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**GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN AGRICULTURE AND
RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

(Paper prepared by the Secretariat)

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide information on the findings of and key recommendations from the country gender assessments in agriculture and rural sectors produced by the Social Development Programme of SPC in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu

Background

2. Women play a prominent role in agricultural production throughout the Pacific. Whether this is in subsistence farming to feed their immediate families or growing cash crops to sell in the market, women's agricultural labour is an indispensable part of food production and consumption practices in the Pacific. The ways in which Pacific Island women participate in agriculture varies by island and local cultural norms, yet women's critical contributions in planting, tending, and harvesting crops and edible marine life sustain the majority of families throughout the region¹.

3. The increasing global concerns about food security are even more urgent in the Pacific due to the impacts of climate change, and as we work towards becoming self-sufficient with respect to food production, and to be resilient in times of natural disasters, it is important to consider the gendered aspects of agriculture and rural life. This is to enable resilient communities and a sustainable future for Pacific Island agriculture and livelihoods of the majority of Pacific Island citizens. In the State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011, FAO estimated that closing the gender gap could increase yields on women-run farms by 20-30% and this could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5- 4%². Subsequently, FAO in collaboration with its partners globally and in the region including with SPC, are increasingly exploring ways to ensure the key roles and responsibilities of women, their priorities, needs and concerns are heard and reflected in planning, budgeting and decision-making in the agriculture sector.

¹ UNWomen, 2012, Rural Pacific Island Women and Agriculture, Evidence, Data and Knowledge in Pacific Island Countries

² FAO. 2011. The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011. Women in Agriculture: Closing the gender gap for development. Rome.

Country Gender Assessments in Agriculture and Rural Sectors

4. In 2018 SPC partnered with FAO to conduct country gender assessments in agriculture and rural sectors (CGA-ARS) in five Pacific islands countries, namely Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu. The objectives of the assessments were to improve understanding of the gender perspective in rural livelihoods in order to develop effective strategies to support food security, nutrition, and the resilience of Pacific islanders. The CGA-ARS sought to inform the Country Programme Framework (CPF) between FAO and the Governments thereby setting priority areas and activities for FAO assistance in support of the attainment of the country's agriculture, fisheries, natural resources and rural development policy related objectives including food and nutrition security, gender equality and capacity development. More importantly, the assessments were conducted with the intention to inform national level planning and programming in agriculture including fisheries, natural resources and rural development. The CGA-ARS is also in line with the project on Progressing Gender Equality in the Pacific (PGEP), which aimed to support the generation of knowledge and evidence to inform decision making, and the development of gender policies and gender mainstreaming across sectors. PGEP is funded by the Government of Australia and is implemented by SPC through its Social Development Programme. The Assessments were funded by FAO and SPC through PGEP.

Methodology

5. The methodology for the assessments comprised a desk review of policies, strategies, and programs in rural sectors; interviews with senior government representatives (permanent secretaries and directors) and civil society organizations; focus group discussions with farmers in selected sites; and a validation workshop at the country level. Community consultations involved the participation of staff from Ministry of Agriculture and, in Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Tonga, staff from the Ministry responsible for women's affairs. The methodology also included an assessment of the institutional capacity of governments to mainstream gender. For this, SPC used an analytical framework on the enabling environment for mainstreaming gender. The same methodology was also used for conducting national gender stocktakes in 15 Pacific countries and territories between 2010 and 2013³. The stocktake methodology examines the gender responsiveness of the policy framework, the political will, the technical capacity, the allocation of resources, and the organizational culture of government institutions towards addressing enabling gender responsiveness across sectors of government.

6. The assessments provided information on gender roles in rural livelihoods, men's and women's assets and constraints, the capacities of institutions to mainstream gender, and recommendations to empower rural women and address gender issues through rural development initiatives.

Findings from the Countries Gender Assessment in Agriculture and Rural Sectors

Pacific women play a considerable role in agriculture and rural livelihood but their potential is not fully developed because of lack of attention to their contribution to the sector

7. In rural settings, women and men still maintain strict gender roles and division of labour. For example, in the majority of cases, men's work in rural livelihood is more likely to be paid. Men are expected to perform tasks related to clearing land, ploughing, the construction of sheds for livestock and planting and harvesting of crops, fencing grazing land and raising large livestock (cows, horses, goats), fishing, and paid employment. Women are more likely to be involved in unpaid work such as providing care to family members including cleaning and cooking. However, they are also involved in activities generating considerable income for their families such as weeding, watering and maintenance of gardens, including subsistence gardens, post-harvest processing of subsistence and cash crops, raising small animals like poultry, coastal fisheries, production of handcrafts (mats, baskets, sewing, etc.), and small scale marketing of excess produce.

³ For access to these reports go to: <https://www.spc.int/sdp/resources>

8. Nevertheless, women's role in agriculture and other rural livelihood activities is not fully recognized and it is noticeable by their limited access to productive assets, including financial services and development programs. In general, men have more access to machineries and farm equipment; they have greater control over financial assets including family savings and land leases and land ownership, and greater control over community assets through customary institutions.

Mainstreaming gender perspectives in agriculture and other rural sectors is not routinely practiced

9. Overall, in the five countries where the CGAs were conducted, findings showed that agriculture policy frameworks included some commitments for gender equality, but resources were not allocated to implement these policies or commitments. Whilst some agriculture staff recognized gender as a development issue that needed to be addressed in the sector, there appeared to be a lack of understanding or recognition that women's needs may differ to men's needs and an assumption that services delivered by the government benefitted everybody equally. In some instances, staff were not aware that gender inequalities could hinder women from fully benefitting from government support in agriculture development. As a result, organizational culture (or the "way we work") are not as supportive as they can be to mainstream gender; there is very limited collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data and a low recognition of women's role in agriculture. Technical capacity to mainstream gender are very limited, and resources for supporting women in agriculture or for implementing gender responsive agriculture programs are resourced by projects (donors) and not necessarily from core government budgets. In few countries, there are extension officers dedicated to support women's farmers but budget to support their work remain limited.

Nevertheless, there is a growing interest from different sectors to pilot initiatives to support rural women in diversifying their livelihood activities, in value chain development of niche products, and accessing markets.

CGA-ARS Recommendations

10. The following recommendations are formulated to progress gender equality and social inclusion and support the empowerment of rural women through policy, programming, and organizational strengthening.

Increase knowledge on women's role and needs in agriculture and rural sectors

- 1) Improve the collection of data disaggregated by sex, age and rural/urban; and strengthen the analysis of data across sectors to inform policies and programming; and to monitor progress.
- 2) Conduct systematic gender and social analysis of the relevant legislations and policies, including macroeconomic policies, structural reforms, aid and trade agreements, towards addressing barriers to women's access to land; productive assets and economic empowerment.

Implement policies, programs and services that are gender responsive

- 3) Adopt and implement gender mainstreaming strategies in key ministries providing services in the rural sector.
- 4) Design gender-responsive policies and strategies for food security, climate change adaptation and disaster risk management that support women's livelihood activities including in small-scale agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture and cultural industries.
- 5) Strengthen capacity of ministries involved in rural sectors development to mainstream gender and social inclusion across their policies, programs, budgets, and services, including through extension services.

Support the empowerment of rural women in all their diversities and protect their rights

- 6) Increase the participation of rural women in decision-making and the management and governance of natural resources.
- 7) Support the economic empowerment of rural women by improving their access to technical support, extension services, technologies, and transport and increasing investments from the government and private sector in supporting cultural industries and small-scale farming and fisheries.