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Advancing gender equality at SPC through a flagship programme

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Summary

1. SPC and its members are committed to advancing gender equality, to ensure that Pacific women and girls in all their diversity are safe and have equitably share in resources, opportunities and decision-making, with men and boys. This commitment is articulated in numerous regional frameworks including the Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018-2030 (PPA), the Outcomes of the 14th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, and the Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration as well as global commitments like the SDGs and national sustainable development plans and gender equality policies.
2. The SPC strategic plan 2022-2031 concentrates on seven interconnected Key Focus Areas, requiring integrated and interconnected activity and outcome delivery, while enhancing the technical and scientific capability that we are known for, our relationships across the region, and beyond, that shape how we work.
3. The importance of including **human rights, gender equality and social inclusion, cultural development** and the relationship of people to their environment into all aspects of SPC's work. SPC has taken steps in this direction, through establishing integrated programmes called 'flagship programmes' which are multi-dimensional and cross-sectional. These flagships are focused on advancing Gender Equality, Oceans, Food Systems and Climate Change.

Purpose of the paper

4. The purpose of this briefing paper is to provide information on the work SPC is doing to develop its integrated programme to support commitments on gender equality through a Gender Equality Flagship. It will also highlight the importance of addressing gender equality and women's empowerment in the fisheries sector.
5. **Definition:** Flagship programming is defined by SPC as: Significant, scalable programmes for the key areas of SPC's cross-cutting work. They bring together and connect capabilities and resources – the projects, funding and people – from across the organization to achieve collective impact in the key strategic areas, in the strategic plan.

Snapshot on gender equality in the Pacific

6. The PPA notes that Pacific women and girls have experienced considerable improvements in certain areas of their lives. Their access to both education and health care has significantly improved. Nevertheless, countries and territories in the Pacific region share several challenges to achieving gender equality.
7. The region has made little progress on Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality, reflecting the most recent regional review report on progress towards the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Successive national and regional reports illustrate that that attention, resources and capacity committed to gender equality have been insufficient to achieve substantive gains.
8. Pervasive problems remain, including vulnerability to poverty; high levels of violence against women and girls; limited access to reproductive health services; increasing rates of non-communicable diseases; and low levels of political participation.

9. Government departments in charge of women's affairs/gender equality are typically under-resourced and understaffed and often do not have the capacity to effectively implement their mandate, especially that of working across the whole of government to integrate gender perspectives.
10. Although collection of data on gender gaps is improving, there is little analysis or use of the data to inform policy or programme development and implementation.
11. The impact of these multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral factors on achievement of equality and the advancement of women and girls across PICTs calls for a regional action to accelerate the implementation of gender equality commitments so that women and girls can develop their full potential and have equal access to opportunities, with resulting benefits for the whole of society.

Overview of the SPC Gender Equality Flagship

12. SPC has a two-pronged approach on addressing gender equality. First, internally it is strengthening its institutional framework and mechanisms to support and empower its female workforce through the Women in Leadership (WIL) programme. Second, there are various gender equality programmes underway across divisions which serve its members, this includes the AUD 56.8 million Pacific Women Lead at SPC programme. The efforts are being consolidated and further strengthened under SPC's Gender Flagship which is being designed and finalised by mid-2023.
13. The Gender Equality Flagship will provide an over-arching framework for action on the cross-cutting issue of gender inequality. It will serve to connect the critical resources (projects, funding, and people) that support gender equality in pursuit of the goals outlined in SPC's Strategic Plan 2022–2031 and the international, regional and national commitments made by SPC members.
14. **The proposed dimensions of the Gender Flagship are below.** The annexure to this paper provides the rationale for each dimension:
 - Leadership and decision-making
 - Gender-based violence
 - Economic empowerment and livelihoods
 - Health
 - Social/human capital/capabilities (education, employment, etc)
 - Gender research, data and innovation
 - Resilience and climate action
 - Governance and institutional mechanisms, and coordination

Advantages of a Gender Flagship led by SPC

15. This flagship will strengthen SPC's organisation-wide capabilities in advancing gender equality and enhance the value of the resources SPC is investing and mobilising towards gender equality, together with SPC members.
16. Integrated programme for gender equality is to connect existing resources and capabilities to try and 'shift the dial' on an entrenched problem of widespread inequality in the region.
17. The visibility and coordination of SPC gender equality action through the flagship will maximise SPC's impact and ability to support our members to meet their commitments.

18. Ultimately, through this flagship, SPC seeks to serve the most marginalised women and girls of our region.

Importance of supporting gender equality and women's empowerment in the fisheries sector

19. The 2023 UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) study titled *Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH)*¹ estimated 44.7 million women worldwide participate in small-scale fisheries value chains or engage in subsistence activities, which translates into 39.6 percent of the total people active in the subsector. Women represent 15.4 percent of total employment in the pre-harvest segment of the small-scale fisheries value chain (e.g. gear fabrication and repair, bait and ice provisioning, boat-building), 18.7 percent in the harvesting segment (including vessel-based and non-vessel-based activities), 49.8 percent in the post-harvest segment (e.g. processing, transporting, trading, selling) and 45.2 percent of the total actors engaged in small-scale fisheries subsistence activities.
20. Women in many contexts including here in the Pacific, have less access to small-scale fisheries, but also stand to significantly benefit from that access, with broad societal implications for food security and nutrition and poverty alleviation. Women continue to be under-represented in small-scale fisheries governance systems, and those who do participate are typically only able to engage in limited ways. Barriers include gender-blind small-scale fisheries policy, and lack of capacity to implement existing policy.
21. The IHH study and other assessments over the years highlight the significant contribution of women to inshore fishing activities, such as reef gleaning for invertebrates, the preparation of food gathered during fishing activities for sale and other post-harvest activities along the fisheries value chain, including marketing². These reports also show women are responsible for a significant amount of inshore fisheries' catches mainly for subsistence purposes to ensure food security. Women also make up a significant proportion of the workforce in tuna supply and value chains.
22. Despite the extensive amount of fisheries studies conducted and the recognition of the significant role women play in the sector there is consensus that there are still limited data available to measure the full extent of women's engagement in fisheries. The IHH study illustrates that gender-disaggregated fisheries data are still rare, especially in official national-level fisheries statistics. Gender disaggregation should be the minimum requirement for all monitoring and research that informs fisheries policies and programmes.
23. Gender-blind data or biased data collection methodologies overlook women in fisheries, obscuring the full contributions of small-scale fisheries towards the realization of the SDGs and towards achieving gender-inclusive fisheries policies and practices, as called for by the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines).
24. Fisheries development interventions are yet to shift focus towards women fishers and fish worker's needs (e.g. more support needs expressed by women for fish handling training, improved marketing or financial literacy). Increased attention is also needed for women

¹ [Illuminating Hidden Harvests \(IHH\) study by FAO and World Fish 2023](#)

² Refer to the [Gender and Fisheries Desk-Review 2019](#) and the [SPC Women in Fisheries Bulletin](#) published regularly.

dominated fisheries and related management needs, e.g. invertebrates. These are often not counted because of perceived low economic value despite their huge contributions towards socio-economic benefits, food security and health (nutrition).

25. Another area that is highlighted as a main barrier towards achieving equality and ensuring gender responsive policy frameworks is women's participation in decision-making many PICTs. Discriminatory practices based on traditional and cultural norms remain the biggest challenge to women's equal participation with men in decision-making the access, use and management of marine resources, in particular at community level.
26. Women tend to succeed best when forming collectives or work together as a group or cluster when fishing. This gives women a sense of protection and power and the opportunity for a collective voice in fishing (SPC, WiFN-Fiji, 2018). There is a need to make sure that women have equal and direct access to, and control over, resources. Women's unpaid work burden (i.e. family care responsibilities) needs to be taken into consideration and their participation recorded with the aim of translating these into supporting systems. Over time, there have been rapid changes in the division of labour in some countries, notably in Palau, Solomon Islands and Fiji.
27. **Some interventions by SPC** - SPC is supporting initiatives to support gender equality and women's empowerment in the fisheries sector through the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme and its many regional and national partners. Some highlights of the work undertaken and in progress are:
 - Coastal fisheries management – promoting community-based forms of marine resource management and issues around gender sensitive and participatory facilitation of community-based fisheries management interventions.
 - Socio-economics and research: integrating GESI lenses into socio-economic surveys and focused country gender and fisheries assessments.
 - Livelihoods: women's economic empowerment and gendered value chains, shifting focus to support women dominated fisheries such as mud crab, aquaculture farming, sea grapes, shellfish collection and supporting decent employment for women and men in the tuna industry.
 - Capacity building: national; and regional training and mentoring fisheries agencies, including tool development (handbook coastal and handbook for tuna fishery in the process)
 - Policy and law: Supporting gender strategy for Solomon Islands fisheries, review of gender and human rights in fisheries legislation³.

³ [Gender and human rights in coastal fisheries and aquaculture: A comparative analysis of legislation in Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu](#)

Annexure



Leadership and decision-making

Gender equality in leadership and decision making is necessary for poverty alleviation, and promoting the social and economic wellbeing of women, girls and their families. The Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration highlights the importance of national policy action that supports the participation of women at all levels of leadership and decision making. Strengthened engagement of women will go a long way to ensure social inclusion and to drive advocacy for social justice and transformative change to systems and structures including institutional mechanisms.

Three major issues include the underrepresentation of women in politics and national parliaments in the region, inequalities in formal employment where men outnumber women 2 to 1 and in Melanesia 3 to 1, and high rates of violence against women which are estimated at upwards of 60% Melanesia and greater than 40% Polynesia and Micronesia. For this reason, targeted interventions are needed. This dimension recognizes that strong institutions and systems require equitable representation of all genders and is aligned with SDG 5 Gender Equality and Women’s empowerment and SDG 16 Peace, Justice & Strong institutions.

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence continues to be one of our region's gravest manifestations of human rights violations. The COVID-19 pandemic further catalysed an increase in the rates of violence for women and children. Nascent investment in sectors not traditionally targeted are starting to show signs of societal norms transformation. These sectors are education, religion, culture and sports and this flagship wishes to increase investment in these approaches whilst not compromising on investments in legal reforms, legal services and survivor-centric services.

Despite the substantial work invested in establishing and strengthening support services for survivors of gender-based violence and the various awareness programs implemented in countries, a sustained change in the rates of gender-based violence requires continued support that ensures that impacts focus on behaviour and change in social norms. There needs to be collaborative work between

governments, CSOs and development partners to address the problem of gender-based violence to ensure that survivors have access to quality support services regardless of their location. Finally, to ensure that the high rates of gender-based violence in our region are reduced over the long term, there must be an emphasis on working with men and boys.

Economic empowerment and livelihoods

A crucial lever for gender equality for the Blue Pacific continent is women's economic empowerment. This needs to be built on broader intergenerational benefits for girls and women, recognising that when women work and participate in economic enterprising activities and decisions, our economies grow. Hinged on this, is girls' and women's educational and learning pathways to creates opportunities for inclusive economic growth and to endeavour to close the gender gap.

Structural changes need to occur to reshape power dynamics and unlock prospects that offer different perspectives of livelihoods and welfare. That is, moving beyond the cash-based narrative of traditional economics and embracing a more holistic approach that embraces women's ability to participate and lead in markets; their ability to access and/or manage productive natural resources, including household food security; their role in preserving culture and traditions coupled with innovative ideas; have access to decent work and pay; and be able to have meaningful and effective participation at decision-making levels from household and local communities to national efforts and beyond.

Health

The goal to ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages is a universal one and yet national policies that advance women's holistic health needs, continue to show critical gaps. Pacific people face a number of challenges when it comes to women's holistic health needs. These challenges stem from socio-cultural norms and behaviours combined with limited investment and prioritisation on women's health.

Aspirations of the *Women's Health* dimension focuses on an increased effort in prioritising women's health on national development agendas founded on evidence that is current and relevant. A robust environment which supports women's health will ensure that women and men are equally able to access relevant and timely information about their health and well-being; that services and infrastructure are sensitive to the needs of women and men equally and that the peculiar health needs of women and how these needs evolve within the social context of the pacific region are realised.

Social/human capital/capabilities (education, employment, etc.)

Women, young people and other marginalised groups have the right to equitable access of social services and economic opportunities through their knowledge, skills, and health invested in and accumulated throughout their lives. Access to information, services, training, and opportunities in other sectors is also critical. It is essential to identify gender gaps; analyse how gender power relations affect access to services, opportunities, and outcomes; and design interventions to meet the different needs of women, men, girls, and boys. Gender-based stereotypes, discrimination, and deficiencies in service quality need to be addressed to enhance human capital. This includes capacities attributable to collective know-how over which no single individual has command: custom and culture. It rests on intangibles such as ethics, esteem of learning, group loyalty, and social trust.

Gender research, data and innovation

Quality gender research and data drives policy to practice. Access to and use of quality gender data and research is crucial and underpins evidence-based gender equality policy and programming decisions and implementation across the flagship. Research exploring specific gender equality issues is complemented by research that integrates gender dimensions. These ‘twin tracks’ will innovate and transform how gender data and statistics are promoted, created, and used, utilising a combination of user-producer engagement to address data needs that directly respond to policy needs as well as promoting analysis and use of existing gender-sensitive and disaggregated data to monitor progress and inform decision-making.

Resilience and climate action

Climate change affects women and men differently and those differences are due to their respective roles and being dependent on men. Gender inequality result in women not having the option to adapt and take part in the decision making. To address such inequality, its critical to identify what these institutional systems, behaviours, perceptions look like and what supporting resources is lacking. Across sectors, women’s innovations and expertise have transformed lives and livelihoods, and increased climate resilience and overall well-being.

Invigorate dialogue tied to accountability processes to foster thriving communities for risks reductions, and strengthening preparedness, responses and recovery that amplifies resilient - including harnessing cultural and indigenous knowledges that not only values but see the civic duties of men, boys, women, and girls as co-stewards alongside the relevant stakeholders in responding to inter-alia, implementation of Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP), 2017 – 2030. Recognising the important contributions of women as decision makers, stakeholders, educators, carers and experts across sectors and at all levels can lead to successful, long-term solutions to climate change.

Governance institutional mechanisms and coordination

Advancing gender equality within the rich tapestry of interdependent sustainable development issues in our Blue Pacific Continent requires a high degree of coordination between various levels of governance and institutional mechanisms. The value and utility of existing governance and institutional mechanisms for gender equality underscores our commitment to realising global gender equality standards.

In recognition of the importance of strengthening confidence in our governance and institutional mechanisms for gender equality, future incentives must converge on fostering coordination between governments, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, and other non-state actors (including development agencies). In addition, they must accommodate contextualised and people-centred approaches that are sustainable, responsive, and sensitive to the needs and rights of Pacific peoples. The implementation of the 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy provides avenues for improved coordination within our region with a wealth of opportunities for gender equality integration.