



IN BRIEF



WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP

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What's the Issue?

Gender equality lies at the core of human rights and is the bedrock from which sustainable development can be achieved. Women and girls represent 50% of the world's population, yet are often excluded from the political arena, and shut out of decision-making that directly affects their lives. Increasing women's political participation and leadership are vital mechanisms that support women to realize their human rights.

Increasing women's participation in leadership and decision-making has proven to be good for economic and social development around the world. Studies have found that longer exposure to women's political representation increases women's overall labour force participation, the share of public employment opportunities allocated to women, and women's access to public amenities, such as roads and health services.

The Pacific region has the world's lowest levels of women in parliament (8%),¹ and is home to two countries that have never elected a woman to their national parliament: the Federated States of Micronesia and Vanuatu.²

In the Pacific, as in many other parts of the world, the absence of women in decision-making and leadership is largely a result of inherently biased structures and systems. Discriminatory laws, processes and practices result in greater barriers to educational and economic opportunities for women and girls. Consequently, women are less likely than men to have access to the education, contacts and resources needed to become effective leaders. Social norms also play a part in creating and maintaining gender stereotypes and attitudes that disadvantage women and girls.

The small size of most Pacific parliaments, and the correspondingly low number of ministerial and public official

positions available, can present additional barriers for women, especially when combined with unequal access to resources and inherently biased structures and regulations.

The continued absence of women in decision-making and leadership in the Pacific further reinforces stereotypes, both amongst potential candidates and the general public, undermining efforts to build the skills, networks and confidence women need to change the game.

Progress is being made, however. President Hilda Heine was sworn into office in Marshall Islands in 2016 – the first woman elected as President of a Pacific Island country. In March of the same year, Fiame Naomi Mata'afa was appointed Deputy Prime Minister in Samoa following an election, during which temporary special measures were applied at national level for the first time in the Pacific. And in late 2014, Dr Jiko Luveni was appointed Speaker of the Parliament of Fiji - the first female in the history of Fiji to hold this office. Across the region, there has also been a slow but steady increase in the number of women standing for parliament and in the overall number of votes for women candidates.

Our Solutions

Through its Women's Political Empowerment and Leadership Programme, UN Women works with regional partners to address country-specific barriers to women's full political participation. It works with government and civil society organizations to help create an institutional and social environment that welcomes and supports women's political participation, increasing the number of women candidates and enhancing their support networks.



How We Make a Difference

Recent results from around the Pacific

- In Solomon Islands, UN Women supported provincial dialogues and activities and is helping connect women at the sub-national level with their national Members of Parliament and creating a space for women and national leaders to discuss women’s concerns. As a result of UN Women supported Provincial Gender Equality/Women’s Empowerment policies, the Provincial government in the Western Province has committed 20% of its budget to the implementation of the policy. A first in Solomon Islands.
- In Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Nauru, UN Women strengthened media capacity to report on gender equality and women’s leadership with targeted media training conducted in the lead-up to elections.
- Ground-breaking research on voter preferences and behaviour in Solomon Islands was commissioned by UN Women in 2016 to unpack how gender attitudes and norms influence people to vote for female candidates, rather than male candidates. The study was a response to the low number of female candidates elected to office in Solomon Islands; only one female candidate was elected in the 2014 National General Election, despite numerous efforts from government, donors, civil society partners and other stakeholders working in the sphere of women’s political participation. The report outlines a number of long- and short-term recommendations that will guide future programming initiatives in this critical area.
- Radio dramas and talk-back shows about women’s political participation were developed in both Solomon Islands and Samoa as part of broader programming on women’s political participation ahead of national elections. The radio programmes had wide reach nationally and contributed to changing the way women leaders are perceived.
- In Samoa, UN Women partnered with the Office of the Electoral Commission to draft a new gender-sensitive Candidate’s Handbook. The sole female candidate to run in the 2014 by-election acknowledged the handbook as having directly influenced her decision to run. The project, an Australian Government funded initiative, is currently in its second phase, supporting women in leadership in Samoa.

SOURCES

^{1&3}Overall percentage based on aggregation of individual country data taken from Inter-parliamentary Union and Pacific Women in Politics websites. Excludes Australia, New Zealand and French territories. Retrieved 22 February 2017 from: <http://www.ipu.org/iss-e/women.htm> and <http://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/>

²2017. Pacific Women in Politics [website]. Retrieved 22 February 2017 from: <http://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/?&printerfriendly=true>

PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE

Timeframe: 2013 - 2017

Countries: 14 Pacific Island countries and territories

Funding sources: Australian Government, European Union, United Nations Peacebuilding Fund

PACIFIC WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT³

Country	Proportion of women in Parliament/National Legislature
Cook Islands	16.6%
Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)	0%
Fiji	14%
Kiribati	6.5%
Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI)	9.1%
Nauru	10.5%
Niue	10%
Palau	13.8%
Papua New Guinea (National Parliament)	2.7%
Samoa	10%
Solomon Islands	2%
Tonga	3.8%
Tuvalu	6.7%
Vanuatu	0%
Tokelau	15%
Regional average	8.04%

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The Multi-Country Office headquartered in Fiji covers Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu