

Women's Economic Empowerment in the Pacific: Gender Situational Analysis

Prepared by Froniga Greig
18 April 2012

1 Introduction

AusAID is developing a major funding initiative in gender equality in the Pacific. The nominated focal areas for support within the initiative are:

- Ending violence against women;
- Women's economic empowerment; and
- Women's leadership.

To initiate the design process and to provide sufficient information for initial peer review and executive consideration, AusAID requires the development of a concept note related to each of the three focal areas. A first step in developing the concept note is the preparation of background papers for each area.

This report provides a gender situational analysis of women's economic empowerment in the Pacific, with a focus Melanesia (Papua New Guinea (hereafter, PNG), Fiji, Solomon Islands (hereafter, SI) and Vanuatu). The analysis provides a brief synthesis of background materials on women's economic empowerment gathered from published and unpublished sources, including project documents and reports, research papers and reports from AusAID and other development partners.

The review describes the economic barriers for Pacific women, particularly rural and remote women operating in the informal sector in Melanesia. Five key questions will be addressed by this review:

1. What is the AusAID and Melanesian gender policy environment and is women's economic empowerment a priority?
2. What changes are required to promote women's economic empowerment in Melanesia?
3. What existing interventions contribute to women's economic empowerment in the Pacific?
4. What areas are weak and what lessons can be learned to ensure future success in women's economic empowerment?
5. What areas require further research and data?

2 What is the Australian and Pacific gender policy environment and is women's economic empowerment a priority?

2.1 Melanesia's gender policy framework

All countries in Melanesia have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and have integrated gender equality and women's empowerment in national level policies.

Vanuatu ratified CEDAW in 1995 and is working towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and targets have been incorporated into the National Gender Equity Policy and strategic plans (ADB 2009). Government policy documents including the Medium Term Strategic Framework (2006 – 2015) call for the reallocation of budgets toward social sectors and human resource development (ibid.).

Fiji has demonstrated its commitment to gender equality through national plans and international commitments such as CEDAW, Pacific Platform of Action, Convention on the Rights of a Child, Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015 and the Revised Pacific Platform of Action. The Fiji Government's Strategic Development Plan 2008–2011 states the commitment to, 'enable women to participate fully in the socio-economic development of the country.' The Women's Plan of Action has several aims, including the allocation of additional resources to develop women's micro-enterprises and encourage financial institutions to review lending policies to disadvantaged women and young women who lack traditional sources of collateral.

Both the SI Government and Government of PNG are signatories to CEDAW and are working towards achieving the MDGs, particularly goal three - gender equality and women's empowerment. The Medium-Term Development Strategies in both countries emphasize the importance of working towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

contracts in town (Bourke 2006). While some men divide this money among their families, and ensure that women also enjoy benefits, this is not always the case (ibid.).

Juggling economic pressures and heavy domestic burdens have serious health impacts on Melanesian women. In PNG the life expectancy of females is lower than that of males. Life expectancy of females in PNG (58.7 years) is lower than that of males (63.0 years) (JICA 2010). High rates of child marriage and fertility limit the amount of time women have available to participate in economic activities and contribute to poor health outcomes. Women work in the open air and in unhygienic conditions and face risks of sexual and physical abuse (UNIFEM 2009). At home Melanesian women are vulnerable to physical and psychological abuse (ADB 2011, AusAID 2008).

Female-headed households are among the poorest households in Melanesia. In Fiji and the Solomons, numbers of female-headed households have grown rapidly and their poverty is increasing (AusAID 2012). Traditionally, the *wantok* system provided a safety net to women, however, the erosion of the system in the cash economy translates into a lack of support for single mothers, widows and deserted women (JICA 2010).

4 What changes are required to promote women's economic empowerment in Melanesia?
4.1 Increasing women's access to productive resources including upgraded skills and knowledge, and assets and infrastructure.

Non-government organizations (hereafter, NGOs), donors and government have made effort to develop entrepreneurship among SI women, however, existing business support and training focuses on an inadequate set of skills, and implicitly reinforces the restriction of women's participation to very small businesses providing a very limited range of goods and services" (Greig and Haque 2010). For example, in the SI, women entrepreneurs could not access specific technical advice relevant for their business ideas locally and needed to travel abroad to pursue business ideas, which increased the cost.

Many women also lack access to land for cash cropping while others have experienced obstacles when applying for leases on alienated land in urban areas. Approval of leases is bureaucratic and often at the discretion of male government ministers. Even in provinces where women inherit land, male chiefs or relatives typically manage decisions made about the use of land for economic purposes. The ARDS reports that women lack opportunities to voice their concerns or defend their land rights. For example, the Isabel nickel mine deal was negotiated in Honiara without any of the women who are considered customary landowners in the matrilineal system.

Without reliable transport and other infrastructure men and women spend long hours travelling to buy or grow food, building materials and to collect water. Unreliable or unstable forms of transport keep transport costs high for men and women. A lack of transport limits men and women's access to work opportunities and labor markets. This may result in men having to travel further away for work and makes it difficult for them to return regularly. There is evidence linking seasonal and migrant labor with an increased risk of HIV transmission. Without transport, women who comprise 85 percent of all farmers in PNG have limited access to markets and find it difficult to increase productivity. The unavailability of affordable modes of transport limits the mobility of men and women.

4.2 Ensuring the availability of financial and business support services.

While women and men may have equal rights to loans and credit by law, men's position as landowners provides them access to collateral and makes it easier to come up with a deposit (AusAID 2007). No bank is taking active steps to meet women's banking needs (ibid.). Women entrepreneurs also face challenges when dealing with bank officials for financing. Those with personal or family connections to bank staff have better chances of securing financing than those without such connections (ibid.).

In the SI and Vanuatu women mentioned a lack of access to business services and advice about markets (Bourke 2006, Greig and Haque 2010, CREEDA 2009).

on-site access to health, information, credit, savings, and access to and exchange of market information. Furthermore, in a time of food price crises, improved markets could provide a key point for agricultural services, crop diversification, dissemination of local appropriate technologies and discussion around the advantages of cooperatives. Finally, markets provide an ideal site for NGOs working on social and rural development issues to interface regularly with farmers, particularly women farmers, to provide information, collect data and information and to educate rural women on many critical aspects of governance, human rights and justice. The broader program objective of PIM is for women market vendors and their local governments in PNG, Fiji, SI and Vanuatu to collaborate effectively to research, analyze, legislate, plan and budget, and improve the physical, social and economic conditions of marketplaces.

Westpac women in business awards. Westpac sponsors an annual award for women in business in the Pacific.

Australian Business Volunteers (ABVs) provide business-mentoring services, which have been accessed by some women entrepreneurs (Greig and Haque 2010). The ABV model appeals to many women in business, with volunteers able to transfer a broad range of useful skills over a period of three to four months. The matching process for volunteers, however, is lengthy and there is no guarantee that a suitable candidate will be identified (ibid.).

Australia Pacific Training Centre (APTC) established by Australia in 2006 and was designed as a centre of training excellence, helping you to gain Australian-standard skills and qualifications for a wide range of vocational careers throughout the Pacific – careers where skilled employees are in high demand.

The APTC offers Australian Certificates III and IV training in:

- Tourism and hospitality
- Automotive
- Manufacturing
- Construction
- Electrical trades
- Health, and
- Community services.

Courses are delivered by highly regarded Australian Registered Training Organizations, and when you successfully complete your course you'll enjoy the benefits of an accredited Australian qualification.

The **Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Women and the Economy Summit (WES)** is the premier event bringing together senior private and public sector players for a dialogue on fostering women's economic empowerment among the APEC economies.

5.2 Fiji

Women's Social and Economic Development Program (WOSED) is a micro-enterprise program (based on the Grameen banking model) being conducted in selected areas throughout Fiji. The objective of the program is to enhance the social, economic and political status of women so they can participate confidently and meaningfully at all levels of the development process (Ministry of Women, Culture and Heritage Fiji web content).

Cakaudrove Women's Resource Centre (CWRC) operates in the town of Savusavu on the island of Vanua Levu. It also includes a detailed project budget and management arrangements. The centre aims to address a lack of women's services and to empower women in rural areas around Savsavu. It will provide space for women to sell and exhibit craft and other products, safe and affordable temporary accommodation for travelers, and training for younger rural women. It also aims to strengthen cultural traditions and improve the standard of living for local women through self-employment (AusAID web content).

Honiara Youth Development, Employment & Small Enterprise Project aims to assist 300 young people (with priority given to women) to be empowered to make better life and career choices. Programme includes business skills development and literacy training. Phase one focused on the delivery of grants.

Makira-Ulawa Community Economic Development Project aims to reduce poverty by improving the economic conditions and livelihoods of 15 vulnerable communities in Makira by 2015. This project aims to look at improving economic and livelihood conditions for 15 target communities in Makira Province.

Honiara City Council (HCC) business incubation program offers 24 rent subsidized shops at the Honiara Central Market and Kukum market for two years. Although the program is open to men and women, two of the shops are reserved for women. Women reported difficulty in accessing information about the program, and believed that a business incubator needs to offer more than subsidized rent (Greig and Haque 2010).

Kastom Gaden Association (KGA) has offered women from remote and rural areas extension services and training on livestock, farming, seed banks and farming in general. *Kastom Gaden* has also established an organic produce delivery service and a fruit processing initiative that helps women (and men) to find markets for their produce.

5.5 Vanuatu

VANWODS program Vanuatu began delivering microfinance services to women in 1996, and by 2007 had served more than 2,600 active members (IFC 2009). It has been a major source of obtaining credit for women but mostly for women in urban areas. The National Bank of Vanuatu has recently begun delivering a microfinance scheme, supported by ADB, to rural and outer islands with the aim of reaching the population who does not have easy access to credit or opportunities for saving. While there are significant ongoing efforts to increase women's access to credit through a variety of microfinance schemes, lessons from women's experience with micro credit indicate many barriers to their developing successful business opportunities, mainly due to lack of basic education and business skills. In order for women's access to expanded financial services to result in successful income generating businesses, the ongoing efforts need to be accompanied by basic business skills training such as financial literacy, marketing, and understanding of business opportunities. The CEDAW Committee commended the State party on its microfinance programs, particularly the introduction and expansion of the VANWODS scheme targeting disadvantaged women and the *Sevem Fastaim* or "Save it First" scheme (CEDAW 2007).

The Gender Network in Vanuatu creates linkages between the DWA and the UN body dedicated to women, with the aim of sharing information and advocating for women's empowerment. Many women's organizations feel strongly that there is a lack of communication across stakeholders lobbying for women's empowerment, especially "umbrella organizations" that promote/advocate/lobby for women in business under "a common roof" as is the case in other countries (ADB 2011). There may be merit in establishing a similar body at a regional level; indeed women in business in the Pacific region have already mentioned their support of "PIPSO as the Regional Private Sector representation for gender issues in business and trade".

World Vision's Enabling People's Livelihood Project is a four years project implemented in Santo, Sanma Province, Vanuatu. The project aims to improve livelihoods in 41 villages with a total population of 10,200 people through provision of skills training and income generation opportunities. The project also conducts literacy and numeracy training for women.

Department of Women's Affairs and National Council of Women Vanuatu Provides skills and training to Ni-Vanuatu Women to empower and build confidence (CREEDA 2009).

6.3 Services and infrastructure

Women's economic opportunities are compromised by a lack of transport (roads and boat) to and from markets, access to health services, clean water and schools and technologies such as internet and mobile phones (ADB 2006a, AusAID 2007, UNIFEM 2008, JICA 2010).

Lessons learned from PNG indicate that when women have access to land and major roads they are able to earn up to three times the national minimum wage (CEDAW 2008a). Although this example is an exception, it does reinforce the how critical access to services and infrastructure are to women's economic empowerment. Improving services and infrastructure are short / medium term interventions. Existing infrastructure projects throughout Melanesia can be reviewed to ensure that opportunities to support women's economic empowerment have not been overlooked.

6.4 Skills / Training

In Melanesia, women's economic empowerment requires women to be supported to develop skills in new non-traditional areas. Cultural stereotypes pertaining to the "suitability" of jobs for males and females limit women's opportunities for study and work (JICA 2010, 2007). For example, in PNG tertiary education, female enrolments predominate in nursing, secretarial skills and teaching (ibid.). The percentage of female students to male students in universities in 2007 was 35 percent to 65 percent (ibid.).

Throughout the Pacific there has been a focus on developing women's livelihoods in line with their traditional roles. Government, Church groups and NGOs have myriad programs designed to provide women with livelihood skills in sewing, cooking, flower arranging and second hand fabric dyeing. This type of skills training has provided a low risk opportunity for many women in the country to make enough money to pay for school fees, transport costs back to the village or health care, however, it may not be enough to elevate women from poverty or provide a regular sustainable income source (Greig and Haque 2010).

Continued effort also needs to be made to ensure that extension and training programs meet women's needs (ADB 2009, 2006, 2006a, Bourke 2006, World Bank 2006). Enabling women to access training and new livelihood related technologies can increase production and reduce their work burden (ibid.).

6.5 Business incubation and support to identify new markets

There are limited business incubation initiatives designed to encourage women to enter into new markets in Melanesia. The feasibility study of business incubators in Vanuatu found that there is a need for an independent women's business support centre, governed by an alliance drawing together relevant and committed public and private stakeholders, managed so as to avoid duplication and fragmentation of resources and ensuring the service is openly available and readily accessible to all women (CREEDA 2009).

In the SI, the Foreign Investment Act 2005 and the Foreign Investment Regulations 2006 provide a list of business opportunities that are not open to foreign investors (Pacific Islands Trade and Investment Commission 2008). The list includes, operating public transport such as buses and taxis, fast food, handicrafts, marketing and cleaning services including hotel cleaning and domestic help. Although the Ministry for Commerce no longer monitors this list, women entrepreneurs continue to use it to identify potential business opportunities (Greig and Haque 2010). The types of businesses operated by women in the SI are narrow with most women working in handicrafts, catering, beauty and real estate (ibid.).

In Fiji, a large proportion of the private sector in Fiji has grown out of tourism. Women own approximately 19 percent of businesses in Fiji, and most of these are in the tourism industry and have suffered from political instability with some businesses going out of business or becoming bankrupt (ibid.). Without support to identify new markets and business opportunities these women will lose their incomes. Supporting business incubation and new markets is a priority area for women's economic empowerment.

Further, within the formal labour market recognition of women's reproductive responsibility could be improved. Provision for breastfeeding mothers are limited with women only allowed breaks of half hour duration twice daily and there are no State or employer funded childcare facilities in Melanesia (CEDAW 2008, 2008a).

6.8 Creation of formal employment opportunities for women

While there has been a wealth of research on the barriers to formalization facing women in business there has not been a parallel push for increasing women's employment opportunities in formal sectors. The private sector in the Pacific accounts for most of the formal economy job opportunities in the Pacific. In particular jobs exist in mining, export fishing, oil palm and logging. Additional work is needed with the private sector to develop innovative strategies to promote women's employment and leadership. Creating new formal employment opportunities for women is a long term goal, however, ensuring that women can access existing formal employment opportunities can be achieved in the short term.

In PNG, almost 30 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product comes from mining which brings with it a large number of employment opportunities, most of which are for male labourers. Over the past two decades women have largely been overlooked as employees in the mining industry, however, there have been a number of reports relating to the abuse of women on mine sites and losses of agricultural land (JICA 2010). In 2007, the World Bank developed a Women in Mining Action Plan but there is little information on how successful the plan has been in removing barriers facing women in the mining sector and increasing employment for women.

Males have typically benefited from private sector jobs in palm oil, coffee, copra and mining (CEDAW 2008a). The arrival of Exxon Mobil's liquefied natural gas project in Papua New Guinea has provided economic opportunities for 900 women (PNG LNG press release November 30, 2011). Although the number may have increased since the arrival of Exxon Mobil, it is estimated that women comprise only 5 percent of the formal work force in PNG (JICA 2010). In Vanuatu, women gather fish and shellfish for home consumption and are involved in preservation, marketing, and distribution of fish, and increasingly also in artisanal fishing, however, the number of women employed by the fish export industry remains low (IFC 2010).

Throughout Melanesia males have benefited from labour migration opportunities more than females. Women's chances to migrate for labour will increase with formal employment opportunities, however, labour migration brings with it an increased risk of exploitation and abuse (Esplen and Brody 2007). For example, the Kolombangarra Forest Products Limited in SI provides employment opportunities to males and females (usually husband and wife teams) clearing and thinning logs but camp conditions make it difficult for individual women to access seasonal labor opportunities without an accompanying male. Caution needs to be taken to ensure that discrimination does not undermine the gains by increasing women's labor migration (ibid.).

7 What areas require further research and data?

7.1 Research on women's lived experiences

There has been a lot of research on the barriers facing women in business in Melanesia, however, many of the findings, especially relating to the legal / regulatory framework and business environment are relevant to men as well as women. Research focusing on women's economic empowerment needs to move beyond a discussion of generic barriers to a more detailed documentation of actual experiences facing Melanesian women.

7.2 Action oriented research

Economic empowerment is about making differences to the lives of women and the families they support, therefore, research initiatives need to catalyze action and actual change. Further research into the area of women's empowerment should be integrated into pilots, monitoring and evaluation and evidenced based decision-making.

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