
*PACIFIC PLATFORM FOR ACTION ON GENDER EQUALITY
AND WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS 2018–2030*

PART I

Prepared by the Pacific Community

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Introduction

In 1994, Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) adopted the first regional instrument to promote gender equality: the Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (PPA). The Platform, which formed the basis of the Pacific region's contribution at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, included 13 critical areas of concern related to health, education and training, economic empowerment, agriculture and fishing, legal and human rights, shared decision-making, environment, culture and the family, mechanisms to promote the advancement of women, violence, peace and justice, poverty, and indigenous people's rights.

The PPA was reviewed in 2004 to assess achievements, challenges and obstacles. The 13 critical areas of concern were then clustered into four strategic themes:

- 1) Mechanisms to promote the advancement of women
- 2) Women's legal and human rights – including targets for the elimination of violence against women, women's political leadership and access to justice
- 3) Women's access to services – with a specific focus on health and education
- 4) Economic empowerment of women

In 2013, the Twelfth Triennial Conference of Pacific Women and the Fifth Pacific Women's Ministerial Meeting called for an independent review of the Revised PPA as part of a process for assessing how the Pacific agenda for women's advancement and gender equality should be taken forward at the end of the term of the RPPA in 2015.

The new Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018–2030 takes into account existing regional and international instruments for promoting gender equality, such as the 2012 Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and commitments made by PICTs to progress gender equality. These 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 (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The objective of the Pacific Platform for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights is to accelerate the implementation of gender commitments at all levels in order to achieve gender equality and the promotion and protection of the human rights of all women and girls, in all their diversity.

This brief has two parts. The first part provides background information on the status of implementation of regional commitments to gender equality, specifically in the critical areas identified by the RPPA. The second part presents the new Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights (PPA 2018–2030), identifying strategic objectives for accelerating progress towards gender equality and the implementation of national and regional commitments, and for achieving meaningful outcomes for women and men in the region.

Background

Challenges to achieving gender equality in Pacific Island countries and territories

Since the adoption of the first PPA in 1994, 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. In some countries, women have greater access to paid employment, and improvements in basic infrastructure have helped reduce the burden of unpaid care work for which women bear most or all responsibility. Women's participation in decision-making and their leadership are progressively being recognised and supported. Nevertheless, countries and territories in the Pacific region share several challenges to achieving gender equality. As a measure of these challenges, the region in general made little progress towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender equality. The 2013 Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report noted that only three Forum member countries were on track to achieving the goal on promoting gender equality and empowering women.¹

In many cases, there is lack of political will to advance gender equality, which may be partly due to the level of understanding of gender equality and its implications for achieving sustainable development goals. The 2015 review of 20 years of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action noted that 'in most PICTs,² attention, resources and capacity committed to gender equality have been insufficient to achieve substantive gains'.³ Pervasive problems remain, including vulnerability to poverty; high levels of violence against women; poor access to reproductive health services; increasing rates of non-communicable diseases; and low levels of political participation.

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. Many government departments have a high turnover of staff. Although collection of data on gender gaps is improving, there is little analysis or use of the data to inform policy or programme development.

Promotion of gender equality concerns everybody – women and girls, men and boys. Yet women and girls continue to be disadvantaged economically, politically and socially by a combination of historical, cultural and religious factors. The impact of these interconnected factors on achievement of equality and the advancement of women and girls across PICTs calls for a regional framework 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.

¹ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2013. 2013 Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report. PIFS, Suva. 106 pp.

² PICTs – Pacific Island countries and territories – refers to the 22 members of the Pacific Community: American Samoa, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna. (Australia and New Zealand are also members of the Pacific Islands Forum.)

³ Pacific Community. 2016. Review of the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005–2015. SPC, Noumea. 43 pp.

What do we mean by gender equality?

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development (OSAGI 2001).

Gender equality means that women and men of all ages, in all their diversity, have equal rights in all areas of life:

- the right to be safe;
- the right to be respected;
- the right to earn incomes;
- the right to express their views and be heard;
- the right to express their gender identity;
- the right to choose how many children they have;
- the right to choose their partner;
- the right to have safe and accessible services and infrastructure for women and men differently abled;
- the right to participate in decision-making and occupy leadership positions;
- the right to decide for themselves the future they want.

Regional commitments to gender equality

The rationale for developing the Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (PPA) in 1994 as a regional platform in addition to the global platform, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), was to ensure it included issues of particular relevance to Pacific women and reflected the context of their lives.

The 2004 review of the PPA, including national and regional achievements, challenges and obstacles, was the basis for the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005–2015 (RPPA). In the revised platform, the PPA's 13 critical areas of concern were clustered under four strategic themes. The intention was to bring new energy to the process by generating more focused and concrete results. The RPPA was also seen as a move away from the approach of 'women in development' to 'gender and development'.

Progress on the RPPA was monitored at three-yearly intervals through country reports and technical briefs presented to the Triennial Conferences of Pacific Women and Pacific Women's Ministerial Meetings. At each of these meetings, further recommendations were incorporated to adapt the RPPA to changing circumstances.

The five-yearly reviews of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action offered another opportunity to analyse progress at the national and regional level in addressing gender equality.



PACIFIC LEADERS GENDER EQUALITY DECLARATION

Gender-responsive government programmes and policies

Increased women's representation in governance and decision-making

Economic empowerment of women

Ending violence against women

Improved health and education outcomes

At the 2012 Pacific Islands Forum meeting, the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) reaffirmed their commitment to six key areas: *ending violence against women; embracing women’s participation in all levels of decision-making; promoting gender-responsive legislation, policies and programmes; economic empowerment; improving reproductive health services for adult and young women; and improving education and training opportunities for girls and women.*

It was recognised that to fulfil this commitment by Forum Leaders, investments in capacity building, and development and resourcing of policies, programmes, implementation and accountability mechanisms were needed to galvanise real progress towards achieving gender equality.⁴

National priorities for achieving gender equality

Most countries now have established government institutions in charge of women’s affairs/gender equality and have developed gender equality policies or are in the process of finalising their policies. PICTs are also increasingly integrating a gender perspective in national development and sector plans. National gender policies prioritise issues related to gender mainstreaming and institutional strengthening, including compliance with CEDAW, ending violence against women, shared decision-making and economic empowerment. Some policies include issues such as climate change, peace building and health.

Review of the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality

Consultations undertaken during the independent review of the RPPA, which was called for by the Twelfth Triennial Conference of Pacific Women and Fifth Pacific Women’s Ministerial Meeting in 2013, found that while some Pacific governments valued the RPPA and felt that it had had an impact at national and regional levels, they did not always use it as a basis for informing policies and programme development. The review found that civil society organisations and the governments of the French territories made most use of the RPPA. When interviewees were asked whether a new regional Pacific Platform for Gender Equality should be developed to replace the RPPA at the end of its term, the response was unanimously positive. Amongst other things, the review recommended that the new instrument should have a monitoring framework with a realistic timeframe and a set of targets and indicators to ensure timely reporting and consistent tracking of progress in the region.

The report of the RPPA review also stated that: ‘Going forward, the regional gender equality agenda will also need to be congruent with the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. Above all, a new Platform must be guided by the parameters contained in the 2014 Framework for Pacific Regionalism, endorsed by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in 2014, where countries are at the front and centre, with development partners providing support.’⁵

⁴ Pacific Islands Forum. 2012. Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration -

<http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/2012%20Forum%20Communique,%20Rarotonga,%20Cook%20Islands%2028-30%20Aug1.pdf>

⁵ Pacific Community. 2016. Review of the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005–2015. SPC, Noumea. 43 pp.

Progress in implementing the thematic areas of the RPPA

Responsibility for implementation

The RPPA and its associated processes refer to implementation at both regional and national levels. Most of the recommendations of the RPPA and of the Triennial Conferences are intended for action by governments. The role of regional organisations is to support government action on the recommendations. The Pacific Community (SPC) and Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) are the main regional bodies responsible for supporting PICTs in implementing the recommendations of the conferences and regional meetings of Ministers for Women. As the following brief overview shows, PICTs have taken many positive steps to advance gender equality in the thematic areas of the RPPA.

Advances in Priority Area 1: Mechanisms to promote the advancement of women

The RPPA identifies six dimensions of effective national mechanisms for the advancement of women:

- 1) A national women's machinery, which is the government ministry, department or office responsible for women and/or gender equality.
- 2) Integration of a gender perspective in policies and planning implemented by other ministries.
- 3) Production and use of gender statistics.
- 4) Technical capacity in gender mainstreaming.
- 5) Processes for monitoring and reporting on progress towards gender equality.
- 6) Partnership with civil society organisations.

❖ *Stocktakes of government capacity to mainstream gender across programmes and services*

Since 2009, SPC has conducted, or supported, a series of stocktakes of government capacity to mainstream gender in 15 PICTs. The findings of the stocktakes indicate that, despite political commitments made to gender equality, a gender perspective is not always integrated in national and sectoral policies and programmes. A few initiatives specifically target women in some sectors, but these are generally ad hoc activities. Gender mainstreaming is often not understood as a cross-cutting issue for which all sectors need to take responsibility. Instead, it is still perceived as primarily the concern of the ministry responsible for women's affairs. In most cases, this situation is due to lack of knowledge and understanding of gender inequality issues and not enough technical capacity in mainstreaming gender.

❖ *Development and review of gender policies and plans*

PICTs have made considerable progress in developing and reviewing national gender policies and plans. All policies have shifted from the approach of 'women in development' to 'gender equality and women's empowerment', with specific targets for addressing the causes of gender inequality. Most policies also support the development of the government's capacity to mainstream gender as a key policy outcome. Revision of these policies has provided an opportunity to adapt the mandate of the government institutions in charge of women's affairs to focus more on a coordination and policy advisory role. This is a major shift for these institutions and they need support from government, civil society organisations and development partners to make the transition, which requires different capacities, adequate resources, and strategic positioning within government.

Government departments/ministries in charge of women's affairs continue to be under-resourced. Most receive less than the recommended one percent of the national budget and have fewer resources than other departments and ministries.

❖ *Data collection and gender statistics*

Data collection is being strengthened and capacity is being built in producing and using gender statistics for policy development and monitoring of progress. Some countries have begun producing sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics, although the processes are not yet systematised. Barriers include lack of training in gender issues for public servants, both at induction and as part of career paths, and the absence of systems that require collective responsibility across government for reporting against gender targets in all sectors. This situation creates difficulties for monitoring and reporting on progress towards gender equality, and also for government reporting against regional and international commitments. The capacity of civil society to advocate for increased government accountability for progress towards gender equality, and systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective across governments through collective responsibility and enhanced ownership, also needs to be strengthened.

❖ *Increasing technical capacity*

In 2013, the University of the South Pacific began offering an online postgraduate certificate in gender studies consisting of two, one-semester courses. The students enrolled are mainly public servants from Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. The course is oversubscribed due to the high demand.

Several initiatives have been taken at the national and regional level across sectors to build the capacity of government staff to mainstream a gender perspective. These initiatives include sessions on raising awareness of gender inequality, gender analysis, gender statistics, and gender budgeting organised by SPC, PIFS, UN Women and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Two major sectoral gender mainstreaming initiatives in the last five years are the regional course on gender in macroeconomics organised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Pacific Gender and Climate Change Toolkit for climate change practitioners, which was developed in a partnership between GIZ (German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH), SPC, SPREP (Pacific Regional Environment Programme), UNDP and UN Women.

Advances in Priority Area 2: Legal and human rights

Many countries have made progress in reviewing their legislation to ensure compliance with CEDAW, and there are encouraging examples of governments acting on discriminatory provisions identified during the gender mainstreaming stocktakes. Revision of customary laws and the practices of traditional (male-dominated) courts is also taking place, for example in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Vanuatu, but this is a much more challenging undertaking.

With the exception of the French territories, the Pacific region has the world's lowest percentage of women representatives in national legislatures. French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna continue to benefit from the French Parity Law introduced in 2000. Other PICTs are considering introducing Temporary Special Measures to provide seats for women, but only Samoa (10%) and PNG's Autonomous Region of Bougainville (8%) have succeeded in doing so at the national level. In 2013, Vanuatu introduced a 30 per cent quota for women's representation in municipal governments.

Violence against women (VAW) is a serious manifestation of gender inequality and a violation of women's human rights. Prevalence studies, using the comprehensive World Health Organization methodology, have been conducted in 11 PICTs. These studies found a higher prevalence of VAW in the Pacific than in most countries of the world where

the same methodology has been applied. The findings of the studies have catalysed action across the Pacific region and legislation and policies addressing VAW have been put in place, although gaps remain in enforcing the legislation.

Discussions of the RPPA at the Triennial Conference of Pacific Women have resulted in comprehensive recommendations for a multi-sectoral response to VAW by governments, civil society and donors to provide:

- high-quality medical and mental health services for survivors;
- safe, temporary accommodation for survivors and their children;
- training for justice sector personnel to improve prosecution and women's access to justice;
- education for communities and youth to prevent VAW;
- involvement of men and boys in prevention activities;
- media campaigns to change attitudes;
- consideration of the needs of vulnerable groups, such as women with disabilities, women in rural or remote areas, women living with HIV, and the lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender community.

Many PICTs have made some progress in these areas, but a great deal of work remains to be done⁶ in terms of law enforcement in general and support services for victims of violence, especially in the outer islands and remote areas.

Advances in Priority Area 3: Women's access to services

One of the specific thematic areas of the RPPA is women's access to health and education services.

❖ Health

The RPPA recommended improvements in health services for women including:

- a country gender policy and plan for the health sector;
- affordable and accessible medical and reproductive health care;
- health education for the public;
- prevention programmes, especially for non-communicable diseases;
- revision of legislation relating to reproductive health;
- cancer screening;
- special attention to the needs of women with disabilities;
- more attention to the reproductive and sexual health needs of adolescents and young people.

It is noted that progress has been made across the areas listed above, although cancer screening and treatment for both men and women are rare due to cost and the technologies involved. Provision of accessible health care for rural and remote populations remains a challenge.

⁶ Other aspects of legal and human rights mentioned in the RPPA are not regularly reported on to the Triennials.

There has been notable progress in maternal health during the period of the RPPA, including a reduction in maternal mortality in line with target 5.A of Millennium Development Goal 5. An increase in antenatal care coverage and attendance of trained personnel at births has been reflected in lower rates of maternal mortality in some PICTs. However, there are significant variations and access to reproductive health services is difficult in countries with large and dispersed populations living in remote outer islands or mountainous areas. Evidence shows a high unmet need for family planning in most PICTs, especially among marginalised or vulnerable groups and young people.⁷ Contraceptive prevalence rates have remained below 50 per cent and, in some countries below 33 per cent, while preventable maternal deaths continue to occur in some countries. Women's sexual health is still at risk through high levels of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and the rise of HIV in some parts of the region.⁸ The 2015–2019 Pacific Sexual Health and Wellbeing Shared Agenda provides guidance for progress in this area, especially for youth services. Non-communicable diseases are now the biggest threat to women's health in the Pacific region. In addition, the burden of caring for others suffering non-communicable diseases falls mainly on women. Women are affected by high rates of cervical cancer and obesity.⁹

❖ Education

Most PICTs are on track to achieve, or come close to achieving, the MDG targets of universal primary education and gender parity of enrolments at primary and secondary levels. However, in several countries, more boys than girls are dropping out of secondary education. At university level, female enrolments at the University of the South Pacific, for example, exceeded those of males, although there is still strong stereotyping in the courses chosen, with women under-represented in scientific and technical fields and other forms of technical and vocational training. Efforts are being made to address this gap in education for girls including through policy decisions made by Forum Ministers of Education.

Several countries have noted with concern that women's achievements in education have not translated into a noticeable increase in women's economic empowerment through employment or entrepreneurship (SPC, 2014a: 22).

Advances in Priority Area 4: Women's economic empowerment

With generally low economic growth in the region in recent years, and an overall lack of job opportunities, women's participation in paid employment has lagged. In most PICTs, in the non-agricultural sector, there are twice as many men as women in paid employment. Most women also occupy lower level positions in the public sector, which is usually the largest employer. Nevertheless, in some countries, a growing number of women hold mid to senior level public service positions.¹⁰

⁷ Hayes, G. and Robertson, A. 2010. Family planning in Asia and the Pacific: Addressing the challenges. UNFPA.

⁸ World Health Organization, Western Pacific Region. Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS: South Pacific situation summary. http://www.wpro.who.int/southpacific/programmes/communicable_diseases/sexually_transmitted_infections/page/en/ (Accessed July 2017.)

⁹ PIFS and SPC. Addressing inequalities: The case of Small Island Developing States in the Pacific. Issues paper for Small Islands Developing States Conference, August, 2013.

¹⁰ PIFS and SPC. Addressing inequalities: The case of Small Island Developing States in the Pacific. Issues paper for the Small Islands Developing States Conference, August, 2013.

Some PICTs have begun to address barriers to women's economic participation as employees or entrepreneurs by removing discriminatory workplace legislation.¹¹ However, the majority of economically active women participate in the informal economy. While this gives them more flexibility in terms of their time and ability to attend to other tasks, disadvantages include low earnings and the absence of any form of protection, including social protection. Women are frequently home-based workers relying on subsistence agriculture, marketing of agricultural products, and petty trading.¹²

Challenges for women's economic participation have begun to be addressed through efforts at both regional and national level. In 2008, UN Women began a four-year programme of working with local partners in PNG and Solomon Islands to improve safety and facilities for women vendors in markets. A second six-year phase of the programme began in 2013, with Fiji and Vanuatu added to the countries targeted, and activities being extended to cover roadside and rural market places.

In 2010, the 11th Triennial called on the Forum Economic Ministers' Meetings (FEMM) to introduce a standing agenda item on women's economic empowerment. The last three annual Action Plans for FEMM have included specific priorities for women's economic empowerment, such as improving financial literacy and access to finance, developing more gender-sensitive data systems, elimination of discriminatory practices in pay and working conditions, and prevention of sexual harassment. FEMM has also encouraged the development of economic empowerment strategies for women and their integration in national development plans.

The Twelfth Triennial drew attention to the needs of women working in markets and in other informal types of work for access to resources for production, financial literacy and safe working conditions.

Emerging issues for achievement of gender equality

The way the RPPA works allows emerging issues to be addressed. These issues are important but have not received the same sustained attention as the RPPA's priority areas. For example, climate change and disability have only recently been added to the discussion.

Poverty is an increasing concern, and women and children are at greater risk, especially in urban areas where women's role in subsistence food growing is no longer a viable survival measure. Some countries are introducing social protection programmes, but slow economic growth limits the extent to which this can make a difference.

Labour migration is one means by which families increase their income, and remittances make a substantial contribution to the economies of many PICTs. More information is now available about the positive and negative impacts of migration on women.

Climate change is an urgent concern for PICTs. Women's full participation in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction is essential, given their knowledge and skills in natural resource management and energy use. However, their engagement in climate change discussions and the integration of a gender perspective in climate change policies and programmes remain marginal.

¹¹ For example, the Cook Islands Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012; Fiji Employment Relations Promulgation 2008; Kiribati Employment (Amendment) Act 2008; Vanuatu Employment (Amendment) Act 2008; Samoa Labour and Employment Relations Act 2013.

¹² International Finance Corporation. 2010. Economic Opportunities for Women in the Pacific. IFC, Washington. 92 pp.

http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/cf54648049fb11dba2b0ebd1a5d13d27/IFC_Economic+Opp+for+Women+in+the+Pacific.pdf?MOD=AJPERES

Recommendations from the Review

The following recommendations were intended to serve as a basis for the prospective phase of the RPPA review process, and will feed into the actual content, structure and processes for a future regional gender instrument. The new framework should raise the profile of gender equality in the region and help firmly establish in the minds of leaders and development practitioners at every level that gender equality is not only a human right but also a central element of sustainable development.

- 1) SPC, in partnership with PIFS, should coordinate the development of a regional platform or plan of action for gender equality and the advancement of women, with input from all PICTs, that aligns with the SAMOA Pathway and the proposed new stand-alone goal for gender equality in the SDGs, and that also incorporates gender-related issues affecting all other SDGs, including any relating to development effectiveness. This could be framed as a revision or expansion of the PLGED, or as a new instrument.
- 2) The new instrument should have a monitoring framework with a realistic timeframe and set of targets and indicators that allow for the gathering of data by participatory action research to avoid reliance on expensive national surveys conducted at long intervals. Monitoring and reporting against that framework should be enabled by a robust coordination mechanism.
- 3) A clear role for civil society organisations should be included in the accountability arrangements, which should be supported with resources.
- 4) SPC and PIFS should communicate on how the revised RPPA can be made operational through the Framework for Pacific Regionalism to institutionalise gender equality processes as an overarching regional theme for the regular attention of national and regional leaders.
- 5) The CROP¹³ Gender and Development Working Group should establish a sub-group to develop a harmonised reporting framework to lessen the burden of reporting on countries.
- 6) A future platform should embrace an explicit rights-based approach and rights-based language, and should be inclusive of diverse groups, including (but not exclusively) young women, women with disabilities, and women with diverse sexual orientations.
- 7) A high-level champion/ambassador should be engaged to promote the new gender equality instrument.
- 8) A communication strategy should be developed to disseminate the outcomes of each Triennial Conference of Pacific Women to maximise uptake by relevant sectors.

¹³ CROP – Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific.

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