



The Pacific Islands

KEY GENDER ISSUES

Despite progress, the Pacific Island region continues to struggle to meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets related to gender equality and empowering women. With the exception of Papua New Guinea, the region has achieved gender parity in primary education. However, improvements in other areas are much slower. In Melanesian countries – where strong patriarchal cultures discriminate against women and girls – women's participation in the non-agricultural workforce and in politics lags behind Micronesian and Polynesian countries.¹ Across the region, alcohol and substance abuse and high unemployment are serious problems, particularly among men. Youth unemployment is further exacerbated by the increasing secondary school dropout rate.²

While MDG6 calls for the spread of HIV/AIDS to be halted and reversed, in Pacific Island countries the disease is on the rise, with the number of cases nearly doubling between 2001 and 2009. Various risks and vulnerabilities contribute to increasing numbers of HIV infections, including gender inequality and gender-based violence, highly mobile populations, lack of employment opportunities – especially for young people – and the weakening of traditional social safety networks. Most cases are reported in Papua New Guinea, where approximately 0.7 per cent of the adult population was living with HIV/AIDS in 2011.³ Women account for half of those living with HIV.

Economic empowerment

Across the region, approximately twice as many men as women engage in paid employment outside the agricultural sector.⁴ Women's participation in the labour force varies among the countries, ranging from 53 per cent in the Solomon Islands to 71 per cent in Papua New Guinea. In the agricultural sector, Pacific Island women play a prominent role.

A woman in Papua New Guinea preparing FairTrade promotional materials – the country is the first in the region to achieve FairTrade certification for coffee.

In 2010, 67 per cent of economically active women worked in agriculture and more than half of all economically active people working in the sector were women.⁵ Despite their active role, compared with men, they have much less access to agricultural land, training, credit and services.

Many countries have limited land resources; most land is under customary authority, which grants access rights to men through father-son inheritance practices and provides limited legal rights to women. Many women are excluded from inheritance rights to customary land and only have the rights to use land through their fathers or husbands. Even in countries with equal inheritance laws – Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu – customary law regarding agricultural land has constitutional status and allows legal discrimination against women.⁶ In Tonga, land cannot be owned, but by law only men over the age of 16 are allowed to hold land by grant or by lease. Although women are allowed to lease land, they are not given grants, which denies unmarried, separated, divorced and widowed women full access to land. Currently, Tonga is looking at a change to its laws to enable women to inherit town land, but this will not address agricultural land.

Voice and participation

Promoting women's voice and influence remains a major challenge across the Pacific Island countries, where women's representation in politics is among the lowest in the world. At household level, women have relatively little control over their own earnings.⁷ In Kiribati, for example, nearly one out of five women report that their partners do not allow them to make financial decisions on household expenditures. In the Marshall Islands, Samoa and Tuvalu, about 15 per cent of women report that their husbands have control over their cash earnings.⁸ Women's representation in local decision-making bodies is low. In Kiribati, under the traditional *maneaba* system, women are allowed to attend community meetings. However, on occasions when they are allowed to express their views, they must do so indirectly through their husbands and must do so in a low voice.⁹

Moreover, the Pacific Islands have the highest incidence of violence against women in the world, and more than 60 per cent¹⁰ of countries have no laws against domestic violence. In Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea nearly two out of three adult women¹¹ have experienced physical or sexual violence during their lifetime, often at the hands of an intimate partner. Among the key contributing factors are traditional attitudes to male and female roles, jealousy, women's increasing visibility in education and public sector posts, and high levels of alcohol abuse among men.¹² Women and girls face a high risk of violence, including sexual assault, when travelling long distances from home, especially in the dark. This not only exposes them to injury, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and even death, it also restricts their ability to earn money through entrepreneurial activities.

Workloads and benefits

Agricultural roles in the region are divided sharply along gender lines. Women produce and market the vast majority of food crops. They also provide the labour for the more lucrative cash crops. In addition to their domestic and care-giving activities, women spend longer hours than men engaged in agricultural production, while men control the incomes earned from cash crop production.¹³

IFAD STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Supporting women market vendors in Melanesia

Across Melanesia, the majority of market traders are women. They work long hours to earn much needed cash for their families. Many women sleep under open skies, and they often fall victim to harassment, sexual violence and ill health.¹⁴ Despite paying a daily market fee, these women have to work without basic amenities such as toilets, shelter, water or cooking facilities. Until recently, they have had no say in how these markets are run. Owing to a total lack of formalized associations, women vendors have not been able to articulate their priorities, needs or concerns. Until now, most women have been unaware that they could change their situation by lobbying and negotiating, or that they could hold market managers accountable for how their fees are used. But that is starting to change. Since 2011, IFAD has supported the UN Women's project Partners Improving Markets (PIM) in Papua New Guinea. The project focuses on improving the status of women in the informal economy and on making the marketplace a safer and healthier environment for women vendors.

The PIM approach is also being used in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu and includes gender analyses of several markets. It runs gender sensitization workshops for local government decision makers and market managers, almost all of whom are men. Through videos of the markets and case studies prepared with women market vendors, the project ensures that local government officials have access to locally generated knowledge and statistics on women's economic opportunities and constraints. Quantitative data are also gathered on their incomes, expenditures and revenue in order to develop strategic approaches to increase their incomes. The next step is to mobilize and organize women market vendors into associations, and strengthen existing ones. The project also supports women's dialogue with local governments about their priorities, needs and rights in the marketplace as a basis for plans that will improve facilities. In addition, it helps local governments build capacity to engage with women's organizations and to adopt gender-responsive approaches in governance related to markets.¹⁵

Traditional leadership and changing attitudes in Tonga

From 2004 to 2011, IFAD supported the Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovations (MORDI) programme aimed at improving the livelihoods of vulnerable communities in remote areas of the Pacific. The programme focused on building the capacity of local communities so they could create and implement their own development plans. The greatest challenge was to involve women in community planning. In patrilineal societies where men make key decisions,¹⁶ women are marginalized in decision-making and development processes, and are not comfortable expressing their priorities. In Tonga, for example, a community meeting, or *fono*, is held once a month and male attendance is obligatory. Traditionally, women do not attend nor are they organized in their own groups.

MORDI addressed this by first setting up women's groups around a common area of interest. In many communities in Tonga, women showed great interest in handicrafts. Community facilitators provided women with materials, training and marketing strategies to sell their goods. They also worked on group strengthening, identifying priorities and planning. Women soon started to express their views on a range of community issues, to identify viable strategies for action, and to produce their own development plans. With the help of the facilitator, group results were discussed in plenary sessions and, together with the results from the men's group, work consolidated into an overall community development plan. Men started to recognize the value that women add to the community.

The programme went a step further to address the non-representation of women in the *fono*. At first, men were against including women in formal decision-making structures. After much

IFAD GENDER POLICY
Strategic objective 1:
Promote economic empowerment to enable rural women and men to have equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, profitable economic activities.

IFAD GENDER POLICY
Strategic objective 2:
Enable women and men to have equal voice and influence in rural institutions and organizations.

debate, women were allowed to attend the *fono*, but only as a sub-group that would report on their progress and upcoming plans. However, men quickly became accustomed to women's attendance and began to appreciate their input in community planning. Today, in most communities where MORDI worked, both men and women attend the monthly *fono* and women openly discuss community development issues. Almost all communities have strong women's groups, which are well linked into the community development planning activities started under MORDI. Many women describe a heightened sense of purpose, recognition within the community and increased self-worth as a direct result of the MORDI programme.¹⁷ As a result of the programme, there is now an NGO in Tonga called MORDI Tonga Trust, which is the implementing agency of the ongoing IFAD-funded Tonga Rural Innovation Project.

IFAD GENDER POLICY
Strategic objective 3:
Achieve a more equitable
balance in workloads and
in the sharing of
economic and social
benefits between women
and men.

Joining hands to reduce time and drudgery

The strength and success of the MORDI programme is that communities decide on their needs, which they then co-fund and coordinate, and plan ways to sustain them in the long term. One long-standing dream in the hilltop village of Hunga, Tonga, was to construct a road from the village to the wharf, which links to markets on other islands. Access to the wharf was down a very steep dirt track. When it rained, this path became slippery and dangerous, especially for people carrying heavy loads. With the assistance of MORDI, the community developed a creative way of fundraising: they posted information about the road project on a website, with a barometer indicating how much money was collected. In a community where the average income is about US\$58 a month, they raised US\$100,000 from their own funds and from relatives living abroad, and convinced the Government of India to fund the completion of the road.¹⁸

The new road has reduced drudgery and travel time and increased incomes. The fibre from the pandanus palm, used for making woven mats, is harvested at plantations a few hours from the village. Before the road was built, women would stay at the plantations for more than a week to harvest the green leaves and process them there. Now they are able to transport the unprocessed leaves back to the village the same day, which means they can increase mat production. Because more produce can be sent to market now that the road is built, the lucrative vanilla production business has been expanded, with benefits for the whole community.

While attending a group to learn handicrafts, women are encouraged to start discussing community issues and priorities.



LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

The Asia and Pacific Division has implemented a range of projects that address gender equality and women's empowerment in different ways. Some of the lessons learned and good practices employed include:

- **Strengthening women's voice and influence in strong patriarchal cultures.** Using participatory approaches, consulting with stakeholders, supporting women-only groups and facilitation of community planning have proven to be effective ways to increase women's participation in rural community decision-making processes.
- **Using community facilitators.** With an in-depth knowledge of the people in their community, local facilitators can help identify and prioritize their needs, concerns and interests, and work with them to develop an overall plan that is supported by both women and men.
- **Working with men.** Discussing gender issues with men is essential for changing attitudes and traditional leadership structures in which women are marginalized, such as the *fono* in Tonga.
- **Providing empowerment training for women.** Low levels of literacy and numeracy among many rural adult women in the Pacific Island countries mean project activities have to include empowerment training to enable women to understand their basic rights and to feel confident in demanding that those rights are met.

OUTSTANDING ISSUES AND ONGOING CHALLENGES

There are a number of outstanding gender-related issues and ongoing challenges facing IFAD-supported projects in the Pacific region, including:

- **Political instability and ethnic conflict.** These challenges in Bougainville, Fiji Islands, French Polynesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tonga have increased gender inequalities and taken the focus away from development and the human rights agenda.¹⁹
- **Women's access to land and land rights.** This is an important, complex and highly sensitive issue across the Pacific Island countries.
- **The need to strengthen women's voice and influence.** Across the region, women lag far behind men in decision-making power and leadership positions at local, national and regional levels. Lack of women's representation in local and national politics has resulted in few gender-related actions in national and regional activities, and reinforces attitudes that decision-making is the domain of men. Establishing quotas can help to quickly increase rural women's leadership in national and local decision-making bodies.²⁰
- **Increasing awareness about gender issues among young people.** More than 56 per cent of Pacific Islanders are below 25 years of age. Building a critical mass of young people who are knowledgeable about gender equality issues is vital for all Pacific Island countries.²¹

THE STATISTICS AND WHAT THEY SHOW

While there are obvious challenges for human development and gender equality in the Pacific Islands subregion, the lack of data for key indicators makes for an incomplete picture of the lives of women and men. Economically, GDP per capita ranges from around US\$1,500 to just under US\$4,500 (Table 1). All of the countries fall below average on the Human Development Index (Table 2).

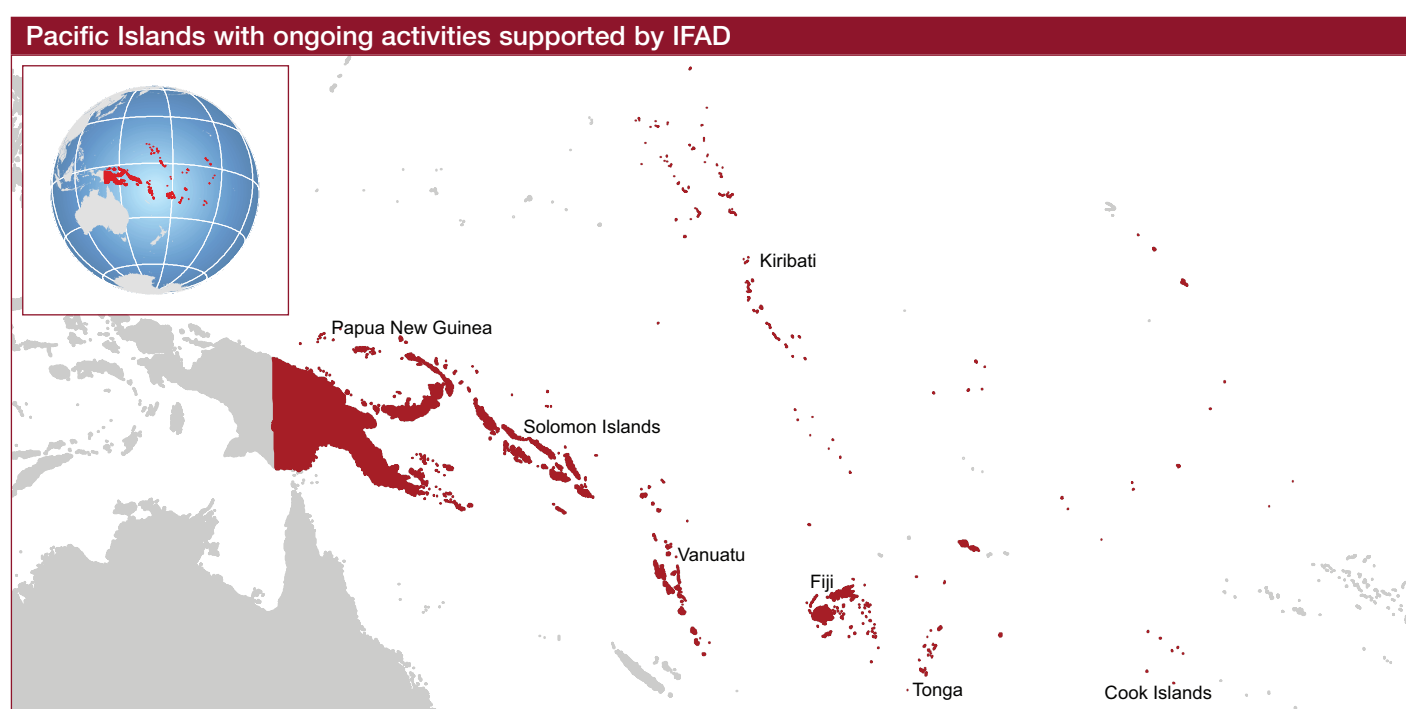
Overall, data that reflect inequality in achievements between the region's women and men in reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market are limited. The same is true for data that measure underlying drivers of gender inequality, for example under the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). Data for key development indicators such as literacy are deficient for both women and men. Importantly, comprehensive, comparable data on key indicators such as women's access to land and to bank loans – important inputs to agriculture and rural development – are also lacking.

While there are enormous data gaps, it is clear that, on average, women can look forward to longer lives than men across the region (Table 1). Existing data also indicate that women's labour participation across the region is lower than that of men, although higher than some other regions. Limited economic opportunities for women and other constraints, including social and cultural barriers, might explain women's lower rates of participation compared with men's. There is also a wide range in maternal mortality rates across the region (Table 3).

Table 1: Key development indicators across the region

Country	GDP per capita (current US\$) (2011)*	Life expectancy at birth (years) (2011)*		Literacy rate, ages 15+ (2010)**	
		Female	Male	Female (% of females)	Male (% of males)
Cook Islands	-	-	-	-	-
Fiji	4 397	72	67	-	-
Kiribati	1 649	-	-	-	-
Papua New Guinea	1 845	65	61	57	64
Solomon Islands	1 517	69	66	-	-
Tonga	4 152	75	69	-	-
Vanuatu	3 094	73	69	81	84

Source: World Bank database (2008-2012). *Accessed 26 June 2013. **Accessed 25 September 2013.



Because of the different lived experiences of men and women across the countries in the subregion and the continued discrimination against women in many facets of their lives, it is important to include comprehensive gender analyses in the design of all policies and programmes. Doing so will ensure greater progress towards gender equality and human development outcomes across the region.

Table 2: Human development and gender inequality across the region, 2012

Country	Human Development Index (HDI)* (186 countries) Source: UNDP	Gender Inequality Index (GII) (148 countries)** Source: UNDP	Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) (86 non-OECD countries)*, *** Source: OECD
		Value	Rank
Cook Islands	-	-	-
Fiji	96	0.391**	44
Kiribati	121	-	-
Papua New Guinea	156	0.617	134
Solomon Islands	143	-	-
Tonga	95	0.462	90
Vanuatu	124	-	-

Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) HDI; UNdata 2012, GI; SIGI, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Gender, Institutions and Development Database 2012. Accessed 25-26 June 2013.

Notes: *Only 2009 data available.

**This figure appears in the UNDP human development indicators table (HDI), but not in the UNdata 2012 tables.

• The HDI is a composite measure of health, education and income and an alternative to purely economic assessments of national progress, (e.g. GDP growth). Source <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/>.

•• The GI is a composite measure that reflects inequality in achievements between women and men in reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. The index ranges between "0", which means women fare equally well, to "1.0", which indicates that women fare as poorly as possible in all dimensions measured.

Source: <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/68606.html>.

••• The SIGI was launched by the OECD Development Centre as an innovative measure of the underlying drivers of gender inequality. The SIGI captures discriminatory social institutions such as early marriage, discriminatory inheritance practices, violence against women, son preference, restricted access to public space and restricted access to land and credit. Source: <http://genderindex.org/ranking>.

Table 3: Key gender indicators across the region

Country	Maternal mortality ratio (modelled estimate, per 100,000 live births) (2010). Source: World Bank	Women's access to land* (2012) Source: OECD	Women's access to bank loans** (2012) Source: OECD	Labour participation rate, ages 15+ (2011) Source: World Bank	
				Female (% of females)	Male (% of males)
Cook Islands	-	-	-	-	-
Fiji	26	0.5	0.5	39	80
Kiribati	-	-	-	-	-
Papua New Guinea	230	1.0	0.5	71	74
Solomon Islands	93	-	-	53	80
Tonga	110	-	-	54	75
Vanuatu	110	-	-	61	80

Source: World Bank database (2008-2012); SIGI, OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database 2012. Accessed 26 June 2013.

Notes: * Women's legal and de facto rights to own and access agricultural land: 0: Women have equal legal rights with men to own and access land; 0.5: Women have the same legal rights to own and access land, but are restricted due to discriminatory practices; 1.0: Women have no or few legal rights to access or own land, or access is severely restricted by discriminatory practices.

**Women's legal and de facto access to loans and credit: 0: Women have equal rights to access credit and bank loans with men; 0.5: Women have rights to access some kinds of credit (e.g. microcredit), or have equal rights but face discrimination in accessing bank loans and credit; 1.0: Women have few or no rights to access bank loans or credit or access is severely restricted by discriminatory practices.

KEY RESOURCES

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- ⁷ World Bank. 2012. *Toward Gender Equality in East Asia and the Pacific: A Companion to the World Development Report – Conference Edition*. Washington D.C.: World Bank, p. 98. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0. Available at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/Resources/226300-1339798342386/eap-gender-full-conference.pdf>.
- ⁸ World Bank. 2012. *Toward Gender Equality*, p. 98.
- ⁹ IFAD. 2012. "Rural Sector Performance Assessment Scoring Form – Country: Kiribati."
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- ¹³ UN Women Pacific. 2012. *Rural Pacific Island Women and Agriculture*. Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography, p. 27.
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- ¹⁹ Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2010. *Beijing +15*, p. 2.
- ²⁰ Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2010. *Beijing +15*, p.3.
- ²¹ Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2010. *Beijing +15*, p. 4.

CONTACTS

Hoonae Kim
Director
Asia and the Pacific
IFAD
Tel: +39 06 54592640
E-mail: hoonae.kim@ifad.org

Clare Bishop-Sambrook
Senior Technical Adviser
Gender, Empowerment and
Social Inclusion
Policy and Technical Advisory
Division
IFAD
Tel: +39 06 54592489
E-mail: c.bishopsambrook@ifad.org

LINKS

IFAD policy on gender equality and
women's empowerment
[http://www.ifad.org/gender/policy/
gender_e.pdf](http://www.ifad.org/gender/policy/gender_e.pdf)

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International Fund for
Agricultural Development

Via Paolo di Dono, 44

00142 Rome, Italy

Tel: +39 06 54591

Fax: +39 06 5043463

E-mail: ifad@ifad.org

www.ifad.org

www.ruralpovertyportal.org

ifad-un.blogspot.com

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