

this issue

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Limited economic opportunities for women **P.2**

Women in decision making **P.3**

Commitments, actions and challenges **P.4**

PUTTING GENDER EQUALITY CENTRE STAGE IN THE PACIFIC

With **economic growth** and rising household incomes remaining elusive in many Pacific Island Countries, it is long past time to **reap the benefits** that economic **empowerment of women** can bring to individual women, their families and to the economy as a whole.



Gender inequality is both a human rights issue and a serious constraint to inclusive and equitable sustainable development. Addressing it will enable better outcomes for economic growth, social development and for the environment. Although many commitments to achieving gender equality have been made by Pacific Island governments at global, regional and national levels, progress has been poor. Violence against women in the Pacific is at alarming levels and the Pacific region is the worst in the world in terms of women's representation in national parliaments.

'Some Forum Island Countries have made progress towards greater gender equality and the empowerment of women. However, the pace has been slow and inconsistent across all FICs'¹

Limited Economic Opportunities for Women

Progress has been made in getting more girls in school and getting them to stay longer. In most PICs, girls stay at school longer than boys and achieve better results. The "Gender Parity Index" for most countries is above 1 in secondary education.

This good progress in education has not translated into increased economic opportunities and employment for women. Labour market surveys show that while women's share of the labour force is increasing, it is consistently lower than that of men. Relatively few women reach senior roles in the private or public sectors or own businesses. In Fiji, only 19% of businesses are registered to women and most of those are micro and small businesses. Much of Pacific women's employment is informal, insecure and largely unregulated - protective legislation is weak or absent and women typically face discrimination in many forms.

Pacific women are significant private sector players, though mostly in informal activities. They are frequently home-based

focusing on subsistence agriculture, marketing of agricultural products, and petty trading.²

In Vanuatu, 90% of the private sector is comprised of informal businesses, with women heading 60% of them. The main income activity of many women is market trading. Women constitute 87% of market vendors in Fiji. The Honiara central market in the Solomon Islands has an annual turnover of around US\$10-16 million. 90% of market vendors are women³. In addition to the roles women play in productive employment, women do more household and reproductive work, and have less leisure time, than men. A study in Fiji found that when household work was included, women worked between 26-31% more than men.⁴

Gender Parity in Secondary Education – more than 1 means more girls than boys

Country	Secondary	
	Lower	Upper
Cook Islands	1.11	1.4
Fiji	1.05	1.18
Kiribati	0.99	1.21
Marshall Islands	1.00	1.03
Micronesia (FSM)	0.99	1.06
Nauru	1.16	1.2
Niue	1.45	2.56
Palau	0.93	1.01
Papua New Guinea	0.71	0.57
Samoa	1.00	1.24
Solomon Islands	0.96	0.74
Timor-Leste	1.03	0.98
Tokelau	0.92	0.89
Tonga	0.97	1.1
Tuvalu	0.98	0.98
Vanuatu	1.05	0.93

Source: ESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2012 (based on Gross enrolment ratios)

Why do we care about women's empowerment?

Women's empowerment contributes to economic growth.

Marginalisation of women in Pacific island labour markets reduces the labour 'talent pool'.

The high level of violence against women is a major barrier to development.

How do PICs compare with the rest of the world in terms of economic opportunity for women?

The Economist Intelligence Unit's Women's Economic Opportunity Index⁵ included six Pacific island countries (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu) for the first time in 2012.

Country	Rank out of 128
Fiji	81 st
Samoa	99 th
Vanuatu	106 th
Tonga	110 th
Timor Leste	111 th
Solomon Islands	124 th
Papua New Guinea	125 th

Source: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012

In a special box on Pacific islands, the report remarks that “the islands congregate at the bottom in property ownership and access to finance as well as in the implementation and enforcement of the labour conventions of equal pay for equal work and non-discrimination. Legislation against violence toward women is weak and domestic abuse is pervasive and persistent.”

Violence against women is a serious manifestation of gender inequality and an abuse of fundamental human rights; and a demonstration of the persistence of patriarchy.

In the Solomon Islands, data indicate that 64% of ever-partnered women aged between 15 and 49 reported experiencing physical and/or sexual partner violence in the previous 12 months⁶. For the same age-group in Kiribati the incidence was 68%⁷, in Vanuatu 60%⁸ and in Samoa 41%⁹. A similar study in Fiji found the percentage to be 64. These are much higher than the global average of 33%¹⁰.

**“Violence against women is unacceptably high”
– Pacific Leaders, 2012**

Pacific Leaders acknowledge that violence against women is a significant long-term threat to the economic, social and cultural well-being and security of Pacific island countries. It has multiple human rights ramifications, resulting in not only trauma to individual women and girls, their families and their communities, but also leading to productivity losses through resultant health issues, inability to advance in education or training, and loss of employment.

The consequences of violence are far-reaching and are major barriers to development, poverty reduction, and socially inclusive and environmentally friendly societies.

Women in decision making – lowest in the world

Despite many efforts by governments and political parties, women's political representation in Pacific parliaments remains the lowest in the world. The Pacific compares poorly with the world average of 22%¹¹. There are no obvious institutional or legal obstacles to participation but there are many historical, cultural and economic

Percent of Seats held by women in national parliament

Country	2000	2013
Australia	22	25
New Zealand	29	32
Fiji	11	0
Kiribati	5	9
Marshall Islands	0	3
Micronesia (FSM)	0	0
Nauru	0	0
Palau	0	0
Papua New Guinea	2	3
Samoa	8	4
Solomon Islands	2	2
Tonga	0	4
Tuvalu	0	7
Vanuatu	0	0

Source: ESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2013



What can we do?

Temporary Special Measures to raise women's political participation can increase women in decision making which can result in broad gains in women's empowerment.

Gender mainstreaming has had limited impact and needs to be further evaluated to identify constraints to progress.

Highlighting the costs of gender inequality can help build the political will to address it.

The emerging consensus...

“Nothing, arguably, is as important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of political, economic, and social participation and leadership of women.”

-Amartya Sen, *Economist*¹⁴, 1999

“Greater gender equality is.... smart economics, enhancing productivity and improving development outcomes, including prospects for the next generation and for the quality of societal policies and institutions.” - *World Bank*¹⁵, 2012

“Leaders understand that gender inequality is imposing a high personal, social and economic cost on Pacific people and nations, and that improved gender equality will make a significant contribution to creating a prosperous, stable and secure Pacific for all current and future generations.”

- *Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué*¹⁶, 2012

“There is ample evidence that when women are able to develop their full labour market potential, there can be significant macroeconomic gains.”

-*International Monetary Fund*¹⁷, 2013

barriers.

The number of women on private sector boards and senior government decision-making committees is low. A review conducted by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and UN Women on the number of women on the boards of state-owned enterprises in Pacific island countries showed that although all countries had at least some women on boards, they were a very small minority, with some women sitting on multiple boards¹².

Commitments, actions and challenges

Commitments on gender equality, at the national, regional and international levels, abound. In 2012, Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum issued a Gender Equality Declaration stating that they “are concerned that women’s representation in Pacific legislature remains the lowest in the world; violence against women is unacceptably high and that women’s economic opportunities remain limited”.¹³

All but two Pacific island countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The Convention commits governments to undertake all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

Reflecting commitments under CEDAW, most Pacific island countries have national gender policies and gender equality is gaining prominence in national development plans and policies. The persistent challenge is translating these good intentions into results on the ground.

Improving economic opportunities in the formal employment sector has focussed on the removal of obstacles and inequalities that women face. The Cook Islands has the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*, which legislates equality between women and men in the workplace, including through parental leave provisions. Samoa has prohibited sexual harassment in the workplace through its *Labour and Employment Relations Act 2013*. Kiribati, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Tonga are all progressing labour law reform.

Legislation on maternity leave, sexual harassment and gender-based violence is critical to creating enabling environments and making workplaces more accessible for women. Legislation alone, however, is insufficient. Legislation must be enforced and complemented with other measures, such as the provision of services and the funding of women’s collective organizations.

Mainstreaming gender analysis and perspectives into all development and governance processes is universally recognised as a key tool for achieving gender equality. Progress in gender mainstreaming across the public sector in Pacific island countries has, however, been slow. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community has undertaken stocktakes of the gender mainstreaming capacity of nine Pacific Island governments and more are planned. The stocktakes do not review or assess the work of governments, rather they analyse the degree to which there is an enabling environment for mainstreaming to take place. The reviews identified six requirements for gender mainstreaming: legal and policy frameworks; political will; organisational culture; accountability & responsibility; technical capacity; and adequate resources.

Lack of human and financial resources to effectively mainstream gender

All Pacific island governments have a national women's machinery (NWM) that is responsible for addressing gender equality issues. In the Pacific, NWMs are typically only part of the mandate of a ministry and usually only receive a very small share of national budgetary resources. An exception is Kiribati which, in 2013, established a stand-alone Ministry of Women.

Although the level of understanding of gender mainstreaming and the capacity for it differs among Pacific island countries, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community stocktakes found that NWMs generally lack the human and financial resources to effectively mainstream gender.

Many NWMs are still using a 'women in development' approach, which typically involves activities such as distributing sewing machines, providing training for home gardens and handicraft, rather than a 'gender and development' approach which address human rights and gender equality.

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Mainstreaming requires a 'whole of government' approach where every ministry and department makes a conscious effort to integrate gender into its policies and programmes. Despite considerable training in this area, progress is limited.

Progress is being made in addressing violence against women. After years of work, almost all Pacific island countries

have either passed, or have drafts of, family protection legislation that specifically criminalises domestic violence. Implementation of such legislation, policies and action plans remains an ongoing challenge, particularly the provision of appropriate services for women and girls who are the survivors of violence.

Some Pacific island countries have embarked on "temporary special measures" to improve the political representation of women. Efforts have already been made to support women candidates and to provide training in a range of areas including political campaigning. Initiatives include educating women about political campaigning. Yet this has not been enough to address the paucity of women represented in local and national political structures. Samoa is the only Pacific island country that has legislated Temporary Special Measures to promote gender balance in national legislatures. At the sub-national level, there is also progress. Tuvalu has passed a law requiring female representatives on local councils, and Samoa has initiated a programme to appoint a woman representative in every village council. In 2013, the Parliament of Vanuatu unanimously passed legislation amending the Municipalities Act, such that one seat in every ward must be held by a woman.

Moving Forward Faster

As the Pacific Forum 2013 Millennium Development Goal Tracking Report notes, progress towards "gender equality and the empowerment of women... is influenced by a web of intersecting, fluctuating and often conflicting factors... But the most powerful influence of all is political will".²⁰

There are many positive signs that political will for gender equality and women's empowerment is growing. Pacific women have continuously lobbied and advocated for their rights and empower-

Gender mainstreaming is defined by ECOSOC as...

The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is gender equality.¹⁸

ment. Governments have responded, mostly with development partner assistance, by establishing NWMs, reforming legislation, introducing mechanisms to address violence against women and girls, and taking some measures to increase women's political representation.

Much more, however, can and needs to be done to advance the rights of women and girls. The NWMs need to be strengthened and empowered to take a 'whole of government' approach to gender mainstreaming; new labour market and domestic violence legislation needs to be strongly enforced; women need concrete support and recognition of their role in the private sector; and more can be done to implement Temporary Special Measures to get competent women into Parliament.

Above all, moving forward faster on gender equality means looking beyond 'political will' as a reason for slow progress and identifying the cultural and attitudinal issues that may be hindering concerted action.



Solomon Islands Public Service Commission—gender mainstreaming

In 2013, Solomon Islands adopted an innovative approach to gender mainstreaming across government by including a gender equality related set of performance indicators in Permanent Secretaries' contracts. Permanent Secretaries have to demonstrate 'evidence of gender sensitivity within the recruitment and selection process in the Ministry'; and 'zero tolerance' of workplace harassment, including sexual harassment. They will also be required to report on their ministry's progress on gender mainstreaming as part of annual reporting processes.¹⁹

Women in Parliament in Samoa

In 2013, the Samoan Parliament passed the Constitution Amendment Act that provides for a minimum of 10% of national parliament seats to be held by women. If five or more women are elected to the national Parliament in any given election, the quota is met. If, however, less than five women succeed in winning parliamentary seats, the female candidates with the highest percentage of votes will be appointed to the national parliament, increasing the total number of seats to a maximum of 54.

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About UNESCAP Pacific Office

We work with Pacific island countries to promote sustainable development through:

- a. conducting research on economic and social issues relevant to policy makers;
- b. promoting regional cooperation and sharing knowledge and good practices;
- c. providing regional policy advisory services;
- d. building institutional capacity through training workshops; and
- e. assisting policy implementation through pilot projects.

ESCAP Pacific Office policy briefs aim to take stock of current issues that face Pacific island policy-makers in their quest to achieve the sustainable development of their countries.

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