increase funding for essential drugs. Improvements to maternal health care facilities and services include a low risk maternity unit at Makoi in the Central Division. It is expected to manage 800 births a year and ease demand on the main referral hospital in the capital, Suva. New sub-divisional hospitals and health centres will help

¹⁰ WHO methodology studies on violence against women in the Pacific have found that victims are more likely to think about and attempt suicide than women who have not experienced violence. See for example: <https://pacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/SolomonIslandsFamilyHealthandSafetyStudy.pdf> and <http://www.fijiwomen.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/National-Survey-Summary.pdf>

alleviate service shortages in rural areas. Doctors in Fiji are trained to ensure that women terminating a pregnancy give informed consent in accordance with conditions in the *Crimes Decree 2009* and are adequately counselled on the choices they make.

- Policy gaps still exist. An under-reported health concern in the region is drug use. In the absence of coordinated social, health and law enforcement policies, the spread of hard drug use is becoming a serious health issue. While young men are the most obvious users, associated risks of increasing violence and crime in the region have negative implications for women.
- Similarly, gaps in mental health policies and services mean that health systems struggle to address complex psychological health problems associated with urban poverty, homelessness and drug use. Policies and services to address rising rates of suicide among young adults and women who are victims of intimate partner violence remain inadequate. In Kiribati, the government is attempting to address mental health issues in the correctional system with a focus on women inmates with disabilities. Efforts include training and placement of a nurse with mental health experience in the prison system.

Improving sexual and reproductive health outcomes for women of all ages

Pacific Island states have ongoing commitments to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Plan of Action, especially on sexual and reproductive health and rights, improving reproductive health services, making pregnancy safe, and adopting rights-based approaches to family planning. Improvements have been slow in some areas. Contraceptive prevalence rates remain as low as 33% in some countries (SPC 2011:10). In 2018, UNFPA began a regional programme aimed at reducing unmet need for family planning in the region to zero by 2020.¹¹

In the Pacific region, SRHR is a culturally sensitive issue and young people have restricted access to family planning coverage. Some countries still require adolescents to have parental consent for prescription contraceptives and in other countries the lack of confidentiality may inhibit them from seeking contraception.

High teenage pregnancy rates in some sub-regions are reported to be increasing and sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates among all age groups remain high. HIV/AIDS rates vary between countries but are high in Papua New Guinea. Confidentiality is a concern for women in small communities if they have STIs, are victims of violence from an intimate partner, have been sexually assaulted or are seeking contraception. Women, and especially young unmarried women, report being stigmatised by health workers and note that health clinics in small communities offer little in the way of client privacy.



¹¹ The programme is running in Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/transformative-agenda-women-adolescents-youth-pacific.pdf>

Births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years

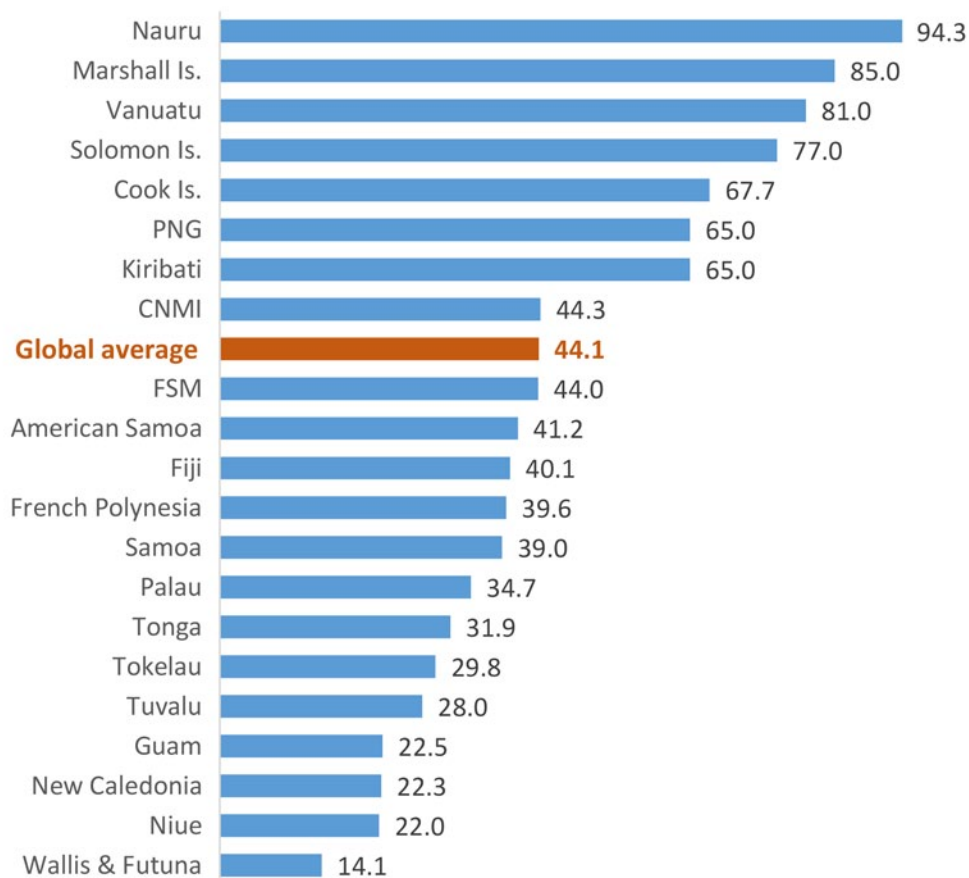


Figure 1: Adolescent pregnancies in Pacific Island countries and territories

Source: SPC (Most recent census, demographic and health survey, and vital statistics reports)

Across the region, a number of NGOs also support SRHR services, including rural outreach through mobile clinics.¹² Services include public information sessions on SRHR issues and child wellness clinics. The generalised nature of services, and the fact that service providers do not remain in the communities, creates a layer of increased confidentiality for clients. In Fiji, NGOs complement and fill gaps in government services through provision of post-rape care, safe abortion, and VAWG (violence against women and girls) counselling.

Non-communicable diseases

In the last several decades, NCDs have been increasing rapidly. They now pose the biggest threat to women's health in the region. Diabetes and obesity-related disability and heart disease are epidemic and affect families, economies and health systems. They impose an additional burden on women, to whom the work of caring for others afflicted by NCDs usually falls. The incidence of breast and cervical cancers is especially high, and screening technologies are expensive and available only in a limited number of tertiary health facilities, with associated long wait times and expense. The prevalence of diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases, together with obesity and cancer, reflect changes in lifestyle and eating habits. Diets are increasingly high in simple carbohydrates, sugar, salt, meat and inferior food imports, while consumption of fresh vegetables and fruits is limited.

¹² Service providers include the International Planned Parenthood Federation, national affiliates and Medical Services Pacific (Fiji).



Figure 2: Percentage of overweight and obese men and women
 Source: Most recent WHO STEP surveys or national health agency survey data

National reports for Beijing +25 include a number of policy and program initiatives to combat NCDs:

- In Palau, under its 2015 Strategic Plan of Action to combat NCDs, cost-effective interventions are being made to promote healthy lifestyles, early detection and treatment of metabolic risk factors (tobacco, alcohol, poor diet and lack of physical exercise), community outreach, and reliable data collection. Palau has also introduced a Wellness Worksite Program to combat NCDs and National Health Insurance coverage for annual health check-ups.
- RMI reports epidemic levels of NCDs and is specifically addressing cervical cancer, the most common cause of female cancer deaths, through a National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program that includes a mobile health team for outer islands. The programme supports a cancer registry, support groups, and prevention programming, which includes vaccinating all children against the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).
- In Fiji, where cervical cancer is also the most common form of female cancer mortality, HPV vaccination of girls aged 11–13 is now part of the school health programme. Fiji also offers HIV services free of charge and antiretroviral treatment is available free for life.
- To reduce NCDs in Samoa, the Ministry of Health has adapted the WHO Protocol on Essential Non-communicable Disease Interventions. They run a primary care programme that is delivered through village women’s committees trained by the Ministry of Health. Committees do NCD screening and make referrals to district hospitals for early intervention. The ministry also conducts village awareness programmes with church youth groups that incorporate family planning and safe sex practices.

Challenges and areas for action

Many countries in the Pacific region lack technical capacity to support comprehensive collection and analysis of health data. Data collection systems may be on paper in rural clinic and computerised at central levels but backlogs of data entry and problems with cleaning data can inhibit clear analyses, which are useful for informing policy and monitoring trends (WHO 2016).

Shortfalls in staffing and limited funding to support training on gender responsive policy analysis and service provision affect the quality of both primary and complex care. In a number of countries, staffing attrition and inconsistent supplies of medicine at rural and district health centres force patients to seek care in urban locations. This puts a particular burden on women who have caregiving responsibilities and may not have time or finances to travel. This is exacerbated where front-line health care workers lack sensitivity to women's needs or do not adhere to confidentiality protocols. Women can then be inhibited from seeking care until their health issues become high risk.

Provision of gender-responsive health care requires a multi-entry point approach that considers socio-cultural and economic barriers, including the fact that many women are subjected to controlling behaviour of spouses and do not have the freedom to make their own health care decisions.¹³

Recommendations

The 13th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women made the following recommendations on health.

That governments adopt, review and implement legislative measures to:

- ensure that access to SRHR is available to all people, with increased support and protection for girls and young women, including enhancing access to education and appropriate resourcing, human and financial; and.
- increase financing and sustained investment to provide affordable, high-quality and accessible care services, such as child care, elder care, mental health care and disability care.

Critical area D: Violence against women

Violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive manifestations of gender inequality in the Pacific region. It reflects attitudes about male privilege, the lower status of women in social systems, and the related unequal power dynamics at play within families and communities. The most widespread form of violence against women relates to intimate partner violence and/or domestic violence. Physical and sexual violence against women and girls perpetrated by strangers is also reported at levels higher than world averages.¹⁴ Violence against women and girls with disabilities is also reported to be high (UNFPA 2012).

Violence and discrimination commonly experienced by LGBTIQ persons have tended, until recently, to largely remain under the radar, and the focus on high levels of intimate partner violence may have left other forms of family violence less examined. The submission made to the Constitutional Review Commission in Fiji in 2012 and recent publication of the results of research on the lifetime experiences of human rights violations by LBT persons (DIVA for Equality (2019) has clarified formerly hidden or ignored dimensions of violence that are counter to Fiji's constitutional protection for all persons from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

¹³ Demographic and health surveys and surveys on violence against women have identified controlling behaviour of spouses as a notable constraint to women accessing health care.

¹⁴ Links to multiple studies on violence against women in the Pacific can be found on the website of the Australian government programme Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development. <https://pacificwomen.org/our-work/focus-areas/ending-violence-against-women/>

Context and progress

Data and Information

Over the past 12 years governments, the Pacific Community, civil society groups and development partners have supported surveys on violence against women to establish baseline measures on types of violence, incidence and effects on women. These surveys did not, however, capture information on sexual harassment or cyber violence and online stalking.

While almost every Pacific country has prevalence indicators from baseline surveys, they are dated and need to be revised. Unfortunately, financing for updates has not materialised, with discussion about whether the investment in the data collection is warranted, given that these funds could be used to provide services for survivors. Global estimates published by WHO indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime¹⁵; with rates in the Pacific region much higher. Figure 3 highlights data from violence against women surveys done in Pacific countries using the World Health Organization methodology, indicating that the prevalence of gender-based violence in the Pacific region is above the global average of 35%, with the exception of Palau at 25%, and with recent estimates for Samoa at 86% (NRHI 2018).

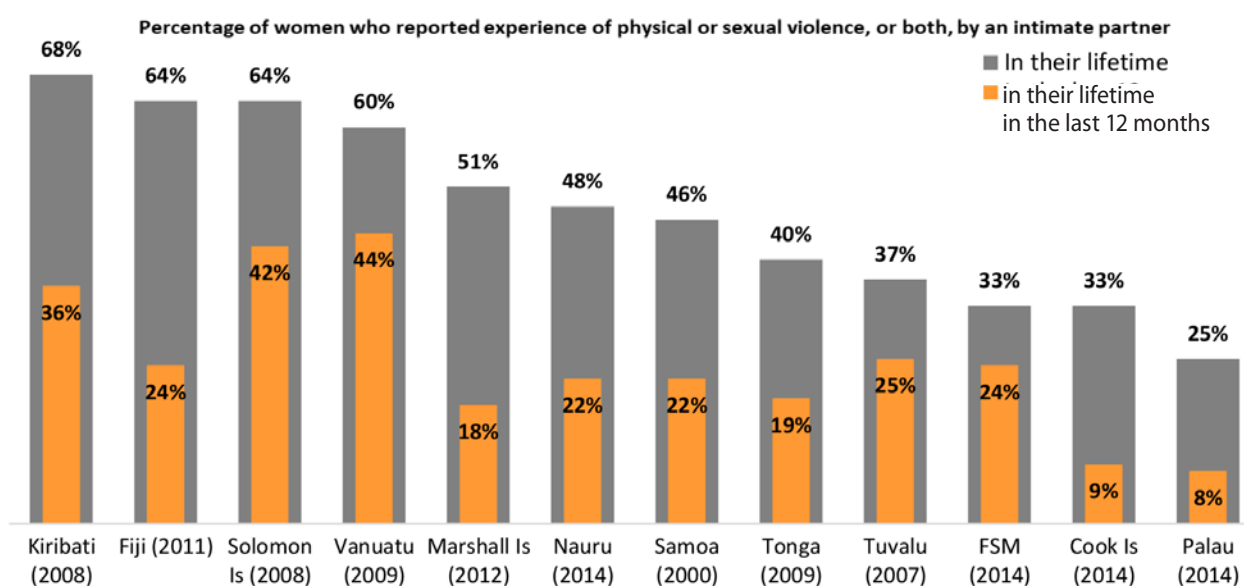


Figure 3: Women’s experience with or physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner

Source: UNFPA

Other forms of violence include brutal public torture and execution of women accused of sorcery in Papua New Guinea. Men have also been targeted but a 2018 study by Oxfam and Queensland University of Technology (cited in Davidson 2018) reported 232 sorcery violence incidents, in which 56% of the victims were women, one third of whom said they had “some kind of disability”. The perpetrators were predominantly men, 89%.

15 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

Some follow-up work has been done to advance understanding about how gender-based violence violates the human rights of women, children and individuals with diverse sexual orientations. In 2016, a national public inquiry into family violence by Samoa's National Human Rights Institute was begun. It was the first such inquiry ever carried out by a Pacific Island nation. The 2018 report, *Let the TRUTH be Out and RIGHT be Done*, reported high levels of seemingly normalised intra-family violence, including against children, wives who are from outside the village (*nofotane*), sexually diverse individuals and between male family members. The inquiry uncovered aspects of family violence, "underlying misconceptions related to the term human rights" and the need for "dialogue at all levels on the status of women and inequities present in the current way of life".¹⁶ Samoa has called for "proactive leadership by village councils, church leaders and government" (NHRI 2018) to address the problem of violence in a holistic way and try to end it, including by drawing on interlinked cultural values, human rights and Christianity.

Building on legislative and policy frameworks

Governments and development partners recognise that ending violence against women requires changing social norms and entrenched gender power dynamics. These changes take time, integrated and well-funded initiatives, and continued advocacy from both male and female leaders in communities, churches and governments. Governments acknowledge that violence against women is a barrier to development and imposes significant direct and indirect costs on countries. The regional Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration calls on member governments to work in two main areas to: (i) implement a package of essential services and enact and implement legislation regarding sexual and gender-based violence; and (ii) impose appropriate penalties for perpetrators of violence.

All countries now have either legislation or pending family law bills that can provide protection for women from gender-based violence. Under most laws, violence against women is criminalised. In some cases, laws also cover child protection and sexual violence. Marital rape is now recognised as a crime in all countries,¹⁷ but implementation of legislation remains limited and decisions about how appropriate penalties are remains debatable.

Sector policies in a number of countries create a framework to provide protection against harassment, coercion, bullying and abuse in education, public sector employment, policing and health care. Temporary social protections are offered in some countries by governments, civil society organisations or both.

Services for survivors

Services for survivors of violence vary from urban to rural areas and from country to country. Rural women are much less likely to have easily accessible health and protection services and, in many cases, economic controls imposed by abusive partners prohibit them from traveling to seek help. Services for survivors are generally funded by development partners and delivered through specialised non-governmental organisations. These organisations provide both services and advocacy. Women are supported to seek medical care, find safe shelter and counselling, and – if they choose to report – service providers can assist with visits to the police, courts and protection order applications.

In line with directives from the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, countries are developing essential services packages and delivery protocols designed to provide consistent approaches to ensuring that survivors are treated fairly and informed of all options available to them.

¹⁶ Samoa National Report for Beijing+25.

¹⁷ 2018 draft. Government of Australia. Legislative barriers to gender equality in Pacific Island countries.

Access to justice is also very challenging for rural women, as many issues are still first brought forward to church leaders or traditional decision-making bodies that are not required to follow legal, policy or good practice precedents. Access to justice is also difficult for urban women, as negotiating legal systems can be costly and complex (RRRT 2013; Government of Australia 2016).

The number of cross-sector interventions to end violence against women is increasing. In sectors such as environmental protection, fisheries, and rural development, some development partners are integrating gender awareness into their programmes, along with guidelines on zero tolerance for violence against women.

Attitudes, stigma and pace of change reflect persistent normalisation of violence against women

Although positive changes have been made in law and policy, and despite the fact that organisations providing services to survivors of violence receive ongoing donor funds, women are still hesitant to report violence against them. This reluctance indicates a high level of stigma against women who want to exercise their rights to a peaceful and safe life. Data on reporting rates show that many women never tell anyone they have been victimised. When women do report, they most often turn to family or friends. In Marshall Islands, when women did report violence, “it was because they were severely injured, their life had been threatened or they could not endure the violence any longer”.¹⁸

Demographic and health surveys done in the Pacific region ask questions about if and when male and female respondents feel violence is justified. A significant percentage of both men and women were reported to have agreed that violence is justified for some perceived transgressions, signalling how much more re-socialisation work is needed.

Overcoming the persistence of violence against women requires understanding that attitudes may also be ingrained in the value systems of senior decision-makers in law courts, governments, the police and among front-line health care providers. The pervasive normalisation of violence contributes to low prioritisation of funding and limited implementation of violence against women programmes within and by governments.

Ongoing efforts to eliminate violence against women

In late 2018, development partners announced a new five-year regional partnership to end sexual and gender-based violence. The €19.5 m Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls (2018–2022) will strengthen partnerships among development partners and governments to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls, and increase the quality of services to survivors of violence.¹⁹

Multilateral development banks are also working with the private sector to address gender-based violence, clarifying hidden costs of violence and its effects on both workers and profits (IFC 2019).

Challenges and areas for action

Challenges linked to ending violence against women in the Pacific region are daunting, as social dynamics, gender power relations, and attitudes still perpetuate normalisation of violence against women. While funding from development partners is increasing, government ownership of women’s rights as a development issue worthy of adequate core financing has not materialised.

18 Results of 2015 Survey on violence against women by Women United Together Marshall Islands, cited in RMI national report for Beijing+25

19 Pacific Islands Forum, <https://www.forumsec.org/reference-group-on-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-welcomes-gender-declaration-2/>. UN Women <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/fiji/ending-violence-against-women/pacific-partnership>

In addition, regular monitoring of prevalence rates to assess effectiveness of initiatives is close to non-existent. This makes it very difficult to understand what works and what does not work in such a diverse region. Accurately measuring violence against women and integrating analysis of data into policy and programming cycles is a critical and outstanding area for further action.

Recommendations

Delegates at the 13th Triennial Women's Conference made the following recommendations on violence against women.

- Build effective partnerships among academics, governments, the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) agencies, development partners and the private sector to conduct studies, gender analysis and participatory research to generate knowledge on... causes and social and economic impacts of gender-based violence, and strategic approaches to address harmful social norms.
- Governments to adopt, review and implement legislative measures to address all forms of sexual and gender-based violence in all areas of life.
- Public and private sectors to improve working conditions for women by supporting enterprises to introduce and strengthen violence and harassment policies and conduct gender audits to identify measures to ensure gender equality at all levels, establish respectful and safe workplace environments for women and men, and enable reconciliation of work and family responsibilities.
- Develop and strengthen partnerships between women and men, and among government institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs), faith-based organisations, unions and the private sector to:
 - establish high-level corporate leadership of gender equality to advance policies for addressing gender-based violence, discrimination and sexual harassment, and promote the appointment of women to leadership positions;
 - support the initiatives of CSOs to challenge harmful gender norms, gender-based violence and discriminatory practices, and to promote equality and the human rights of women and girls of all diversities; and
 - PICTs, CROP agencies and development partners to establish or support the implementation of and reporting on, existing commitments, with accountability mechanisms that demonstrate development and implementation of legislative measures, policies and programmes to eliminate gender-based discrimination, and violence and harmful gender norms in the workplace.

Critical area E: Women in armed conflict

There are currently no ongoing organised armed conflicts in Pacific Island countries, although there are epidemic levels of violence involving weapons in Papua New Guinea. The Pacific region retains memories and scars from the second world war and has outstanding reconciliation issues from more recent conflicts in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

Context and progress

In recent history, Pacific island countries have seen limited armed conflict but, as documented in the Pacific Beijing+20 report, when conflict has broken out internally, women have played key informal roles to end it and secure peace. To date, formal peace talks in the region have consistently excluded women (Bhagwan Rolls 2016). Pacific societies have longstanding cultural practices of resolving disagreements and conflicts through dialogue, as well as systems of restorative justice, and women are often traditionally actively involved in peacemaking.

In the post-independence period, the region has experienced two domestic armed conflicts. The longest was the ten-year civil war on the island of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea (1989–1997) which resulted in almost 15,000 fatalities. In Solomon Islands, inter-ethnic tensions escalated from December 1998 to outbreaks of open conflict, causing the loss of 50 lives. In both conflicts, women were subjected to sexual violence, with many raped at gunpoint by combatants on both sides.

Continuing struggles for independence in the region have been marked by periods of violence or ongoing armed conflict. The last incidents of armed resistance to French rule in New Caledonia took place in 1988/1989, but the demand for sovereignty remains strong in both New Caledonia and French Polynesia, and both territories are now on the UN Decolonisation Committee list.

A number of Pacific Island countries submitting national reports identified ongoing initiatives to promote peace and security that align with Beijing Platform for Action objectives.

Peacemaking, crime prevention and arms control

Few Pacific states have a military or armed police force. The policy underpinnings of this are articulated in Samoa's Beijing+25 report. "Respect for the rule of law has been 'an integral part of Samoa's 55-year journey as an independent nation'. Peace and security are maintained by 'cultural institutions and the traditional chiefly system' and constitute a core part of Samoa's village governance structure, in which women's committees play an important role".²⁰

There are longstanding traditions of women playing peacemaking roles. RMI's report for Beijing+25 notes that in traditional Marshallese society, women are integral to decision-making and peacekeeping²¹. The traditional role played by mothers and sisters in peacemaking is also known in Fijian society. Similarly, in Solomon Islands, a number of cultural groups provide the means for women to intervene in conflicts in order to resolve them.

Four Pacific Island states, Cook Islands, Palau, Samoa and Vanuatu, have ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017). The treaty offers the possibility of some degree of nuclear justice to Pacific Islanders, who continue to suffer ongoing intergenerational health and environmental effects of the nuclear tests perpetrated on them by colonial powers, and the danger of nuclear waste buried on their islands.

²⁰ Samoa national report for Beijing+25

²¹ RMI national report for Beijing+25

Samoa has joined global efforts to reduce the possibilities for armed conflict by ratifying the Arms Trade Treaty in 2014 and submitting a comprehensive report on its compliance with the UN Programme of Action Addressing the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in 2016. It also ratified the Biological Weapons Convention in 2017.

Eleven Pacific Island states have become States Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC).²² Fiji, Kiribati, FSM, Nauru and Palau have also ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing UNTOC. Four Pacific Islands states have become States Parties to the second protocol under UNTOC against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air²³ and three have ratified UNTOC's third Protocol against Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, the Parts and Components and Ammunition.²⁴

Participation of women in peacekeeping and security services

In 2007, Cook Islands withdrew its reservation on Article 11 (2) (b) of CEDAW, regarding women's recruitment into or service in the armed forces and law enforcement agencies "in situations involving violence or threats of violence". Cook Islands and Tuvalu sent small numbers of women police and peacekeepers to Solomon Islands in the 1998–2005 period.

Fiji currently has an estimated 100 female soldiers, including officers deployed in peacekeeping missions abroad. Fiji reported on appointments of women to senior military leadership positions within the Republic of Fiji Military Forces as indicative of Fiji's commitment to gender equality. Fiji also aims to double the number of women within the military by 2020.²⁵

Women, peace and security action plans

In October 2012, the Pacific Islands Forum adopted a Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012–2015). The action plan was developed by the Working Group for Women, Peace and Security. It provides a framework to support regional and national efforts to: (i) utilise and enhance women's capabilities as peace builders; (ii) increase the visibility and active participation of women in conflict prevention and peace-building activities; and (iii) ensure necessary frameworks of protection for women and girls during humanitarian crises and transitional and post-conflict situations.²⁶ The first two elements of the plan could potentially produce a sea change in security protocols, with the inclusion of women in formal conflict prevention, management, and post-conflict recovery efforts, while at the same time transforming how women are perceived – no longer simply as victims, but as effective agents of transformative change.

A number of countries subsequently adopted national action plans on women, peace and security. Linked to UN Security Council Resolution 1325, national action plans prioritise four outcomes, including women's participation, representation and decision-making in peace and security; women's human rights; and ending sexual and gender-based violence during conflicts.

22 Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, RMI, FSM, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/signatures.html>

23 Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru and Palau.

24 Fiji, Nauru and Palau.

25 Maggie Boyle (2019) RFMF to increase women recruits. FBC News. Available at: <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/rmf-to-increase-women-recruits/>

26 <https://www.forumsec.org/forum-chair-launch-regional-action-plan-on-women-peace-security/>

Challenges and areas for action

In Papua New Guinea a large number of weapons circulate in the general population. Increasing social instability and high levels of normalised armed violence make arms control a priority. Communities, whose land is given over to large-scale natural resource extraction, often experience fighting and gun violence related to jurisdictional disputes and tribal factionalism tied to royalty distribution. Violence against women and rape, as retribution between groups, is also common. Following an uncommonly brutal massacre of women and children in Hela province, humanitarian and community groups have flagged the high risks of further internal conflict. They report “the influx of high-powered weapons and an insufficient police force have emboldened tribal violence in Papua New Guinea’s Highlands” (Srinivasan et al. 2019).

In Solomon Islands, the Women Peace and Security National Action Plan 2017–2022 calls for stronger attention and commitment by Solomon Islands to recovery, rehabilitation and reconciliation efforts that respond to the needs of women and girls.

Nauru and Papua New Guinea have had the challenging experience of detaining large numbers of asylum seekers awaiting processing of their applications for refugee status, and governments have come under the spotlight for alleged breaches of human rights. In 2017 the CEDAW committee’s concluding comments to Nauru expressed concern about reports that refugee and asylum-seeking girls are subject to harassment, bullying and violence, causing them to drop out of school.²⁷ The committee called on Nauru to train law enforcement officers, including the police and the judiciary, as well as health service providers and social workers, to ensure that they are able to respond adequately to the needs of detained refugee and asylum-seeking women.

Recommendation

Noting the (then) forthcoming Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the 13th Triennial Conference of Women delegates called specifically for “the development and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programs, where appropriate, to address the inter-generational effects of nuclear testing, including on women’s health and other areas”.

Critical area F: Women and the economy

Women’s economic empowerment in the Pacific region is challenging for multiple reasons, including the fact that land and resources are clan owned and clan or tribal decision-making structures are male dominated. This is true even in matrilineal areas, where inheritance and lineage go through the female line. Lack of access to resources, in turn, has a negative influence on women’s access to collateral and credit.

Pacific Island Forum leaders and officials have recognised women’s unequal economic status in the region. The Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration highlights key areas where work is needed. Monitoring of progress on gender and economic issues is integrated into the work of the Forum Economic Ministers and Officials annual meetings.

Context and progress

The Pacific region has a limited number of formal sector jobs, most of which are in the public service. Women’s participation in the labour force varies from country to country. Employed women are still subject to entrenched

²⁷ Concluding observations on the combined initial and second periodic reports of Nauru.

social hierarchies that make them more likely to be discriminated against during hiring and promotion processes. Even though gender parity has been achieved in higher education, this has not translated into an increased share of female employment. In the informal sector, women have few protections from abuse and unfair treatment. Women outnumber men in most areas classified as vulnerable employment.

General constraints to business development in the region are barriers to both women and men, especially in rural areas and outer islands. Small markets, high transport costs, weak understanding of value-chain development, and convoluted, time-consuming regulatory procedures all inhibit small enterprise development and can intimidate women considering entering business. Despite the barriers, many rural and urban women in the region are entrepreneurial. Their initiatives range from formal established businesses to intermittent informal work at the micro level, which generates income for specific needs, such as school-related expenses, contributions to funerals and weddings, and church and community events.

Legislation, policy and development interventions

Governments and development partners are working together with civil society organisations to foster women's economic empowerment. To date, some development programmes that support rural women to engage in business have not been particularly sustainable. They provide training and/or links and then end with little in the way of tangible results. Examples of good practice²⁸ highlight NGOs that work with communities and families to promote and support women producers in the cultural or handicraft industry, as well as in food production and processing. NGOs provide ongoing technical assistance with value-chain development, quality control, accumulation of products, and domestic and export marketing.

Establishment of support structures for existing women business operators in urban areas has had varied success, depending on the models and individuals involved. In Solomon Islands the Chamber of Commerce is linked to the Women in Business Association and provides enhanced networks and services.

Considerable effort has been made to reform legislation and streamline business regulations in support of small business development in the region. This has in some cases included removing gender discriminatory clauses from marital property, citizenship and inheritance laws, and divorce law. Changes to regulations and licensing requirements have included removing requirements for husbands to sign their wife's business registration documents and the introduction of online – and in some cases sex-disaggregated – registration and licensing processes.

Pay equity, or equal pay for work of equal value, is still an aspiration for women in Pacific Island countries. Even when countries introduce the concept, discretionary decisions about women's qualifications and experience often result in their assignment to pay bands lower than their male counterparts.

Gender responsive employment policies that support maternity and parental leave, promote women in leadership, subsidise childcare, enhance job security, eliminate harassment, and provide support to women employees who are victims of violence is an emerging policy area in the Pacific region. Public Service Commissions across the region have generally addressed maternity leave and, in some cases, allowed women time to breastfeed infants at work. In the private sector, the International Finance Corporation is introducing pilot programmes in Fiji and Solomon Islands, aiming to clarify through business case development, that employers will profit from a stabilised, protected workforce with gender-balanced leadership.²⁹

28 Examples can be explored on the following websites: <http://friendfiji.com>; <http://www.organicpasifika.com/poetcom/for-farmers-and-growers/members/women-in-business-development-inc/>; <http://friendfiji.com> and <https://risebeyondthereef.org>

29 See <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/395547/ifc-lays-out-huge-business-cost-from-domestic-violence>; and https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/region__ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/east+asia+and+the+pacific/resources/fiji-domestic+and+sexual+violence+report. See also https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/news_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/news+and+events/news/fiji-tackling+childcare

A number of countries – Samoa, Kiribati, Tonga, Tuvalu and Solomon Islands – have developed specific policy direction on women in the economy within their gender policies. The Solomon Island policy is representative and focuses on four key objectives targeted at rural women and the informal sector.

- Enable legislation for micro banking in the informal sector.
- Create opportunities to regulate and increase social and financial protection for women in the informal sector.
- Develop a policy on security of land and property ownership rights for women.
- Initiate a process for gender analysis of government’s development policies and plans to increase employment opportunities for women across different industry sectors (Government of Solomon Islands n.d.).

How do Pacific women define economic empowerment?

The ways that Pacific Island women describe their own ideas of economic empowerment are varied and depend on multiple influencing factors, such as their degree of isolation, the richness or constraints of the natural environment they live within, levels of education, the economic quintile they occupy, examples and role models they have been exposed to in person or through the internet, the type of support they have from family, and their level of self confidence and self-esteem. There is a clear overlap with women’s ability to be empowered economically and their experience of violence by intimate partners. Women who are victims of violence in the home are less likely to have control over decision-making and their own incomes.

The 2019 *Pacific Women* Regional Learning Forum on Women’s Economic Empowerment brought together development partners, governments, civil society and women entrepreneurs of different ages and abilities.³⁰ The event highlighted differences between the needs, desires and expectations of rural women who juggle multiple subsistence and caregiving responsibilities, and the needs of women in the largest urban areas, who are interested in operating formal sector businesses.

Women in the labour force

Definitions about labour force participation are relatively standardised across the Pacific region and are collected through population and housing censuses. In Melanesian countries, women have a higher rate of participation than women in Micronesia and Polynesia. This is due to the nature of resources available in the subregions, differing cultural norms, variations in women’s engagement in subsistence work, and gendered divisions of labour.



30 A summary of the event is available on the *Pacific Women* Shaping Pacific Development website: <https://pacificwomen.org/resources/pacific-women-regional-learning-forum-on-womens-economic-empowerment/>

Table 3: Key labour force indicators

Country	Labour force participation rate (working and unemployed persons as a percentage of total working age population)		Gender gap (male-female)	Paid employment rate (persons in paid work as a percentage of total working age population)		Women's share of wage employment in non-agriculture sector (%)	Year and source
	Male	Female		Male	Female		
Cook Islands	77	65	12	68.9	59.3	47.3	2011 Census
FSM	66	48	18	--	--	37.9	2010 Census
Fiji	80	46	34	64.3	28.8	33.2	2010-11 LFS
Kiribati	67	52	15	33.9	25.9	47.4	2010 Census
Marshall Islands	--	--	--	48.0	26.5	36.7	2011 Census
Nauru	79	49	30	58.2	35.2	37.6	2011 Census
Niue	69	61	8	65.5	56.1	46.0	2011 Census
Palau	77	60	17	--	--	39.6	2005 Census
PNG	62	62	0	--	--	--	2009-10 HIES
Samoa	40	24	16	29.8	20.1	37.5	2012 LFS
Solomon Islands	69	67	2	35.2	17.6	33.2	2009 Census
Tonga	63	42	21	44.0	29.6	47.9	2011 Census
Tuvalu	68	51	17	--	--	43.5	2012 Census
Vanuatu	81	61	20	37.2	23.4	41.3	2009 Census

-- = not available

Source: ADB, 2016, *Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor-Leste*.

Data from population and housing censuses (census), labour force surveys, and household and expenditure surveys

Notes: Working age population is 15 years and above. Employment, as part of the labour force participation rate, includes paid employment, subsistence production of goods and materials for own-use and consumption, unpaid community work and unpaid work in a family business (except for Cook Islands where subsistence is not included). Paid employment includes those with an employment status of employees, employers, self-employed, producing goods mainly for sale, and paid family workers.

Women's access to and control of resources

A key challenge for women wanting to engage in some form of income generation or small business is access to and control of resources. In many countries, economic decision-making at the household level has traditionally been a male domain but demographic and health survey data from Samoa and Solomon Islands show that this appears to be changing in favour of joint decision-making. In government, the finance and economic portfolios are heavily male dominated. No Pacific countries have introduced any gender responsive budgeting approaches, despite policy directives and requests from gender equality ministries. In Kiribati, efforts to improve transport and wharf infrastructure have increased opportunities for women to engage in economic activities that require access to external markets.

Control of productive natural resources, including land, fisheries, and subsurface minerals is an area where

women are disadvantaged by traditional tenure and decision-making systems. This is true, even in areas where women are technically owners of matrilineal land, because in those settings brothers or uncles act as family representatives in public forums.

Women generally have use rights to clan resources for agriculture, collection of traditional medicines, fishing, or handicraft creation but negotiations about commercialisation or leasing of land, water diversion, and commercial fisheries development generally exclude women. In cases where large-scale development will compromise resources that women rely on, they often lose out to ventures that will produce royalties controlled by male dominated committees.

Increasingly non-government organisations working on environmental sustainability and climate change adaptation have introduced gender equality protocols and quotas into their operations. This potentially allows women to have more voice in natural resource decision-making. It also facilitates wider awareness of women's environmental knowledge and economic contributions to their communities.

Financial inclusion

Central and private sector banks across the Pacific region have undertaken financial inclusion initiatives that are empowering women and enabling them to maintain more control over earnings. In Fiji and Solomon Islands, national financial inclusion taskforces have done sex-disaggregated surveys on financial inclusion and decision-making on household income (PFIP 2016). The introduction of mobile money that allows transactions by mobile phones can benefit women who have less access to transportation and financial services.

Development partners, such as UN Women, are working to change social norms about women's role in the economy in Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. Their Markets for Change programme, in collaboration with local governments, builds financial and leadership skills through market-based programmes.³¹

Civil society actors are also supporting social norms change and financial inclusion through the development of savings clubs and value-chain support programmes that provide basic financial training and, in some cases, micro-loans. In Samoa, Fiji and Solomon Islands, the success that rural women are demonstrating in micro-businesses or cooperatives raises their profile in communities as key economic contributors. It is hoped that this will have additional positive effects on women's status and reduce the incidence of domestic violence.³²

Labour mobility programmes

Australia and New Zealand both work with Pacific governments to create temporary migration for employment. Australia started working with eight countries but has expanded its programme to include all Pacific Island states. New Zealand's partnerships are with Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. International Labour Organization's 2019 report on schemes – Labour mobility in Pacific Island countries (ILO 2019) – provides some insights into gender disparities and the social costs of men and women engaging in the schemes. Host countries provide pre-departure orientation in an attempt to prepare all workers and minimise problems. Nevertheless, some issues remain problematic, including marital tensions, bias toward selection of male labourers, safety risks for women workers, and inconsistent remittance of income to families at home.

31 <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/02/markets-for-change>

32 See case studies and overviews of initiatives at <https://iwda.org.au/case-study-west-areare-rokotanikeni-association-solomon-islands/>; <https://www.womeninbusiness.ws>; <https://risebeyondthereef.org>.

The schemes continue to expand, as they provide options for steady employment for periods ranging from three months to three years. The opportunity for women to travel and learn new skills and ways of working has been anecdotally reported to strengthen their confidence to pursue entrepreneurial ventures at home.

Challenges and areas for action

Rural and urban divides pose particular challenges for women's active engagement in the economy. There is a specific need to transform development approaches, designing them to empower women economically and concurrently improve their status relative to men. Increasing recognition about the value women bring to their communities and workplaces through their knowledge, skills and contributions to the economy will facilitate more equitable decision-making about management of economies from the family to national levels.

Recommendations

Delegates to the 13th Triennial Women's Conference, which was focused on women's economic empowerment, made numerous recommendations.

- Women's economic empowerment must be supported by all sectors.
- Central and local governments, with the assistance of CSOs, FBOs, regional agencies and development partners, are encouraged to mainstream gender across their policies, legislation, programmes and services.
- Support women's entrepreneurship.
- Facilitate financial inclusion of women.
- Support enterprises to introduce and strengthen violence and harassment policies and conduct gender audits to ensure gender equality and respectful and safe workplace environments for women and men, and enable work/life balance.
- Improve infrastructure and governance of marketplaces to create inclusive and gender-responsive environments.
- Implement training, mentorship, internship, apprenticeship and sponsorship programmes to enable female employees to develop their skills.
- Ensure that structural reforms, budgets, economic policies, taxation, aid arrangements and trade agreements do not disadvantage women.
- Provide high-quality, accessible and affordable childcare.
- Introduce appropriate gender equity measures in public procurement to encourage women-led businesses in the formal and informal sector to bid on government tenders, or provide assistance to women-owned enterprises, such as setting mandatory procurement targets and subcontracting goals in supply chains.

Critical area G: Women in power and decision-making

In the Pacific region, it is acknowledged that advancing women in leadership and decision-making extends beyond attempts to elect women to local and national governments. Promoting shared decision-making at the household level, in communities, and in management of natural resources is a key step in the process of changing social norms about women's right to participate across all levels of society.

In addition, women who hold political positions can be role models and shape opinions about women's potential. The number and percentage of women in Pacific Island national parliaments has increased steadily since the Beijing+20 report for 2015. Across the 14 independent PICs 46 women (8.2%) hold seats, up from 30 (5.4%) in 2015.³³ This remains considerably lower than the global average of 24.3%. In 2016, in Republic of the Marshall Islands, Hilde Heine was the first woman to be elected as head of state in the Pacific region.

Context and progress

Legislative and policy supports

In 2012, the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration established regional objectives for gender equality. The declaration identified the need to accelerate women's full and equal participation in governance reform at all levels and women's leadership in all decision-making, and advocate for increased representation of women in private sector and local level governance boards and committees. Since the declaration was signed, governments, development partners and civil society organisations have been working across sectors to increase women's active participation in politics, on boards, on school committees, and in community and traditional leadership organisations.

Women in formal leadership positions

Temporary special measures are a tool promoted by human rights advocates to break through attitudinal and social barriers to women's leadership and allow women to demonstrate that they can be strong, effective leaders. In the Pacific region, efforts to pass and implement temporary special measures have had mixed success. In Samoa, a 10% quota for women in the national parliament has worked well, but in Papua New Guinea the *Equality and Participation Act* (2011) was thwarted by the failure of enabling legislation. Vanuatu has measures that reserve one seat for women on local governments, which, in some areas, appears to have encouraged women to contest seats more widely. In 2014, Solomon Islands passed the *Political Parties Integrity Act* that requires parties to reserve 10% of candidatures for women. The act includes incentive grants for parties that support women in specific ways but does not sanction parties who fail to attract women applicants.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of women holding elected seats in national assemblies. In French Polynesia and New Caledonia, women's representation in territorial governments is 30 (52%) and 24 (44.4%) respectively (2019). These territories benefit from French parity law that requires all political parties to present equal numbers of male and female candidates on their party lists for elections under proportional representation.

³³ <https://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/> Figures as of Sept 2019

Country	Proportion	Number
French Polynesia	53%	30
New Caledonia	44%	24
Cook Islands	25%	6
Niue	25%	5
Fiji	20%	10
Tokelau	15%	3
Palau	14%	4
Nauru	11%	2
Samoa	10%	5
Marshall Islands	9%	3
Tonga	8%	2
Tuvalu	7%	1
Kiribati	7%	3
Solomon Islands	4%	2
FSM	0%	0
PNG	0%	0
Vanuatu	0%	0

Figure 4: Seats held by women in national parliaments, 2019 (percentage of seats)

Sources: For all countries except New Caledonia and French Polynesia, the data are from: Pacific Women in Politics, <https://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/>. Data for New Caledonia and French Polynesia are from: CIA World Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/new-caledonia/> and <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/french-polynesia/>.

Note: The number of seats for Palau includes both Houses of Congress (House of Delegates and House of Senate). For Tonga, it includes elected representatives of nobles and the people. In Samoa, it includes four elected women representatives, together with the next highest polling women included as part of Samoa's special measure for 10% of women's representation in parliament.

In many Pacific countries, the political environment is not attractive to women, nor is politics seen as a worthwhile career choice. Adversarial norms and standards of electioneering and parliamentary procedures can be intimidating and disguise harassment, bullying and abuse. The number of women in public service leadership positions seems to indicate that many women find it easier and more secure to follow a career path in government civil service than in politics.

The Pacific region has well-established national and regional women's rights organisations. Several women's organisations run training programmes and mentor younger women as part of their mandate. In Fiji, women's organisations lead national coalitions, such as the NGO Coalition on Human Rights.

Additionally, a number of national women's organisations have well-established relationships with governments. In the period since the last regional BPA report, many women's organisations have effectively engaged with regional multilateral processes to debate issues and provide input on issues such as sustainable development, climate change and oceans management.

Promoting women as decision-makers in households and communities

Gender equality policies endorsed by governments, development partners and international non-governmental organisations support improving women's status at all levels and increasing their access to and control over political and economic resources. There has been progress in many areas but cultural norms and perceptions about leadership as a male domain, from the household and into public life, are persistent. Gendered divisions of labour create expectations that women are primary caregivers of children, the elderly and disabled in their families. Women are also commonly expected to manage the household work of cleaning, cooking and family nutrition as part of their natural responsibilities. This is often in addition to the burden of employment, entrepreneurship, subsistence labour, and community obligations. As a result, many women do not have time and/or energy to contest positions of leadership that can be time-intensive and at times adversarial.

Changing social norms and values to foster equitable partnerships and sharing of workloads at the household level is a basic step to support women's leadership and will require coordinated advocacy and awareness raising. Changing perceptions about women as leaders is also a generational issue and programmes to integrate gender equality in schools and support young female development advocates have been successful in raising the status of young women in a number of countries, including PNG (Bougainville), Fiji, RMI and Solomon Islands.³⁴

Challenges and areas for action

The prevalence and scope of violence against women is a major barrier to women's advancement in decision-making positions in households, in employment settings and in political settings. Legislation and policy interventions to address violence are in place in most countries but are stymied by entrenched attitudes and reliance on donor funding for implementation initiatives.

Changing discriminatory social norms takes longer than development agencies' project cycles. The need to show measurable short-term progress in areas where change happens in slow increments is antithetical to the working of both the development industry and political systems. Civil society organisations also struggle to build capacity among staff and communities while they are dependent on short-term donor funding. Funding gaps create loss of continuity and institutional memory and undermine prior gains.

Interventions to promote women in political decision-making have been largely unsuccessful in the region. Research published in 2017 indicates that attempts to support women to run for office are too short-term and do not address formal and informal barriers. Barriers may include socio-cultural norms and stereotypes perpetuated by families and communities, as well as lack of civic education (Government of Australia 2017).

Recommendations

The 13th Triennial conference of Pacific Women made multiple recommendations related to women in leadership and decision-making.

- Increase the number of women in national and sub-national parliaments and legislatures, in customary institutions and in senior decision-making positions in government.
- Set appropriate targets for the representation of women, men and marginalised groups across the key decision-making areas noted in PLGED, and consider adopting temporary special measures, where appropriate, to increase women's representation in legislatures.
- Work with women, particularly the most marginalised, to amplify their voices and support representative

³⁴ For example: the Pacific Women initiative in Bougainville, Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Youth to Youth and Youth@Work

organisations to negotiate with national, sub-national and local government and private sector bodies.

- Promote a safe and enabling environment for all civil society actors, with a specific focus on women human rights defenders, and more equitable access to resources for grassroots, local, national and regional women's organisations and CSOs to support women in asserting their economic rights.
- Encourage women's participation and leadership in trade unions, organisations for informal workers, employers' and business organisations and professional associations.
- Promote women's influence and agency by supporting the capacity of special interest groups, such as market vendors, to develop their bargaining power in economic areas.

Critical area H: Institutional mechanisms for advancement of women

Institutional mechanisms for advancement of women are intended to provide multiple entry-points in government systems to enable coordinated and reinforcing efforts toward achieving the goal of gender equality. Such mechanisms were outlined as strategic objectives in the Beijing Platform for Action and include: (i) creation or strengthening of national machineries and other governmental bodies to uphold women's human rights; (ii) integration of gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects; and (iii) generation and dissemination of gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation purposes.

The SDP/SPC has worked with governments to complete stocktakes of gender mainstreaming capacity and identify priorities for integration of gender issues into the plans of central and line ministries. The stocktakes identify five key areas of work: i) increasing demonstrated political will, ii) improving organisational cultures supportive to gender equality and equity, iii) developing and enforcing accountability mechanisms, iv) building technical capacity for data collection, evidence creation and gender analysis, and v) securing adequate financing to make gender mainstreaming sustainable within government systems.

Context and progress

In the Pacific region there are multiple types of institutional mechanisms that can support integration (or mainstreaming) of gender equality considerations into government operations and services. These exist both at national and regional agency levels. Regional mechanisms include gender offices in multilateral agencies and civil society organisations that promote gender equality.

National machineries

National gender equality machineries in the Pacific region are designed to be catalysts for gender mainstreaming and to support specific programming targeted at women. Their work is guided by national gender policies and commitments to international frameworks and conventions, the Sustainable Development Goals, and regional declarations, plans and agreements.

A number of factors influence the effectiveness of national gender equality machineries. These include the extent to which they are adequately funded and resourced by staff with appropriate skill sets, and their ability to influence national planning and budgeting processes and provide authoritative direction to other line ministries.

Pacific governments rely heavily on financial support and technical advice from development partners to supplement and advance their gender equality mandates. Similarly, national civil society organisations rely almost exclusively on donor funding to operate their gender equality programmes. In the Pacific region, this can help to both generate demand for action on certain issues, such as ending gender-based violence against women, and support implementation. At the same time, ongoing support from donors allows governments to defer budgeting for gender equality from recurrent budgets. This can potentially undermine political ownership of governments' own gender equality mandates and perpetuate gender-blind organisational cultures in both central and line ministries.

Gender mainstreaming

Between 2009 and 2016 the Pacific Community undertook stocktakes of the gender mainstreaming capacity in the region.³⁵ These looked at institutional mechanisms and formed the basis for governments to identify areas for action. There is global acknowledgement that effective gender mainstreaming requires concurrent interventions in key areas of government and society. National reports reflect both progress and barriers to change in these areas. Examples from the region are provided below.

a. Political will, organisational culture

The Pacific region has made progress in written commitments to gender equality and mainstreaming. These have not, however, resulted in significant change to measures of gender equality in leadership, economic control or access to leisure time. Implementation of gender responsive laws and policies is very slow and shows that the will of senior decision-makers and practitioners is constrained by lack of awareness and in some cases active resistance. Nonetheless, good practice examples are emerging to show that building tangible political will for gender equality is possible.

- In Republic of the Marshall Islands the first five years of implementation of the National Gender Mainstreaming Policy has seen review and revision of legislation and policies across government. This has been followed by specification of more gender-responsive procedures and practices.
- In Solomon Islands the Pacific Community is working with ministries responsible for gender equality and the public service to integrate gender issues into all mandatory public service training courses. This is a strategy to build awareness and gender analysis skills across the civil service.
- Samoa has integrated gender into the responsibility of all divisions within the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development. It has also made gender analysis a requirement in all aid project proposals. Further, it is decentralising gender and social inclusion planning processes, and training district level staff on gender analysis of sector issues.
- Kiribati amended its constitution in 2013 to allow the creation of a new ministry of Women, Youth and Social Affairs.³⁶ The amendment required two-thirds approval by parliamentarians and reflects increased awareness of gender equality as an integral component of sustainable development.

b. Influence and accountability mechanisms

The location of women's machineries in the government structure affects their influence across government. In all countries, offices for advancement of gender equality are housed within larger ministries. Tuvalu has been the only country where the office for gender equality has been housed in a central ministry, although it has now been moved to the newly configured Ministry of Health, Social Welfare and Gender. Having a gender equality office housed in a central ministry is ideal, as it can streamline the provision of guidance on

³⁵ Note that there is no link available for all the stocktakes. Searches for individual countries will source the documents individually, e.g. the stocktake for Samoa can be found at <https://pacificwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Samoa-gender-stocktake.pdf>

³⁶ The Ministry's name was changed to the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports and Social Affairs in 2018.

gender issues to line ministries and lend weight to proposals. Where offices are located within line ministries, they do not have any authority to direct financial, policy or programmatic change in other ministries and must rely on strategic tools of persuasion and influence.

Data and evidence are critical tools to influence change and this is increasingly recognised by gender equality advocates within governments. The Pacific Community provides ongoing support to countries in the region to build capacity and strengthen collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data.

The Fiji Government has designated gender focal point positions across sector ministries. The positions are in addition to regular staff duties and staff have no funds or special authority to catalyse change. The role of the focal points is to liaise with the Department for Women to enrich understanding of gender issues across government as a whole. Lack of gender analysis training and limited capacity to fund or provide training constrain the effectiveness of this approach.

c. Adequate financing

Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu all highlighted funding shortfalls as a major constraint to implementation of gender equality initiatives within government in Beijing+25 national review reports. They noted that funding stretched only to core staff salaries and basic operational costs. Programming, transportation to remote areas and professional development must be funded through development budgets and/or direct agreements with development partners. Other national reports underlined the constraints imposed by small government allocations to gender equality agencies, noting that they did not have the financial and technical resources to fulfil mandates.

d. Technical capacity

Inadequate technical capacity is referenced in almost every national report. Gender analysis and data collection and analysis are most frequently mentioned. These gaps exist in gender equality agencies and across government and constrain efforts to make sector policies more gender responsive and inclusive of diverse women. Positive change is beginning to be seen at an inter-sectoral level, as some donor-funded initiatives – for example on climate change, disaster management, and natural resource management – introduce requirements for gender analysis and provide training to meet those requirements.

Challenges and areas for action

Socio-cultural norms and discriminatory attitudes continue to inhibit the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms for gender equality. Written commitments to gender equality are not incentivised and there are few accountability mechanisms to enforce action at the ministry level if it is not volunteered. Procedures to address sexual harassment in government workplaces are rare in the Pacific region and, given equal merit, more men than women are promoted. While there are a number of examples of good practice, such elements of organisational culture are self-reinforcing and can perpetuate ambivalence to gender mainstreaming.

Most gender equality offices originally had mandates as women's units, where their objectives were to support women to meet the basic needs of their families in areas of nutrition, health and provision of skills for basic income generation. Currently, the same offices are shifting mandates to direct more complex policy-oriented portfolios. Unfortunately, understanding of this evolution does not seem to be widespread within governments. Many male senior decision-makers still equate gender equality with women's issues and do not feel a responsibility to take action. As an example, ministries across governments – that are now charged with gender mainstreaming – still wait for the gender equality agency to build their capacity, provide funding for gender programmes, and show them what to do – this is outside the available resources of gender agencies.

The Tonga, Vanuatu and Cook Island reports for Beijing+25 noted that lack of real political will constrains action on gender equality. They also flag the need for gender analysis training, although none noted the difficulty in getting senior male decision-makers to actually attend training – a fact that has been noted repeatedly by regional development partners.

Recommendations

Recommendations from the 13th Triennial Women's Conference relating to institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women are highly detailed.³⁷ They are summarised, and in some cases paraphrased, below.

- Collect, analyse and use data disaggregated by sex, age and disability and foster effective partnerships to generate knowledge on gender inequality across sectors and institutions.
- Establish or support the implementation of reporting on existing commitments with clear accountability mechanisms.
- Implement mechanisms to support gender mainstreaming processes across central, sub-national and local government programmes and services.
- Address discriminatory organisational cultures by removing biases and stereotypes in human resource policies, adopting practices to reduce gender gaps in hiring, promotion and pay, and establishing accountability mechanisms, including appropriate protocols for pay-equity processes, with objective criteria for initial pay and promotion, and regular reviews of pay equity.
- Ensure that structural reforms, budgets, economic policies, taxation, aid arrangements and trade agreements do not disadvantage women.
- Improve basic infrastructure and services, including sustainable energy, accessible ICT and transport.

Critical area I: Human rights of women

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) provides an international framework and standards for women's human rights and gender equality. The CEDAW Committee, made up of legal and human rights specialists, reviews national CEDAW reports and makes targeted observations, provides explanations to countries about human rights, and makes concluding comments on where countries are – or are not – progressing gender equality and women's rights.

Countries that have ratified CEDAW are obligated to eliminate discrimination against women using their constitutions, laws and policies. This includes reviewing and revising discriminatory laws, policies and regulations and ensuring that legislation upholding human rights takes precedence over any discriminatory social norms, harmful practices or customary law.

³⁷ The full text of the recommendations can be found in the 13th Triennial outcome document. <https://www.spc.int/sites/default/files/wordpresscontent/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Endorsed-Outcomes-of-13e-triennial-conference-of-Pacific-women.pdf>

Context and progress

Ratification of CEDAW

Of the 14 independent Pacific Island countries, only Tonga has not made a commitment to CEDAW.³⁸ Palau has signed the convention, indicating preliminary commitment, while the other 12 states have ratified. Pacific French territories are committed to CEDAW through French ratification.

Table 4: CEDAW ratification and reporting status

State Party	Year of ratification	Periodic reports submitted
Cook Is	1985*	2006, 2017
Fiji	1995	2000, 2009, 2016
FSM	2004	2015
Kiribati	2004	2019
Nauru	2011	2016
Niue	1985*	
Palau	Signed 2011**	
PNG	1995	2009
RMI	2006	2016
Samoa	1992	2003, 2010, 2017
Solomon Is	2002	2013
Tuvalu	1999	2008, 2012
Vanuatu	1995	2005, 2014

Source: UNOHCHR website: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=181&Lang=EN

* Note that Cook Islands and Niue are committed to CEDAW through their association with New Zealand, which ratified in 1985. Cook Islands began submitting independent reports in 2006.

** Palau is a signatory to CEDAW but has not yet ratified the convention.

Pacific countries have also ratified other human rights conventions and covenants that provide legal and human right frameworks relevant to the social, civil, cultural, political and economic rights of men and women, the rights of children, and the rights of persons with disabilities. Only the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by all 14 countries in the region.

Constitutional and legislative barriers to gender equality and women's human rights

Research on legal barriers to gender equality in the Pacific region has clarified where constitutions and laws constrain women's exercise of their human rights.³⁹ The research notes that CEDAW provides a clear definition of discrimination and states that constitutions should address both direct and indirect forms of discrimination against women.

38 In 2015, Tongan Prime Minister Akilisi Pohiva announced his government's intention to ratify CEDAW but withdrew from pursuing it following strong public protests organised by conservative religious organisations that misunderstood CEDAW (Lee 2017: 66-90).

39 2018 draft. Government of Australia. Legislative barriers to gender equality in Pacific Island countries.

CEDAW defines discrimination against women as:

... any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field (CEDAW Convention, Part 1, article 1).

The draft DFAT report notes:

The [CEDAW] definition covers both direct and indirect discrimination, by including laws and actions which have the effect or purpose of negatively affecting women's recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of rights and freedoms. Direct discrimination arises when a law or action expressly discriminates against women. Indirect discrimination against women arises when a rule or practice that appears to apply neutrally to both women and men has a negative outcome for women in practice.

Most non-discrimination clauses in Pacific constitutions are limited to sex. Two – Kiribati and Tuvalu – do not include sex as a prohibited ground of discrimination at all. Fiji's constitution is alone in listing additional grounds of discrimination relevant to women, including sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, marital status and pregnancy.⁴⁰

Regional and national human rights institutions

The CEDAW Committee recommended the establishment of national human rights institutions (NHRIs) to several Pacific countries. Progress has been slow and, where countries have taken steps to legislate the mandates of institutions, funding and human resources to establish functional offices are still limited.

There is no regional multi-lateral human rights institution, but the Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) is a technical advisory group on human rights located within the Pacific Community. RRRT provides two-fold support to countries. It works with governments to raise awareness of their roles as duty bearers, and supports them to act and report on human rights commitments. It also works with civil society organisations and activists to raise awareness about the law and human rights.

At national level, some countries have established human rights offices or ombudsperson's offices. Samoa's National Human Rights Institution, established in 2013, is the only Pacific institute to receive A-level accreditation by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). It indicates that the office is fully compliant with the Paris Principles.⁴¹ Samoa's NHRI role is to undertake "functions to bridge the protection gap between the rights of individuals and responsibilities of the State".⁴² Since it came into being, Samoa's NHRI, based in the Office of the Ombudsman, has submitted three State of Human Rights Reports to the Samoan Parliament and initiated the region's first ever National Public Inquiry into Family Violence in 2018. In partnership with UN Women, NHRI initiated basic human rights education for police recruits in 2015.

The *Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Act* (2009) established the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission. Its predecessor, the Fiji Human Rights Commission, had its A-level GANHRI accreditation suspended in March 2007.⁴³ Fiji's constitution stipulates that the current commission "shall be independent and shall not be subject to the direction or control of any person or authority, except by a court of law or as otherwise prescribed by written law". It is also guaranteed "administrative and financial autonomy" and assured of "adequate funding

40 Ibid. 2018. Government of Australia. p 10.

41 1993. Paris Principles. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/Pages/ParisPrinciples.aspx>

42 <https://ombudsman.gov.ws/human-rights-2/>

43 https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/NHRI/Chart_Status_NIs.pdf

and resources [by parliament] ...to enable it to independently and effectively exercise its powers and perform its functions and duties".⁴⁴

Fiji reported that, between 2016 and 2018, the commission was allocated FJD 3.8 m. It conducted outreach initiatives in 2017 to raise awareness on a range of human rights issues, held public consultations on access to justice, installed Human Rights Walls in all police stations to raise awareness about the rights of detainees, and collaborated in police training on gender-based violence and human rights. However, the NGO Coalition Parallel Report to CEDAW in June 2017 (page 6)⁴⁵ questioned the independence and credibility of the commission and said no data had been shared on the 703 complaints the commission reported receiving since 2013, and particularly no details on gender-based violence and family law cases.

Kiribati established a Ministry of Justice in 2018, which now houses the national Human Rights Division. The Human Rights Division along with the National Human Rights Taskforce has facilitated reporting on human rights treaties, including CEDAW.

Vanuatu appointed an interim National Human Rights Committee in 2013 to coordinate and oversee implementation activities, reporting to treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review and UN Special Procedures. Following an initial scoping study in 2017, and with support from RRRT and UNOCHA, Vanuatu is looking into establishing an independent human rights institution.

Tuvalu reported that, with support from RRRT, the *National Human Rights Institution Act* and the *Leadership Code Amendment Act* were passed in 2017 to establish an NHRI. The NHRI sits within the Ombudsman Office, and is independent of government. Its mandate includes monitoring the performance of government in respect to its international human rights obligations. The office is currently under-resourced but there is a plan to appoint a human rights commissioner and a communication and education officer in 2020.

The Draft Constitution of the Republic of Solomon Islands (2018) provides for the establishment of a human rights commission, which is still pending.

In all four FSM states, a scoping mission was completed in May 2019 to gauge interest in establishing a national human rights institution but, to date, outcomes have not been released.

Support for the advancement of women's human rights

Development partners support RRRT to work with women, youth, disabled persons and government officials to promote understanding and use of human rights instruments and to facilitate civil society organisations to advocate for more transparency and reduced discrimination in the application of laws.

In addition, efforts of gender equality ministries and women's rights movements receive support and validation from the CEDAW Committee comments and recommendations. This allows them to leverage both funding and advocacy. Visits by international human rights bodies have also raised the profile of human rights generally and women's rights specifically.

The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights of Migrants visited Nauru in 2016 to investigate the Australian Regional Processing Centre for asylum seekers located there. The rapporteur reported on accounts of mistreatment, mental illness, rape and sexual abuse in the facility.

Samoa hosted a ten-day mission from the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women in Law and Practice, at which it developed a report that was later presented to the Human Rights Council meeting in June 2018 in Geneva.

⁴⁴ <http://www.fhradc.org.fj/about-us/constitutional-provisions/constitution-2013/>

⁴⁵ https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/FJI/INT_CEDAW_NGO_FJI_27677_E.pdf

In February 2018 the then High Commissioner for Human Rights visited Fiji and urged the country to ratify two international covenants. Following the visit, in August 2018, Fiji ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Challenges and areas for action

There are multiple challenges to women's exercise of their human rights in the Pacific region. Many women are not aware of their rights and, even where they are, access to justice is uneven, costly and requires legal support. The high prevalence of violence against women in the region means that women face physical risks and backlash if they exercise their rights against the will of controlling intimate partners.

At a higher level, there are tensions between competing systems of customary and human rights-based law. A number of Pacific constitutions and laws officially recognise aspects of customary law – particularly in relation to access and control of natural resources. Customary land laws are adjudicated by male-dominated decision-making forums and are frequently discriminatory against women.

As noted in the section on national human rights institutions, there is limited political will to fund and enforce the application of human rights laws that challenge existing national power structures and current organisational cultures.

Supporting women's human rights requires multi-pronged approaches to be integrated into all levels of development. This includes cross-referencing of human rights treaties such as CEDAW, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and UN covenants on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Recommendations

The 13th Triennial Conference urged governments to adopt, review, and implement legislative measures to:

- reform discriminatory legislative and regulatory frameworks to promote gender equality and women's rights;
- ensure legislation, policies and programmes redress unjust gender norms, gender stereotypes and all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence;
- protect migrant workers and the human rights and social protection of women migrant workers;
- promote gender equality and the human rights of women of all diversities in the workplace;
- establish high-level leadership to advance policies for addressing gender-based violence, discrimination and sexual harassment, and promote women to leadership positions;
- support CSOs to challenge harmful norms, gender-based violence and discriminatory practices, and promote equality and rights of women and girls of all diversities;
- support programmes that engage men and boys as allies in challenging gender stereotypes and reducing women's double burden of paid and unpaid work; and
- support enterprises to address violence and harassment and conduct gender audits to ensure gender equality at all levels, establish respectful and safe workplace environments for women and men, and enable reconciliation of work and family responsibilities.

Critical area J: Women and the media

The Pacific region has seen action and activism on women and the media for decades. This work has been catalysed by a few dedicated civil society organisations and supported by development partners. Pacific media activists also liaise with international human rights media networks through UN forums, including the Commission on the Status of Women. Feminist advocacy and media coverage at regional and international meetings has helped to maintain accountability of Pacific politicians and officials to the gender commitments that have been articulated through the PLGED, CEDAW and the SDGs.

In 2012, UNESCO developed a set of gender sensitive indicators for the media that recognise the extent to which the media can influence perceptions and attitudes about gender equality and women's human rights. The indicator set addresses equality between women and men working in the media, and equality in news reporting on women and men, noting that they are of equal importance and need to be "stridently pursued".⁴⁶

Context and progress

The 2006 Pacific Women in the Media Action Plan includes strategic objectives to ensure fair representation of women in media production and coverage. It advocates for the media to end negative stereotyping and to actively promote gender-sensitive and inclusive reporting.⁴⁷ Since its endorsement, there has been little direct work to promote the plan. This reflects the chronic challenges facing Pacific media in general, including financial sustainability, a rapidly evolving technological context, and human resource constraints.

Nonetheless, the media are critical to achieving progress on gender equality. Triennial conferences and the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report⁴⁸ have identified the importance of media support for campaigns to end violence against women, and to empower women leaders. Media organisations themselves have prioritised gender-based violence as a major concern, and the Pacific Islands News Association has urged the news media to "take a stronger line against this form of abuse" (Panapasa and Singh 2018: 135–145). The Pacific Freedom Forum has welcomed the growth in reporting of gender based violence against women in journalism, cyber-bullying and online harassment of women and has said it will remain vigilant on this issue.⁴⁹

According to the 2015 Global Media Monitoring Project Regional Report, more than 45% of Pacific reporters were female, but women were the central focus of stories only 16% of the time across seven major news topics. Just 1% of news stories examined during the survey raised issues of gender equality/inequality. Female reporters were more likely to quote female news sources.⁵⁰

Policy and legislation

New and amended laws in the review period include a new right to information law in Vanuatu. It currently covers government departments but there are plans to extend it to cover statutory organisations, including the National Council of Women.⁵¹

46 <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/gender-sensitive-indicators-for-media-framework-of-indicators-to-gauge-gender-sensitivity-in-media-operations-and-content/>

47 PACMAS link to draft action plan: <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/34277300/pacific-women-in-media-draft-action-plan-pacmas>

48 https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/publication/Pacific_Leaders_Gender_Equality_Declaration_2016.pdf

49 <https://www.pacificnote.com/single-post/2019/01/02/Digital-opportunity-and-challenges-loom-for-Pacific-media-in-2019>

50 https://www.media-diversity.org/additional-files/Who_Makes_the_News_-_Global_Media_Monitoring_Project.pdf

51 <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/392426/vanuatu-s-right-to-information-law-proving-effective>

Fiji's *Online Safety Act* of 2018 was introduced in response to the high levels of sexual exploitation of women and girls online (Tarai 2018: 84–94). The Fiji Police Force also has a Cyber Crime Unit, which investigates complaints related to online sexual harassment, online stalking and non-consensual sharing of intimate images.⁵²

Vanuatu's Universal Access Policy and ICT policy have expanded the reach of ICT (including broadband internet access) to rural and remote areas, improving women's access to information. In addition, Vanuatu's National Child Online Protection Policy and Strategy is established to prevent child exploitation. Other countries have recognised the need to develop legislation on the matter of violence against women and girls facilitated by technology.

Fiji's National Gender Policy highlights objectives on support for women-led media initiatives. These include: (i) allocation of at least 30% of Public Service Broadcasting funding for the promotion of CEDAW and gender equality projects; (ii) all public service broadcasting required to have a gender policy and gender codes; and (iii) annual qualitative and quantitative gender audits by the Ministry of Information of content produced by government information networks using the Global Media Monitoring Guidelines.

National media issues

In addition to new laws and policies, national reports to the Beijing+25 reporting process note the following.

- In Fiji, women are dramatically under-represented in the news, with the overall presence at 16%. Men outnumber women as newsmakers in every major news topic, and stories on gender inequality are rare.
- The Cook Islands government supports participation and leadership of women in the media.
- The International Federation of Journalists notes that, in 2015, Vanuatu's media industry rated poorly in terms of both representation of women within the media sector and representations of women by the media (Brimacombe 2017).
- The PNG Media Council launched a code of conduct in 2017. It provides standards and guidance to avoid gender-discriminatory reporting.
- The Media Association Solomon Islands (MASI) acknowledges that gender equality is a human right. In 2017 the MASI Board expanded to include a representative from Women in Media Solomon Islands.

As described earlier, the issue of eliminating violence against women has emerged as a priority area.

- Kiribati reports that there has been increased awareness of domestic violence in communities through various channels, including the media.
- In RMI, government and non-governmental organisations, in particular Women United in Marshall Islands (WUTMI), have worked with the media on strategies to end violence against women and girls.

Media coverage of women and men running for political leadership varies.

- In RMI, WUTMI has used radio to profile women political candidates and provide a platform for discussion of issues of concern to Marshallese women and girls.
- In the 2014 Fiji election campaign, coverage of female candidates by non-partisan media "appeared to celebrate and even champion them," (Liki and Slatter 2015: 71–88) and highlight their qualifications to run for office. In other jurisdictions, coverage of women political leaders and candidates has reinforced the social, cultural and political challenges women face and, in some cases, has been "grossly sexist." (Rooney 2017) However, some women politicians have been able to successfully challenge the status quo by taking control of messaging on their own social media channels (Tarai 2019: 52-64).

52 Fiji government report Beijing+25 review

Media landscapes are continually changing. In some jurisdictions, mobile phones, the internet and social media have created opportunities for citizens and civil society to control media messaging. For example, women's rights activists in Fiji have used the social media and other digital technologies to create alternative narratives, build online communities, generate public debate, and trigger international media coverage (Brimacombe et al. 2018).

The pioneering organisation in this field is femLINKpacific, which supports networks in Solomon Islands, Tonga and Papua New Guinea and which, since 2005, has run a suitcase radio programme that has been bridging the inter-generational gap – with young women learning the technology and older women finding their voice, often after years of being told to be silent.⁵³

Non-governmental organisations in other Pacific Island countries that profile the voices of women and girls in their communities include *Ma'afafine moe Famili* and the Talitha Project in Tonga, Young Women for Change and Further Arts in Vanuatu, the World Association for Christian Communication, the Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency Bougainville, the Peace Foundation Melanesia in PNG and Vois Blong Mere in Solomon Islands.⁵⁴

Vois Blong Mere works to promote gender-sensitive media, but also created its own content through the Digital Story Documentation project during 2015–2016. This project builds a resource and digital reference collection of stories about ending violence against women.⁵⁵

The Pacific Young Women's Dialogue, established as part of the YWCA Pacific Regional Young Women's Leadership Strategy (2011–2014), provided a private, online space for young women to share views and network, and then develop positions to share with Pacific governments and donors in order to support young women's leadership (Brimacombe 2017).

Access to communication technology

While technology has opened up new opportunities, the challenge of ensuring rural women have access to ICT remains. Pacific ICT ministers in 2010 called for: "greater coordination in effectively utilising ICT for sustainable development, governance, and improving the livelihood of Pacific communities," and identified gender equity as a key theme.⁵⁶

In Cook Islands, where women have high levels of participation in the media, including in senior managerial roles, many women still face barriers in accessing ICTs because they are likely to lack basic literacy and computer skills, and because the places where they may be able to access computers are uncomfortable or culturally inappropriate.

In several countries, the sector itself is leading by example. Women in IT Solomon Islands was formed by a group of women IT professionals with the aim of implementing projects related to gender and IT. In Vanuatu, Smart Sistas is supporting women and girls in ICT and has introduced an annual camp.

53 <https://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/what-we-do>

54 <https://waccglobal.org/investing-in-young-women-sustaining-women-led-community-media/>

55 <https://www.facebook.com/vbms1/>

56 <https://cropict.usp.ac.fj/images/papers/PRISAP/PRISAP.pdf>

Challenges and areas for action

Despite progress in some areas, advancing gender equality in all forms of media and preventing online exploitation of women and children are increasingly challenging in the Pacific region. In some countries, levels of cyber-bullying are high and have been anecdotally connected to youth suicide.

Mobile phone technology and children's access to the internet has increased the number of children, adolescents and adults with access to exploitive and often violent pornography. Children and adolescents are increasingly exposed to pornography, which negatively affects their potential to develop respectful relationships.⁵⁷ This form of media can reinforce discrimination against women, undermine attempts to develop respectful relationships and normalise exploitive sex.

The international and unregulated nature of the internet makes the media difficult to control.

Recommendations

The 13th Triennial Conference on Women did not produce recommendations in this area. Key recommendations inferred from national reports include:

- stabilise funding sources for media that support gender equality; and
- introduce and implement comprehensive ICT legislation, policies and action plans based on international standards and indicators.

Critical area K: Women and the environment

The Pacific has a wide range of natural environments. All are used by women and men, but often for different purposes. Pacific national reports – on both the environment and gender equality – clarify: (i) how the environment is integral to women's security and wellbeing; and (ii) how women manage and maintain environmental resources to meet needs for subsistence food production and income generation.

Context and progress

The ocean dominates the Pacific regional environment, while the land base of individual countries ranges from coral atolls to small volcanic peaks to larger island archipelagos comprised of distinct mountain ranges, open hills and river deltas. Countries rely heavily on their fisheries and oceanic resources, and many of the larger archipelago countries of Melanesia have rich forest and sub-surface resources.

⁵⁷ Information on children's access to pornography on mobile devices has been identified by the Cyber Safety Pasifika program <https://www.cybersafetypasifika.org/#main>. It was also noted in consultations for the ADB Country Gender Assessments for Solomon Islands and Fiji (2015). See <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/176812/sol-country-gender-assessment.pdf> Correlations between children's online access to both mobile phones and pornography have been drawn in global studies. A recent Pacific study by USP indicates children's increased use of all types of digital technology to access and navigate the internet. https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/AsiaPacific/Documents/Events/2014/September-COP/Salanieta_Tamanikawaimaro.pdf

Diversity of issues

Water resources are scarce in atoll countries and climate change is causing increasing problems with salination. Sea-level rise is a high risk for the atolls and islands of every Pacific Island state. Some countries may become uninhabitable before the end of the century.

In all small island states, and particularly atolls, waste disposal and sanitation are matters of concern. There are few recycling programmes and, as populations grow, all forms of garbage accumulate to form environmental hazards. Disposal of human waste is also an issue in some countries, with atoll lagoons having very high e-coli counts. Gender divisions of labour often dictate that women are responsible for managing household water and sanitation but without support from national level policies, they have no leverage to influence or support stewardship of water sources and development of sanitation infrastructure.

Extreme weather events are becoming much more frequent and disaster planning and management is becoming an urgent priority. Ocean temperatures in the region are warming, with negative impacts on coral reef biodiversity and the movement and sustainability of fisheries stocks. Changes in rainfall patterns and drought conditions are affecting food security, especially in countries that rely heavily on subsistence food production. Because women are most often expected to manage household food supply and production, stress on their health and on family nutrition can become acute.

Large-scale exploitation of natural resources, particularly in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and New Caledonia, has had negative gender differentiated environmental and social impacts. Women and men use forest, river and ocean resources differently, and women's subsistence gathering, income generation and food security has been repeatedly compromised by large-scale forestry operations. Mining has contaminated terrestrial, river and marine environments and toxic chemicals have leached into water systems and agricultural land. The establishment of enclave communities around large-scale forestry and mining camps has increased substance abuse and the sexual exploitation of women and children, and has caused a higher incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies. In some countries, trafficking of women and girls to serve as domestic and sex workers has been reported in these camps (e.g. Protection Project 2010).

Nuclear testing in the North Pacific has resulted in a legacy of environmental mutations and human health complications. Higher rates of cancers and birth anomalies are two examples mentioned in the Republic of Marshall Islands report for Beijing+25.

Environmental civil society organisations and international environmental NGOs exist in most countries, although their capacities and funding vary. Women hold senior positions in many of these organisations and are high level advocates for legislative and policy attention to the environment.

National situations

National reports provided information on topics, including renewable energy, disaster risk management, land lease policies, and water and sanitation projects. The reports emphasise issues of disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery where women become increasingly active as the effects of climate change accelerate in the region.

Samoa's National Environment Sector Plan integrates gender and the needs of vulnerable groups. Samoa also has a Gender in Disaster Risk Management Policy that supports integration of gender considerations in all aspects of interventions.

- Solomon Islands' Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology recognises the need to integrate gender equality approaches into services and staffing. Gender

concerns are integrated into the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan 2011–2020, particularly in targets relating to protected area systems and inland water biodiversity. This reflects knowledge that successful “protected area interventions require an inclusive strategic approach that includes women at all stages of the project cycle”.⁵⁸

- Solomon Islands has invested in research to bring a stronger gender perspective into its management of community-based natural resource management. One intervention focuses on increasing food security and income for the thousands of people living in and depending on aquatic agricultural systems.⁵⁹ The programme uses a gender-transformative approach and works to “foster change in the social environment to maximize the ability of women and men to participate in and benefit from natural resource management” (The Nature Conservancy n.d.:2) in ways that will increase food security and environmental resilience.
- In Vanuatu, since 2014, women have become heavily involved in all levels of disaster management initiatives. The Department of Women’s Affairs leads a gender and protection cluster (GPC), under the National Disaster Management Office. The cluster involves 20 government agencies and CSOs/NGOs working on gender equality. Three sub-clusters work on gender-based violence, child protection and disability inclusion in humanitarian situations. For six years, the GPC has helped ensure that gender, protection and inclusion issues are addressed during natural disasters.
- Vanuatu reports that gender, protection and social inclusion in preparedness, response and resilience has been mainstreamed into the National Disaster Management Office’s Policy on Climate Change and Disaster Induced Displacement (2018). Also, the schools’ disaster risk reduction and resilience building handbook, funded by UNICEF, includes gender responsive planning such as facilities for menstrual hygiene management, gender balance on school disaster management committees, and disaster risk reduction decision-making bodies and processes.⁶⁰ School safety plans take account of the needs of women, girls and people living with disabilities. In 2016, the *Water Resource Management Act* was amended to require a minimum 40% representation of women on rural water committees.
- In Vanuatu’s Shefa and Sanma provinces, disaster risk reduction, safety and security have been mainstreamed into UN Women’s Markets 4 Change Project. Women and girl’s leadership in disaster planning, response and preparedness has also been strengthened through community disaster and climate change committees. The Vanuatu National Displacement Tracking Matrix, which was finalised in 2019, disaggregates vulnerable categories, such as people living with a disability, single female and male-headed households, child-headed households, elderly-headed households, pregnant and lactating women and widows.
- Vanuatu also reported that the *Land Reform Act* (2013) provides for both men and women deciding on customary land ownership and usage. Decision-making processes on land now also require the approval of the ‘tribe’, including women representatives. Vanuatu acknowledges, however, that cultural and knowledge barriers constrain women’s participation, land use and ownership rights.
- In Palau, significant numbers of women are being trained on disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation work. Women also play key roles in environmental protection and conservation management. The Red Cross and the Centre for Women’s Empowerment- Belau are training 200 women in emergency preparedness, crisis response and recovery.⁶¹
- The Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC) research on climate resilient reef ecosystems to protect food security at sea includes female researchers who are being supported to do graduate work related to Palau’s environment. There are two women on the seven-member Environmental Protection Board. Women have also been engaged as conservation managers and employees by the Protected Areas

58 Solomon Islands BPA+25 report section 30.4. p55

59 The initiative is run by the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS) led by WorldFish.

60 2019. Beijing + 25 National Review Report. Government of Vanuatu. p 10.

61 <http://wphfund.org/pacific-emergency-preparedness-response-recovery-project-palau/>

Network to implement management plans in their states. Palau also has national policies and legislation that promote women's and men's equal ownership, management and use of natural resources (e.g. water, fuel, land, forests).

- The Kiribati National Action Plan and the Joint Implementation Plan for climate change integrates gender equality and participation of women across multiple areas including natural resource management, agricultural adaptation and disaster preparedness and response. The Joint Implementation Plan identifies multiple strategies for involving women in remote areas through networks of faith-based organisations, development of women's leadership capacity and changing social norms around violence against women to reduce barriers to women's engagement.
- Fiji's Gender Policy recognises that women in rural communities have the most limited access to energy sources, including access to renewable energy sources. The policy stipulates ensuring that women in communities are consulted in any energy projects and enjoy affordable access to energy sources.
- Nauru reported at length on its considerable environment challenges which affect the health and wellbeing of its communities. No information was given on women's participation in strategies to address them.
- Tuvalu's Fisheries Department has worked in collaboration with the Gender Affairs Department with a view to improving inclusion of women and women's groups. In 2016, the Gender Affairs Department provided awareness training for Fisheries Department staff to highlight women's role in fisheries and their contributions to post-harvesting processes, food preservation and food security. The Funafuti Reef Fisheries Stewardship Plan, launched in 2017, takes into account women's role and contribution.
- The Tuvalu Environment Department has guidelines to support gender mainstreaming. Environmental impact assessments and action plans are required to consider gender issues. Consultations, particularly in the outer islands, continue to be male-dominated but consultation facilitators attempt to ensure that women are given opportunities to speak.
- Cook Islands reported that improving the capacity of women to contribute to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies is one of the six priority areas in the Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Gender considerations are also part of the 2013–2016 Climate and Disaster Compatible Development Policy and programming. The national policy "recognises that women and men play different roles in the livelihood strategy of their families and their use of natural resources and provisions of food for the family differs" (p 17). Climate change is also expected to affect women and men differently, requiring that responses be gender sensitive.

Challenges and areas for action

Currently, there is a shortage of clear evidence on men's and women's roles in all aspects of environmental management. Research on these issues is often focused on small sample sizes from only one or two geographic locations and is often linked to a limited number of species or food types. Customary patterns are different from area to area – even within countries in the Pacific – so gaining clear understanding of gender roles and impacts of fisheries management, agriculture, resource use and climate change is challenging.

Women are still largely excluded from traditional decision-making forums on land and marine management, so their views and experience are missing and decisions are not fully informed. Disaster management processes have been developed more recently as climate change-related disasters have increased. These are more likely to include women and be designed in gender-sensitive ways. There is a need to be innovative and build links between these processes and environmental management at the clan or tribe level.

Environmental management programmes in the region work with landowners and assist them to make sound and sustainable decisions. This can provide an avenue for more gender-inclusive environmental management if programme staff understand how to facilitate the inclusion of women's views into agreed decisions.

Recommendations

Delegates made the following recommendation to the 13th Triennial Conference of Women.

- Design programmes and services that support women's roles as managers and custodians of natural resources in sectors, including agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture and mining.

Critical area L: The girl child

All Pacific Island countries and territories have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and have made specific efforts to increase gender equality for children. Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru and Vanuatu have also ratified the CRC Optional Protocol. PNG, Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, Kiribati and Solomon Islands are State Parties to the 1999 ILO Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms Of Child Labour (ILO Convention No 182) and Fiji is also Party to the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (Convention No.138).

These commitments indicate the high value placed on children in the Pacific. Despite this, however, social norms that reinforce gender stereotypes for children, favouring boys and discriminating against girls, are evidenced at all levels, including in families, schools, community decision-making and society in general.

Disturbingly, and contrary to the spirit of these human rights commitments, children in the Pacific experience high levels of corporal punishment in the home and are targets of sexual abuse and exploitation by family members and strangers alike. Despite the crisis of violence against women, and of family violence more broadly, many decision-makers, including legislators, still oppose strengthened legal protections against family violence on the grounds that it contradicts culture and gives children the right to sue parents for alleged assault.⁶²

Context and progress

A number of Pacific Island states have reviewed legislation and policies in an effort to eliminate discrimination against young women and end harmful gender-biased practices. At the regional level, development partners are working to change social norms that undermine the agency of young women. Across Pacific cultures, hierarchies of gender and age restrict young women's ability to speak out on issues that affect them and advocate for change. A number of young female activists and civil society organisations that began projects independently are now being supported to learn from each other through regional networks.⁶³

Legislation on the age of consent for marriage for young women and men varies across countries. In some countries in the region, even very young adolescent girls are permitted to marry with parents' consent. Laws on the age of consent for sex also vary.

The education chapter identifies recent policy changes related to girls' rights to stay in school if they are pregnant. The media chapter touches on pornography and exploitation of children, and the environment chapter highlights trafficking of women and girls to mining and logging camps.

62 Tongan Minister opposes Family Protection Act, 19 July 2019, Radio New Zealand; UNICEF (2017).

63 The Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program funded by the Australian government brought together young women activists and entrepreneurs during the 2019 Regional Learning Forum on Women's Economic Empowerment. The same program manages the Pacific Girl initiative, which supports civil society organisations to support young women to enhance their knowledge and advocacy skills to influence government policy.

Four Pacific countries have child protection laws, 11 have family protection laws, and across the region policy initiatives to protect the rights of the girl child have been introduced. In May 2019, representatives from 12 national government welfare offices collaborated to develop a regional framework for improving child protection services.⁶⁴

Policy and legislation

Unless otherwise noted, information on national level progress comes from country reports submitted to inform Beijing+25 reporting.

- Republic of the Marshall Islands introduced the *Child Rights Protection Act* in 2015, and the *Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Act* in 2017. To address gender equality child rights, the country is integrating education, health and social services targeted to young people.
- Nauru's parliament passed the *Child Protection and Welfare Act* in June 2016, establishing a protective legislative framework for children. This is supplemented by the *Domestic Violence and Family Protection Act* (2016). A Family Protection and Coordination Committee will monitor implementation and training for service providers.⁶⁵
- Cook Islands' *Family Protection and Support Act* 2017 encompasses child protection rights in line with the principles and provisions of the CRC. The Cook Islands Gender Policy seeks to reduce teenage pregnancies and the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases amongst adolescents through education and health support.
- Solomon Islands' *Child and Family Welfare Act* 2017 includes provision for a Child Protection Referral Pathway, which aims to ensure that girls (and all children) who need care and protection receive the support they need in a timely and coordinated manner.
- Fiji increased funding for child services and established a child helpline in 2015. The helpline is operated through a partnership of government, health providers and telecommunications companies, and received more than 42,000 calls in its first three years of operation. Community and school programmes have also been established to increase protections for girls.
- Palau's Penal Code, effective July 2014, has been strengthened to include an expanded number of child exploitation crimes, mandatory registration of sex offenders, and public posting of the sexual offender registry list online.
- While digital technology can open up a world of educational and economic opportunities, it can also make children, and in particular girl children, more susceptible to harm.⁶⁶ Samoa is taking steps to improve protection for girls from sexual abuse, including exploitation online through its National Cyber Security Strategy 2016–2021.
- Vanuatu's Child Online Protection Awareness Strategy also seeks to strengthen safeguards for girls as part of a broader scope of work under its National Child Protection Policy (2016–2026).

64 Pacific Regional Workshop on Child Protection for the Social Welfare Sector, 31 May 2019. <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/press-releases/12-pacific-island-countries-commit-improve-child-protection-services-regional>

65 Ibid.

66 UNICEF 2017 Children in a Digital World <https://www.unicef.org/media/48601/file>

Challenges and areas for action

Poverty and overwork of women increase the likelihood that girls will be recruited as household labour and their rights to a full education and a safe childhood will be compromised. Persistence of discriminatory social norms and harmful practices, such as early marriage, bride-price, taking girls out of school, and traditional forgiveness ceremonies, contravene the rights of the girl child. As discussed earlier, attitudes about adolescent pregnancy discriminate against young women and limit their educational and employment opportunities but fail to hold the men involved in pregnancies to account.

Child labour is defined by the International Labour Organization as work undertaken by a child which is “harmful to the child’s health and development” and “impedes their growth and development”. Ending child labour by 2025 is Target 8.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Fiji has been designated a Pathfinder Country of Alliance 8.7. Pathfinder countries are those that commit to accelerating efforts with new actions to achieve Target 8.7.⁶⁷

In the Pacific region, older children often help with subsistence agriculture and fishing and with informal sector marketing. In many urban areas, boys sell food at the roadside into the evening. Girls are expected to help with caregiving and housework, which can interrupt or limit their education. Solomon Islands reported a higher likelihood of girls leaving school early and similar findings have emerged from PNG and Vanuatu. Nauru reported that increased rates of NCDs put a strain on girls’ ability to attend school and engage in leisure activities.

Research by ILO notes that Pacific children are “susceptible to the worst forms of child labour, such as hazardous work, illicit activities, and commercial sexual exploitation”. Factors “aggravating risk and vulnerability of children to exploitation and abuse” included poverty, illiteracy, poor academic performance and lack of employment opportunities (ILO 2014).

The most serious violations of the rights of children in the Pacific come from their dependence on adults and related vulnerabilities to abuse. A Save the Children 2019 report describes violence against children, and in particular against girl children, as being “at epidemic levels across Pacific island nations”. The report also notes violent discipline of children is evident in 70% to 87% of homes (Suthanthiraj 2019).

Corporal punishment in schools is outlawed in all Pacific Island nations except Niue and Solomon Islands but anecdotal reports indicate it still occurs in other countries.

Violence inflicted on girl children runs parallel to the high prevalence of violence against adult women in the region and violence starts early. In a 2015 Women United Together Marshall Islands survey on domestic violence, 38% of young women aged 15–24 were already reporting experience of intimate partner violence.

A 2019 survey reports that 85% of welfare workers in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Samoa reported seeing child sexual exploitation in the past year, with two-thirds of the victims being girls.⁶⁸ The common practice of sending children to live with extended families to attend school can increase their risks.

67 Observing the World Day against Child Labour in Suva, Fiji, 12 June 2019 https://www.ilo.org/suva/public-information/WCMS_710154/lang-en/index.html

68 ECPAT 10 June 2019, Pacific Region: Frontline welfare workers regularly seeing child sexual exploitation, <https://www.ecpat.org/news/pacific-sexual-exploitation-children/>

In Fiji, a Women’s Crisis Centre survey indicates that 16% of girls under 15 years of age reported sexual abuse. In Solomon Islands, 37% of women surveyed said they had been sexually abused as a child. A Cook Islands study found “about a quarter of the youth in the Cook Islands experience sexual violence”, and the victims were predominantly female.⁶⁹ The 2018 Samoa National Inquiry into Family Violence revealed an “epidemic” of sexual abuse and incest involving children.⁷⁰

Child trafficking associated with extractive industries in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea have become worrying (Robinson 2011). The Anti-Human Trafficking Advisory Committee of the Solomon Islands government is working in logging communities to raise awareness on child trafficking, as well as child marriage and exploitation.

The 2019 US Department of Labour’s International Child Labour and Force Labour Report on Fiji states that “Commercial sexual exploitation of children continued to occur in Fiji, particularly by family members, taxi drivers, foreign tourists, businessmen, and crew on foreign fishing vessels. Parents sometimes send their children to live with families in cities or near schools to facilitate their continuing education and to perform light household work. Research found that some of these children are vulnerable to involuntary domestic work or are forced to engage in sexual activity in exchange for food, clothing, or shelter”.⁷¹

All of these issues indicate that, despite legislated protections, governments are not fulfilling their duty to protect the rights of children, particularly female children. As duty bearers, governments must proactively address and sanction gender-biased attitudes, violence and exploitation of children and demonstrate clear political will. This includes allocation of adequate financing, development and enforcement of accountability mechanisms, and creation of decentralised support services that will reach vulnerable children in both urban and rural areas.

Recommendations

The 13th Triennial Conference did not make specific recommendations on this area of concern but action is needed to integrate child protection into all social services and natural resource sectors, and to give increased attention to the sexual and reproductive rights of adolescents.



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69 ‘Cook Islands youth not safe from sexual violence’, *Cook Island News*, 29 May 2019.

70 https://ombudsman.gov.ws/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/National-Inquiry-Report-into-Family-Violence_-_State-of-Human-Rights-Report-2018-SUMMARY_English.pdf

71 <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/fiji>

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

On this special anniversary of 25 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995 and the construct of the Beijing Platform of Action (BPA), perhaps it is natural to reflect and ponder over what has been achieved, and whether the achievements are sufficient imprints of a progressive step forward or have we simply slipped back to invisibility and anonymity?

The BPA has provided the momentum to promulgate action. The year 2020 is therefore a pivotal year for the accelerated realisation of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, everywhere. The Pacific Review of the BPA is a story of how Pacific women and their governments have adapted this roadmap for achieving gender equality through promoting women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting and to the full realisation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development in the Pacific.



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While the majority of countries acknowledge that much has been achieved since Beijing, there is always a quick-to-follow comment, in an almost apologetic tone, "but much more needs to be done". Have our expectations run ahead of our realities or is it our lot to be always a step behind? Did we plan to tiptoe, leapfrog or take measured steps that need to be inclusive of all stakeholders and then be able to say "yes, gender equality is looming near!"?

There are definitely variations in the pace we have moved from country to country. According to the feminist women of New Caledonia, they have to "fight for equal rights since the political and social issues are so complex... At Beijing+25, we are building, step by step, our destiny as free women with equal rights." While they feel that their status and empowerment have not attained the expected level, they remain hopeful that their demands will be heard. Already their political leaders have, in fact, agreed to make violence against women a 'country cause' through an action plan, and there is commitment to developing a framework law to restructure New Caledonian society by integrating women's rights in every area.

Those that made the bold move to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women early on, before Beijing, have garnered the windfalls of the UN Decade prior. One country in the region has yet to accede to CEDAW despite opportunity presenting itself to do so. While gender equality has always been contested, opposition to gender equality and to women's rights activism has become more vocal, global and organised. In this case the national condemnation of the convention as a creation of the devil and a foreign vessel to promote women's rights has no place in their country. The clash of culture, religion and globalisation of ideas has left women in the lurch, uncertain of their rights and the opportunities that might have been forfeited.

Reading between the lines of the reflections of Pacific women, one factor is overwhelmingly clear. Pacific people are singing the same tune of 'empowerment transforms'. Women are taking steps and making considered decisions towards their empowerment. Consider the situation of French Polynesia where, in 2019, 30% of families lived under the national poverty line. Currently women have a 49% labour force participation rate. An increasing number of women successfully completed their studies which helped them find decent work opportunities to take them on a path other than being 'housewives'.

Similarly, the women of French Polynesia delved into legislative reforms that provided for gender parity, to propel their way into a higher and more visible participation in public life. As the main report explains, "Following the introduction of these rules, the number of women in office quickly rose and while no more than a handful of

women sat in the French Polynesian Assembly prior to 2000, since 2013 they have accounted for 50 per cent of the 57 members. Female representation also rose sharply on the 48 town councils in French Polynesia, going from 19 per cent in 1995 to 43 per cent since 2014.” Where there is affirmative action, women must seize the opportunity.

Women themselves must take the lead and not rely on anyone else to work towards gender equality in the context of their societies. It is not enough to wait to be counted or recognised. Innovation and initiative are critical. Pacific media feminist activism focused on utilising a range of appropriate and accessible media platforms – print, digital storytelling, online/social media and television – to increase the visibility of women’s and young women’s viewpoints and realities. The experiences encountered will be catalytic to evolving mindsets. The challenges women face are demonstrating success in what is still a male-dominated world, preserving an independent outlook and acquiring the ability to influence decisions so as to help bring about the changes in society that women want to see.

In 1995, where the need for institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women was recognised as a priority by the global body, our Pacific societies were cognisant of the fact that our respective social structures provided the mechanisms for the advancement of women across the region. The case of Samoa, for example, naturally comes to mind, where within each village was the institutional mechanism supporting the advancement of women through the ‘village of women’, and where related issues were addressed at local level. At the national level, governments in the Pacific started to establish offices for women, women’s desks, and divisions for women or standalone ministries. These institutional mechanisms for women were tasked with the design, promotion, implementation, monitoring, advocacy and mobilising resources for the policies that support the advancement of women. Countries continued to evaluate the efficacy of such national mechanisms and how they were serving the interests of women.

To enable the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development of Samoa to respond in a more meaningful manner to the needs of the community, the focus of its work was restructured during 2016–2018. The restructure was premised on thematic areas of social development, economic empowerment, governance and leadership, and ensured the mainstreaming of gender, children, and people living with disability into all divisions of the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, and across sectors, for more effective responses to people’s needs. As the report observes, “The fact that managers and experts in the Pacific Community (SPC), for example, are now requesting technical assistance and asking questions about how to integrate gender equality into their work, is clearly a demonstration of the progress that the Pacific has made, and is a culmination of years of advocacy and building awareness about gender equality and why it matters.”

The Beijing review has encouraged continuous engagement of national mechanisms in a policy platform, including consultative processes for the work on gender equality in the Pacific at all levels; generating often difficult conversations on gender equality and engaging governments and partners in initiatives to empower women; and keeping the momentum going towards gender equality.

The main progress for women with disabilities has been that we are now more vocal and visible advocating for our issues. As Savina Nongebatu of Solomon Islands says, “We have more knowledge on our rights and how to advocate better on our issues as well as social inclusion and human rights for all”. The inclusiveness of education has shown significant improvements, as exemplified in many Pacific countries with an increase of up to 40 per cent of children with disabilities attending regular schools. All but two of the Pacific countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Partnerships and networks have been instrumental in bringing to the fore the priorities of people with disabilities. For instance, the collaboration of Solomon Islands and other countries with the Pacific Disability Forum and Monash University of Australia has resulted in the Pacific Indicators for Disability Inclusive Education (Pacific INDIE) and the regional ministries of education developing inclusive education policies. Funding by the Government of Australia to the Pacific region has been catalytic in highlighting the issues of people with disability as well as gender equality.

Gender parity has been achieved in most countries of the Pacific particularly in primary education, while at secondary and tertiary levels females are outperforming males as determined from surveys of learning outcomes.

Women and girls cannot live quality lives if they are not safe from violence. Since the BPA was launched Pacific countries have implemented an increasing and diverse range of measures to address violence against women, illustrating a commitment to prevent violence against women, to investigate and hold perpetrators accountable, and to provide justice and remedies to victims. These measures have resulted in strengthened and enhanced legal and policy frameworks for addressing such violence and more consistent implementation; better and more accessible protection and services for victims/survivors of violence; a greater focus on prevention of violence and the role of men and boys in these efforts; expanded and more systematic awareness-raising and capacity-building measures; and quality useful data and information that support legal and policy development.

Each one of us has the power to make a difference and collectively write a new story of healing, empowerment, and change. Reversing the traditional perceptions of a division of labour in the home, rewriting the narrative to reflect shared responsibilities, as well as shunning all language that objectifies women are the start of a new beginning. The European Union through the United Nations has certainly put the spotlight on ending violence against women and children by way of the Spotlight Initiative.

There has been considerable progress at the national policy level, and a growing awareness of the importance of gender dimensions in health policies, including general health policies and those specific to sexual and reproductive health. Most countries have highlighted progress related to revising, strengthening and amending health-related action plans, policies and agreements to include gender perspectives. Countries have identified many obstacles and challenges including insufficient statistical data, lack of expertise and resources for research on women and health, the trend to limit women's health policies to reproductive roles (neglecting other priority issues), insufficient funding, and socio-cultural attitudes.

The BPA's strategic objectives examine the issue of women and the environment and emphasise the essential role that women play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management, and stress the need for women to participate in environmental decision-making at all levels. Reflections from the northern Pacific indicate a significant delinking of women's roles from natural resources management with current policy shifts. In such cases, governments appear to have made advances at policy level but have not brought gender equality considerations to specific initiatives.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that 25 years after its adoption, the BPA remains the most comprehensive global policy framework for gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and the realisation of their human rights. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015 and celebrating its fifth year anniversary in 2020, provide an additional framework for action to support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Therefore 2020 is a pivotal year for accelerating gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

The progress in achieving the BPA's objectives is painfully slow and as projected it will take many more years to close the global gender gap and a few hundred years to achieve economic gender parity. Be that as it may, Pacific countries are focused on accelerating the gender equality agenda and are exploring all avenues and innovative measures to prioritise accelerated action.

Achieving gender equality and women's economic empowerment requires transformative economic and social policy agendas that are firmly anchored within a human rights framework.

Greater efforts are essential to mobilise and increase domestic and international resources for gender equality, including official development assistance.

The full and equal participation of women at all levels of decision-making to influence the planning, implementation and monitoring of policies, is essential.

Achieving gender equality requires the involvement of everyone, and is the responsibility of all stakeholders.



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