



Gender equality – Emerging issues for Pacific Island women

Recommendations from the 12th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women and Fifth Pacific Women's Ministerial Meeting

(Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 20–25 October 2013)

From 20 to 24 October 2013, more than 200 people met in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, to discuss how commitments towards gender equality in the region have progressed. The overall aim of the conference was to bring together government ministers and senior decision makers, development partners, research institutions and civil society organisations to review and develop strategies for accelerating progress in the achievement of gender equality and women's human rights in our region. This is in line with *The Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005 to 2015* and other regional commitments on gender equality, including most recently the *Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration* of 2012.

12th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women

With the theme *Celebrating our Progress, Shaping our World*, the 12th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women was the biggest on record; representatives of 21 SPC member countries and territories attended. The conference was convened by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and hosted by the Government of Cook Islands.

There are areas of progress in achieving women's human rights and gender equality in Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs). More and more countries have adopted laws to protect women and children against domestic violence; there is a better understanding of the need to integrate a gender perspective across all sectors of development; there are new initiatives promoting women's political leadership; overall, women's health and women's access to education are improving; and women's contribution in the economy has started to be recognised. However, there is still a long road to travel before Pacific Island women have all their human rights protected, benefit equally from development outcomes, and can fulfil their aspirations. The 12th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women made a number of recommendations regarding the priority areas to accelerate gender equality in the region, notably in the sector of education.

This brief presents the regional overview on emerging issues affecting Pacific women and the recommendations from the Conference made through the outcomes document.

Emerging issues for Pacific Island women

2013 Regional Overview

KEY GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES IN THE REGION

There is a wealth of qualitative and quantitative research on temporary migration, also known as circular migration, in the Pacific. It is widely recognised that labour migration flows and trends are influenced by gender dynamics in the countries of origin and destination, but there is very little emphasis on the gender dimensions of migration in the research. While migration can provide new opportunities to improve women's lives and change oppressive gender relations, it can also perpetuate and entrench traditional roles and inequalities that expose women to new vulnerabilities as a result of the precarious legal status of the migrant and high levels of exclusion and isolation. These vulnerabilities can be severe amongst women migrants in unsupervised and unregulated sectors, such as domestic work and care-giving, and can include domestic violence, exploitation, abuse, and labour rights violations. Other negative aspects to labour migration are a lack of transparency and information, including information on processes, regionally and at national level; inadequate policies regarding migration; illegal practices; limited legal rights; and little support for migrant women workers generally, which increases their vulnerability to exploitation and violence in receiving communities.

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) sets out measures for national and international action to promote the advancement of women. Whilst it is recognised that few women have attained positions at a decision-making level or are in a position to influence policy, the BPFA emphasises the need for negative or degrading images of women to be addressed in order to paint a balanced picture of the diverse lives and contributions women make to society. The media and ICT are obvious tools for working in this area. There is also a need to consider how ICT, women's media networks and government can collaborate to overcome the perpetuation of gender-based discrimination and the denial of the rights of women and girls, which remain the single most widespread driver of inequalities in today's world.

The Pacific region is highly vulnerable to earthquakes, tsunami and other natural hazards, both climate-related and of geological origin. This is due to the small and geographically dispersed characteristics of most PICTs, the high proportion of the population and economic infrastructure that are located in hazard prone coastal regions, and the high dependence of economic systems on the health and productivity of natural ecosystems. This can have adverse effects on livelihoods and human welfare, affecting particularly the more vulnerable populations such as people with disabilities, the elderly and children. This is exacerbated by social and gender inequalities.

Women and girls with any form of disability are among the more vulnerable and marginalised of society. There is an urgent need for all policy-making and programming to take them into account and address their concerns. Special measures are needed at all levels to integrate them into the mainstream of development. Over the years, the concerns and realities of women with disabilities have been raised through research, by civil society and in policy-making, but this has been sporadic and progress has been slow. In August 2013, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders, in recognition of this, called for accelerated efforts to fulfil the Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration priorities and, among other things, reiterated support for women with disabilities in the regional agenda.

Gender impact of temporary labour migration

The Regional Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme was introduced in 2007 to allow for the temporary entry of offshore workers to work in the New Zealand horticulture and viticulture industries. Five Pacific states

were selected for the scheme: Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Facilitation measures were developed to support the implementation of the policy. Among other things, the RSE scheme aimed to create a sustainable seasonal labour supply, protect New Zealanders' access to seasonal employment, minimise immigration risk, and contribute to New Zealand's broad objectives in the region with regard to encouraging Pacific economic development, regional integration and stability.¹ Temporary workers were recruited for a period of up to seven or nine months at a time. By the end of 2013, 480 Solomon Islanders will have worked in New Zealand under the scheme and this is expected to increase to 600 in 2014. Ni-Vanuatu seasonal workers in New Zealand will exceed 3,000 by 2014.²

A study conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2012 found that the scheme resulted in positive changes to the status of Ni-Vanuatu women; they gained additional responsibilities as receivers and managers of remittances, and it increased their opportunity to establish small business ventures. However, negative effects included loneliness and depression as a result of irregular contact with partners/spouses whilst they were overseas, a reduction in household productivity, difficulty with child rearing, and family breakups.³

Labour migration may also be seen across other industries. Many nurses and teachers from Fiji and other Pacific countries have migrated to rim countries and the Middle East. A number of Pacific Islanders reside in North America as caregivers and domestic workers, many of whom often do not possess the necessary authorisation required under immigration regulations to work and therefore face daily risks as illegal migrants. Military and security-related employment also sees labour migration. For example, Fiji's economy is increasingly reliant on remittances from citizens working overseas, with military and security-related recruitment being a growing source of revenue. By mid-2005, there were over 1,000 Fijians working in Iraq and Kuwait as soldiers, security guards, drivers and labourers. Over 2,000 Fijians serve overseas in the British Armed Forces.

Recent qualitative and quantitative research assessing the impact of migration in Fiji reveal that the proportion of women from return migrant households spent much more time in domestic chores and caring for family members, including children, the elderly and the sick, than did non-migrant and absent migrant households. (Return migrant workers are defined as household members who have spent more than three months living abroad within the last ten years and have since returned to their country of origin.) Other findings of the study reveal that 68 per cent of females compared to 32 per cent of male migrants remitted money for child support, and 30 per cent of ethnic Fijian migrants were employed in the service industry, with a high percentage travelling to the United States as female health workers and a smaller percentage to the Middle East for jobs in the security sector.⁴

Although Kiribati and Tuvalu are part of the RSE scheme, the Seafarer Scheme is more economically important for both countries, making a significant contribution to their economies. Remittances contribute an estimated 15 to 20 per cent of Kiribati's national income, and 50 per cent of Tuvalu's national income. Kiribati currently receives remittances of AUD 12–13 million and Tuvalu receives AUD 3–4 million.⁵

The maritime industry, foreign fishing vessels in particular, are crucial to the economy of Kiribati. Earnings from Kiribati's exclusive economic zone's access fee and the licensing of foreign fishing vessels are central to the generation of government revenue. Large foreign 'factory' ships moor off the port of Betio for months at a time,

1 New Zealand, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, *Final Evaluation Report of the Recognised Seasonal Employer Policy* <<http://dol.govt.nz/publications/research/rse-evaluation-final-report/final-06.asp>> at 2 Oct 2013.

2 PACNEWS, *Ni-Vanuatu Seasonal Workers in NZ Will Pass 30000 – Commissioner*, Friday 27 September 2013.

3 International Labor Organization, *Building the Development Potential of Seasonal Work: A case study of seasonal workers in Vanuatu* (International Labor Organization, Fiji, 2012).

4 Kaitani, M., Mohanty, M., Muliana, T., Kumar, R., Kumar, S. and Naidu, V., *Development on the Move: Measuring and Optimising Migration's Economic and Social Impacts in Fiji* (University of the South Pacific, Fiji, 2010).

5 Borovnik, M., *Working Overseas: Seafarers remittances and their distribution in Kiribati* (Asia Pacific Viewpoint, 2006).

and cash spent by foreign seafarers while on shore also delivers substantial economic benefits to the district.

It has been established that migration, both international and within national borders, is a key factor in the transmission and spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections in the Pacific. People who are highly mobile may be at greater risk of engaging in behaviour that involves higher HIV risk exposure. This is especially so for workers who engage in circular migration, spending time away from home and family with discretionary income, and who are targets for the sex industry or subject to peer pressures.⁶

The separation of migrants from the family unit, as a result of labour migration, can have profound effects on family organisation and the lives of family members. The issue of men's labour migration and the impact on their non-migrating wives has received a growing amount of research attention. Repeated findings of various studies indicate a link between men's labour migration and women's autonomy. Explanation for the increased autonomy of the non-travelling migrant (the wife) include the rationale that husbands exercise their authority over wives in numerous daily decisions and activities, such as how to spend money, when to visit friends and family members, including parents, and when to go shopping. All these decisions, combined with having to ask a husband's permission to undertake these activities, could vastly impact on a wife's autonomy. Although it is established that women's autonomy increases in relation to men's labour migration, the permanence of this autonomy and what happens on his return have not been extensively researched. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it can result in increased levels of domestic violence if the male feels his role has been undermined.

Countries of origin are also in a unique position to facilitate safe migration of their migrant workers. A supportive institutional and regulatory framework can protect and empower migrants in the recruitment process and pre-departure stages. This includes disseminating information and providing tailored training and skills to those migrating, taking into consideration the person migrating and the nature of migration. Policies and regulations for recruiting agencies and private recruitment agencies can also be strengthened. Given the importance of temporary labour migration to families, communities and national development in the Pacific, together with the lack of research on the gender impact of migration, it is critical for member countries and development partners to concentrate efforts on research. PICTs should also consider the situation of female migrant workers, including the gender impact of temporary forms of labour migration in their own countries, in CEDAW reporting.

Media and ICT

PICTs have recognised the need to address gender inequality using the power of the media and ICT to accelerate the progress of regional and international gender commitments, including BPEFA. BPEFA highlights the need to empower women through increased skills, knowledge and access to ICT, as well as to strengthen or create self-regulatory mechanisms for the media in order to eliminate gender-bias in programming. To address these issues, BPEFA has two strategic objectives: to increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new communication technologies, and to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media. Some of the recommendations in BPEFA include support for training of national women's machineries and gender advocates in the use of the media, support for gender-sensitive training for local media outlets, and the development of policies and programmes that give rural women and communities' access to information through promotion of gender issues and human rights.

While there is much more to be done, there has been some progress toward gender sensitivity in the media, particularly through the work of women-led media networks. Work in this area includes the development, production and distribution of media content that addresses existing inequalities, especially in rural and remote communities. Civil society networks, in particular women's media networks, have been instrumental in the development of local media content for rural and outer island women and communities. However, it is

⁶ Secretariat of the Pacific Community, *Migration, Mobility and HIV: A rapid assessment of risks and vulnerabilities in the Pacific* (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, New Caledonia, 2010).

essential that national women's machineries and women's groups throughout the region gain media training to help them capitalise on the major role that the media can play in advocating for gender equality, and also that increased funding is provided for such initiatives.

FemLINKPACIFIC is an example of a media and ICT organisation and network that engages women, through the media, at the local and community levels and in rural areas in four PICTs to define community development policies and priorities. Since 2007, FemLINKPACIFIC has convened the Pacific Women's Media and Policy Network on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. In 2009, it also became the regional secretariat for the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict. Since the establishment of the organisation's community radio project in 2004, FemLINKPACIFIC's young women's programme 'Generation Next' has given rise to the involvement of young women from rural communities, as well as key urban centres, to claim their communication rights.

While the news media have predominantly been the recipients of media training programmes in the Pacific, the Beijing+10 report also identified the need for ongoing and cumulative media training for national women's machineries and gender advocates. SPC has responded to requests for gender-sensitive training for the media, but requests for such training are *ad hoc*. In a recent development, the SPC Regional Media Centre has been downsized as a result of the 2012 Independent External Review of the organisation and no longer has the capacity to provide this kind of service nationally or regionally. There is a need to take a more innovative approach and link training with the sustainability of the production of gender-inclusive content, as well as proactively influence the strengthening of the range of institutions that are delivering media and journalism training programmes.

Media-related outputs are also not systematically included in programme planning, and responses to newspaper and other reports that impact on women's lives are rare. National women's machineries do not feature prominently as 'generators' of gender education or media releases, and relationships with media representatives are usually informal and irregular. Whilst this is slowly changing – for example, in Solomon Islands the broadcasting unit has a close relationship with the national women's machinery – additional focus is needed in this area.

Opportunities to address media and ICT issues potentially rest with the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS), which has recently adopted a comprehensive gender policy, and they also utilise the Global Media Monitoring Project and women's media networks. Additionally, the upcoming Global Forum on Media and Gender, organised by UNESCO, UN Women, and media and NGO partners globally, will focus specifically on the women and media priorities of BPFA, as well as on the quality, availability and use of tools developed as a result of initiatives, including the Global Media Monitoring Project.

Gender and climate change

Women have a critical role to play in natural resource management and food security in the region, given their use of both land and marine resources over generations. Women possess knowledge and skills that are fundamental to sustainable resource use and food security. There is a strong and urgent need to recognise the cultural and social value of environmental resources, and to safeguard people's rights to use these resources.

The appropriate conservation of the historic environment, including cultural landscapes, and the safeguarding of relevant traditional knowledge, values and practices, in synergy with other scientific knowledge, enhance the resilience of communities to disasters and climate change. The feeling of normalcy, self-esteem, sense of place and confidence in the future among people and communities affected by disasters should be restored and strengthened through cultural programmes and the rehabilitation of their cultural heritage and institutions. The nexus between culture and environmental resources – including food security – climate change and women should be recognised and valued, and reflected in policy making. There is a

need to ensure strong inclusion of the voices of Pacific women. This can be done through presentation and discussion about their important roles in climate change adaptation and mitigation, in food security, and in ensuring sustainable livelihoods for their families and communities. This would include food production, taking into account the different agriculture ecosystems, cultures and societies in the small island developing states (SIDS) process and the post-2015 development agenda.

There is an increasing amount of literature in the Pacific on integrating gender into climate change programming, yet there is still limited research in this area. SPC has recently rolled out the second phase of the Stock-take of Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island countries, referred to in the session on institutional mechanism. Preliminary findings found that there is very little awareness of gender mainstreaming across government, particularly in key sectoral ministries. Whilst government staff are exposed to one-off training on gender issues specific to their area of work, e.g. climate change, education or health, knowledge of the application of gender mainstreaming into sectoral and multi-sectoral policies and work priorities is very low.

SPC is working towards a more multi-sector and integrated programming approach to address climate change, disaster risk and human security issues. This involves working across divisions in SPC and across government ministries. Taking a more holistic multi-sector approach to addressing climate and natural hazard risks is essential to delivering more resilient development outcomes that take into consideration the needs and concerns of women and men in accessing and controlling resources.

Women and girls with disabilities

Lastly, women and girls with disabilities are a key concern in the region, yet the issue is not reflected in the Millennium Development Goals. Women and girls with disabilities face stigma and discrimination due both to their gender roles and their disabilities. Despite helpful laws, policies and systems of practice in some countries, compared to their disabled male or non-disabled female peers, women with disabilities are generally less well educated, experience higher rates of unemployment, are more likely to be abused, are poorer, are more isolated, experience worse health outcomes, and generally have lower social status. Often, those perpetrating abuse of women and girls with disabilities are immediate family members, carers or in a position of power, which discourages the women and girls from reporting for fear they may be further victimised. The abuse therefore remains unrecognised by the public and by policy makers.⁷

Research commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund in Solomon Islands, Tonga and Kiribati on the sexual and health experiences of women with disabilities found that women with disabilities experience significant violence, both physical and sexual, at a higher rate than other women. Women with intellectual or mental disabilities are particularly vulnerable to abuse, as they are less able to report abuse and may not be believed. The research found that some also suffered severe discrimination through involuntary contraceptive use or sterilisation, and neither health workers nor police were trained to understand the needs of this client group.⁸

So far, Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue (through New Zealand), Vanuatu, Palau, Papua New Guinea and Kiribati have formally ratified or acceded to the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia and Solomon Islands have initiated the process by becoming signatories, with Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa and Tuvalu yet to take any action with regard to the Convention.

7 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *2013 Pacific Regional MDG Tracking Report* (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Fiji, 2013).

8 United Nations Population Fund, *A Deeper Silence* <<http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/pacific/drive/ADEEPERSILENCE.pdf>> at 11 September 2013.

Recommendations from the 12th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women

The issues identified at the last conference were discussed as new priorities at the regional and international level. There is labour migration. The power of the media to address gender inequality was noted, as well as the challenges of eliminating gender-bias and the traditional stereotypes portrayed of women in the media. Climate change was stressed as a critical regional priority, which should no longer be considered as an emerging issue and should be a separate item in the RPPA. Women and girls with disabilities face a double burden of discrimination due to their gender and their disability and this is now recognised in some national gender equality policies and national disability policies.

The conference:

1. Urged CROP agencies and development partners to facilitate regional research, with gender analysis, on the impact of labour migration and remittances in the Pacific to develop strategies to empower people to migrate with dignity.
2. Considered the threats of human trafficking and urged regional cooperation between governments and relevant stakeholders to take immediate national and regional measures to eliminate it through:
 - a) enactment of effective legislation;
 - b) protection mechanisms within existing regimes; and
 - c) development of appropriate support services.
3. Acknowledged the importance of keeping the intersectional issues that women and girls with disabilities face on the regional and national agenda, and reiterated support for the inclusion of those issues in national gender and disability policies to be reported on via CEDAW, CRPD, and other relevant human rights instruments.
4. Encouraged CROP agencies and development partners to increase and strengthen efforts to mainstream gender into climate change and disaster risk management in the delivery of services to PICTs, recognising women's cultural knowledge and skills as custodians of the environment, and emphasised the importance of the production of sex-disaggregated data and indicators to monitor the impacts of adaptation and mitigation initiatives and increase institutional capacity.
5. Called for governments to recognise that community media and women's media networks are important for collaboration and partnerships.
6. Called for governments and NWMs to use the Global Media Monitoring project to conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis of content to be able to ensure that government communication and media strategies effectively promote their gender equality commitments.
7. Called for PICTs to recognise and fully respect the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples, especially the knowledge held by women, as well as in territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities.
8. Called for research with gender analysis by PICTs, in collaboration with development partners, on the impact of inappropriate uses of ICTs, and called for the development of national regulatory infrastructure and policy.

Recommendations from the Fifth Pacific Women's Ministerial Meeting

At the Fifth Pacific Women's Ministerial Meeting held from 24-25 of October 2013 in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, following the 12th Triennial Conference, the Ministers;

- ❖ recognised that climate change is one of the most serious threats to the lives of Pacific people, as it can have a devastating impact on people, their land, and their culture. Climate change affects women and men differently. Recognising this, the ministers called for a fundamental shift in policy approach to an approach that incorporates a gender perspective in climate change programmes and initiatives, as well as in regional and international negotiations to support the advancement of gender equality.
- ❖ acknowledged the importance of temporary labour migration to Pacific Island economies and its recent increase. Labour migration contributes to economic empowerment but the ministers recognised the need to explore both positive and negative impacts of temporary labour migration. Ministers also recognised the need to review temporary labour migration schemes between countries to ensure they support the advancement of gender equality.

February 2014

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