

12. Pacific Gender Perspectives on Sustainable Development

A brief by Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the Secretariat of the Pacific Communities

SUMMARY

Amartya Sen transformed discourse on development when he argued that development not only is about raising people's income or reducing poverty but rather involves the process of expanding freedoms equally for all people¹. **Gender equality and human rights approach** promote a process of development which is built on the principles of empowerment, equality, agency, access to opportunities, participation and protection all essential conditions to achieving sustainable development for all. The primary purpose of this brief is to clearly highlight the importance of using a women's human rights and empowerment approach to shape our shared future. It is hoped that this brief will help support Pacific engagement and preparations in the lead up to the 2014 SIDS Conference and during ongoing consultation around the broader post-2015 development agenda.

The Forum Island Leaders through the **Pacific Plan**² shared their perspectives on a future for the region, a region of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity, so that all of its people can lead free and worthwhile lives. The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** recognized by the Forum members as international customary norm further affirms that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. The **Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005-2015** is a key instrument guiding Pacific countries response on gender equality and women's legal and human rights. Despite the many gains³ achieved through the international and regional commitments gender inequalities and violation of women's fundamental rights and freedoms remains a recurrent challenge for the region.⁴ The Human Development Report data on countries performance on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) reveals the current ranking of only 3 Forum Island Countries⁵ of which one has a ranking of 140 indicating the real challenges in progressing women's reproductive health, women's representation in parliament and participation in the labour market in the region. It should be noted that lack of gender statistics is a concern for the region and highly evident through the absence of gender inequality index rating (GII) for the rest of the Pacific countries and territories.

¹ Sen (1999) defines freedoms in five categories: (a) political freedoms, (b) economic facilities, (c) social opportunities, (d) transparency guarantees, and (e) protective security.

² Adopted by the Forum Leaders in October 2005, the goal of the Pacific Plan is to enhance and stimulate economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security for the Pacific countries. Improved gender equality is a strategic objectives under the pillar of sustainable development

³ Beijing +15: Review of Progress in implementing the Beijing Platform of Action in Pacific Island Countries and Territories presented at the 11th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women noted the progress made in education, health, employment and further stressed that gender inequalities remain prevalent in most development sectors and hamper the capacity of countries to address sustainable development issues.

⁴ The Gender Inequality Index (GII) reflects gender-based inequalities in three dimensions – reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality and adolescent fertility rates; empowerment is measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by each gender and attainment at secondary and higher education by each gender; and economic activity is measured by the labour market participation rate for each gender. The GII replaced the previous Gender-related Development Index and Gender Empowerment Index. The GII shows the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in the three GII dimensions. In the 2011 (GII) index reveals that the lowest ranking country at 141 is Afghanistan and following that is PNG at 140. GII ranking not available for the rest of the region.

⁵ Australia-18, New Zealand -32 and Papua New Guinea-140

Persistent social and economic inequities remains visible and continues to affect women who make up the majority of those living in poverty and susceptible to human rights abuse due to their gender identity, sexual orientation, class, age, disability, race and ethnicity. Gender inequality is experienced by women in social, economic, political and cultural spheres. The increasing feminization of poverty is a major challenge in the region, especially for the 70 percent of women who live in rural area and outer islands and women living in urban squatter settlements. Women have a higher risk of poverty due to labour force discrimination, lack of property rights and heavy domestic and community responsibilities. Recent prevalence studies in the Pacific region shows that 2 out of 3 women faced intimate partner sexual and physical violence in their lifetime⁶. Limited access to economic opportunities, low proportion of women in all levels of decision making and high maternal mortality in some part of the region are additional gender issues undermining development. A recent Asia Pacific World Bank Companion Report to the World Development Report revealed that gender disparities in access to and control of land, resources are pervasive in the region despite growth and development⁷. The report also recognised that overall **women's voice, influence and participation** remains low in the Pacific region. Addressing the **root causes of gender inequalities** presents an opportunity to close the current gender gaps. In response to the chronic inequalities the Pacific Forum Leaders adopted the **Gender Equality Declaration** for the Leaders acknowledged that gender inequality is imposing high personal, social and economic cost on Pacific people and nations, and that improved gender equality will make significant contribution to creating a prosperous, stable and secure Pacific for all current and future generations.⁸

KEY ISSUES

Small Islands States and Territories face many vulnerabilities due to their smallness, isolation, poor infrastructure, limited capacities and high exposure to natural and environmental disasters. Pacific Islands are particularly exposed to coastal inundation, soil erosion, the intrusion of saline water into surface and ground water and other consequences of rise in sea level that threatens infrastructure, settlements and livelihoods. Women face particular risks, since they are often managers, users of natural resources and primary caregivers. With little information and restricted rights, voice and decision making, they cannot fully use their skills and knowledge about local condition, community wellbeing and management of ecological resources.⁹ Women and girls in Pacific countries and territories still have a weaker voice and less influence than men, whether in household decision making, in private sector, in civil society or in politics¹⁰. Despite focused attention on the importance of achieving the MDGs, the Pacific has had mixed success in achieving **MDG 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women**. According to **the Pacific MDGs Tracking Report**¹¹ four countries remain off track from achieving their objectives, with the performance of two (Tonga and Vanuatu) deteriorating during the survey period. And only Palau and Cook Islands improving their

⁶ Family Health and Safety Study analyzes data from the first nationally representative research on violence against women and children in this country. The study, which replicates the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women, was designed to: estimate the prevalence of physical, sexual and emotional violence against women, with particular emphasis on violence by intimate partners; WHO, UNFPA, SPC research was completed in Samoa, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Tonga, Vanuatu and Fiji.

⁷ Towards Gender Equality in East Asia and the Pacific . A Companion Report to the World Development Report, World Bank East Asia and Pacific Regional Report Chapter : Agency: Voice and Influence within Home and Society page 145

⁸ This Declaration marks the highest level political commitment to addressing gender inequalities through implementation of specific national policy actions to progress gender equality, realising women's rights in decision making health, education, measures for women's economic empowerment, and ending violence against women.

⁹ Asia Pacific Human Development Report

¹⁰ Towards gender equality in East Asia and the Pacific. A Companion Report to the World Development Report; World Bank East Asia and Pacific Regional Report,

¹¹ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *2012 Pacific regional MDGs tracking report*.

performance on MDG 3¹². Taking into account the challenges faced by many Pacific countries in achieving their targets under MDG 3, increased efforts to achieve economic, social and environmental sustainability for both women and men is optimal.

The **World Summit Outcome Document** reiterated the ‘interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars’ of sustainable development as **economic development, social development** and **environmental protection**. Therefore it is necessary to unravel gender issues within the economic, social and environmental context and suggest solutions that fully capture the practical and strategic needs of women and girls. **Economic Development** can be achieved if the current conditions and discriminatory practices faced by women in the economy are fully addressed. Currently women are more likely to work in the informal sector and largely concentrated in lower paid occupations and unpaid work. **The SPC Pacific Beijing +15 Report** reveals that in most Pacific countries, there are two times more men than women in paid employment in the non agricultural sector. Gender wage gap is often greatest among men and women with relatively low education and skill level. Occupational segregation remains a challenge for the region with recent qualitative research in PNG and Fiji revealing strong stereotypes on appropriate occupation for men and women in the employment sector.¹³ Recent microeconomic studies from a number of countries across developing regions show that female farmers and entrepreneurs are inherently no less productive than male farmers and entrepreneurs; rather, they tend to have less access to productive inputs. Poor financial infrastructure and limited access to credit and loans further impede on women economic rights¹⁴. The absence of protective mechanism, equal employment opportunities, empowering legislation and access to justice system further limits women’s ability to have a voice and influence within the economy thus compromising overall efforts in achieving **sustainable economic development**.

Securing women’s voice, influence and participation at all level of society will lead to **sustainable social development**. This remains a challenge for the region. The World Bank Report stated that “*women’s voice and participation in politics remains largely absent in the Pacific*”.¹⁵ According to this report women represent 2.5 percent of political leadership roles in the Pacific, and the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau and the Solomon Islands did not have female representation in parliament as of December 2011.¹⁶ However in a positive note, the gender parity laws have led to increased representation of women in French Territories, PNG elected three women in 2012, while Kiribati elected four women in 2011. Pacific Island Countries and Territories, access to education at primary and secondary levels is close to being achieved in most of Polynesia and Micronesia, but disparities still exist in Melanesian countries.¹⁷ Women and girls still face structural and systematic barriers to **life-long education** opportunities especially in science and technology.

Human security and safety is another aspect of sustainable development. Rather unfortunately gender based violence is relatively high and widespread in the region. Studies conducted in Samoa, Kiribati and Solomon Islands and more recently in Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu indicate the rates of intimate partner violence as high as 60 to 70 percent. The UN recently called the provision of protection to victims of sorcery-related violence to be increased as a matter of urgency in Papua New Guinea following a dramatic rise in reported cases of such

¹² The Tracking report notes gains being made on achieving gender parity in education and Cook Islands and Niue being the only countries where women account for more than 50 percent of employment in the non agricultural sector.

¹³ Toward Gender Equality in East Asia and the Pacific: A Companion to the World Development Report pg 130 Gender related beliefs on appropriate employment in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Vietnam

¹⁴ Page 8 A Companion Report to the World Development Report the report also states that female headed households also tend to have poorer access to other productive inputs and support services, including livestock holdings and access to agricultural extension services.

¹⁵ Page 154 World Bank Report

¹⁶ PARLINE database on national parliaments. Inter-Parliamentary Union. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world> .htm

¹⁷ Secretariat of the Pacific Communities , 2012; 37

violence. Access to comprehensive services for survivors of violence and their families is low throughout the Pacific, providing very little escape for women and girls experiencing such violence. Inadequate laws, policies and services are costly for women, their families, society and economy. Women's access to health services has been a concern among the Pacific Island Countries for many years. Although there has been general progress in maternal health, maternal mortality remains high in low income countries and overall universal access to sexual reproductive health and rights is significantly compromised largely because of lack of clear understanding of these rights and strong patriarchal attitudes and practices in the region. Increasing number of HIV and NCDs has increased women primary care giving work leading to wider gender disparities. Food security impacts on women's work and their overall health and nutrition. Removing the root causes of gender inequalities which prevents women from participating fully in society and impeaches on their social rights is critical for **sustainable social development**.

Women play a special role in Pacific societies in **preserving and sustaining our environment** as primary users and protectors of fragile ecosystem and oceans. Pacific Islanders have always demonstrated strong resilience to environmental stresses. Although environmental stresses such as water shortages, depletion of marine and land resources, loss of bio-diversity and natural hazards are affecting everyone in the region the impacts may be different for women and men, especially those living in remote and outer islands. At the **Pacific Women's Ministerial Workshop on Climate Change in 2011, Ministers** agreed that the adverse impacts of climate change are likely to have far-reaching consequences for the Pacific Island economies and the people. Ministers affirmed the necessity of taking into account the knowledge, experiences and priorities of both women and men in order to develop effective climate change strategies.¹⁸ Women and men also play different roles and have different patterns of using natural resources. Unfortunately, there is very little information on gender dimensions of the use pattern and management of natural resources, traditional knowledge, role in food security and disaster preparedness. Women play an important role in protecting water sources and energy use. Women's participation and influence on food, water, land and energy is essential for a sustainable Pacific. Women role as farmers and in the fisheries is often overlooked which limits their participation and access to information and training to protect their environment. It is critical that measures support women's access to technical training and information about climate change, disaster management, food security and energy as a means of better equipping them to safeguard their environment and including their oceans.¹⁹

BACKGROUND

Numerous international and regional platforms and conventions state the importance of gender equality and achieving development, peace and prosperity and resilience. Through the **WAIHEKE DECLARATION ON SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT** the forum leaders pledged their commitments towards addressing economic and social challenges faced in the region, including those arising from climate change, the increasing costs and insecurities of supply of daily necessities such as energy and food, and the impacts of urbanisation and natural disasters. Leaders recognised that sustainable economic development increases the resilience of communities, including their most vulnerable members. They further committed to raising educational standards and expand opportunities for acquiring technical and vocational skills relevant to job markets, especially for women, including through non-formal education and training provision. Political level commitment on gender equality is thriving in the region with recent commitments made by leaders through the **Cairn's Communique** on addressing sexual gender based violence as a human security issue **and**

¹⁸ Communique of the Fourth Pacific Women's Ministerial Meeting, Nadi, Fiji 20-22 July 2011

¹⁹ Joint Paper by PIFS and SPC for Rio plus 20 Negotiations 2012

FEMM Action Plan²⁰ calling for concerted efforts at national level in improving women's access to economic opportunities, their full participation in the formal economy and enabling environment for women's enjoyment of their economic rights. At the recent **Commission on the Status of Women 57th Session** the Pacific ~~Forum Islands~~Islands Forum Secretariat through their collective regional statement highlighted that it is incumbent on the Pacific to ensure that the Post 2015 Development Framework encapsulates the importance of efforts to end violence against women and girls as a major contributor to the achievement of sustainable development. Members also called for gender equality to be core to the post 2015 development agenda.

The Pacific member's party²¹ to **Convention on Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women** underscores that the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the region and the cause of peace and security require maximum participation of women on an equal basis as men. Pacific countries are working towards implementing commitments prescribed by Convention however, efforts on domesticating the Convention fully into legislation, policy and practice remains marginal. The **Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality** is a key operational instrument in the promotion of gender equality for sustainable development in the Pacific Islands Region. Several initiatives implemented through this regional strategy, CEDAW, **Millennium Development Goals** and forum leaders communiqués has led to notable progress in the area of education, women's health and employment.

Whilst considering the challenges²² faced by small islands developing states making their pursuit to sustainable development particularly severe and complex, gender equality, empowerment and women's human rights should not be seen as an added burden rather an opportunity to upscale their efforts in realising sustainable development for all. Key issues to consider during discussions at the SIDS Meeting and upcoming Post Development Framework dialogues are as follows:-

- a. Measures to promote gender equality in all spheres of societies including education, employment, access to and ownership of resources, access to justice, political representation, institutional decision making, health including sexual reproductive health and household and community management needs to be further prioritized and seen as sustainable development measures
- b. Upscaling efforts in addressing root causes of gender inequalities
- c. Women's critical role in promoting sustainable development halting irreversible damage to our environmental and natural resources needs to be fully acknowledged.
- d. Ensuring that women's fundamental rights and rights relating to access to services, technology, natural resources, land, financing and resources are realised and respected
- e. Implementation of international and regional gender equality commitments and leaders communiqués²³
- f. Recognition of women as powerful agents in advancing sustainable development and ensuring their inclusion, participation, voice and influence in the growth of a green economy, sustainable development, poverty eradication as well as bringing tangible benefits to them²⁴

²⁰ adopted by the Pacific Economic Ministers 2012

²¹ Fiji, Samoa, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Republic of Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Cook Islands, (French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna through France) and Niue, Tokelau (through New Zealand)

²² Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) adopted in 1994, further complemented by The Mauritius Strategy of Implementation (MSI) of 2005 and MSI+5 Outcome document, recognized that although they are afflicted by economic difficulties and confronted by development imperatives similar to those of developing countries generally, small island developing States (SIDS) have their own peculiar vulnerabilities and characteristics, so that the difficulties they face in the pursuit of sustainable development are particularly severe and complex. These challenge includes their smallness, isolation, climate change, sea level rise, natural and environmental disasters

²³ RPPA, the Forum Leaders Declaration on gender equality, the Gender Paper for Rio+20 from PIFS/SPC

²⁴ Un Women inputs to the Zero Draft, last updated 5 March 2012. The Future We Want.

- g. Accord high priority and resources to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment towards the achievement of sustainable development and include this as part of the sustainable development goals and targets²⁵
- h. Mainstream gender in all sectors of development and build national capacities to identify and address gender issues
- i. Establish and enabling legal and institutional and social environment for gender equality, human rights and align national, regional and international frameworks with CEDAW

In conclusion regional efforts in shaping a future for the Pacific needs to include women and girls and ensure their rights and freedoms are safeguarded and gender equality and women's empowerment principle guide the sustainable development agenda

KEY DOCUMENTS & HYPERLINKS

Asian Development Bank Towards Gender Equality in East Asia and the Pacific
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/107140468/Toward-Gender-Equality-in-East-Asia-and-the-Pacific>

Communique of the Fourth Pacific Women's Ministerial Meeting, Nadi, Republic of Fiji, 20-22 July 2011

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²⁵ Joint Paper by PIFS and SPC towards the Rio plus 20 negotiations 2012