Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) have the world’s lowest levels of representation of women in parliaments (3.2%)\(^1\) and local government\(^2\). The Pacific region is home to two of the three countries in the world without any women in their lower or single house of parliament: Federated States of Micronesia and Vanuatu.\(^3\)

Increasing women’s participation in leadership and decision-making has proven to be good for economic and social development. 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 increased access to public goods such as roads and health services.

The absence of women in decision-making and leadership in the Pacific is largely a result of negative gender stereotypes, encouraged by socio-cultural norms, and processes such as inherently biased justice structures and systems\(^4\). Fortunately, the opportunity to reverse these inequalities through gender-responsive justice lies within these very same structures.

Gender-responsive justice gives both women and men equal access to the justice system, as well as legislation that reflects international standards regarding human rights and women’s rights. At present only 17% of women in Solomon Islands can easily access legal aid\(^3\), and women’s groups across PICTs report bias in the implementation of the law, affecting women’s capacity to be free of violence and provide for their children.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) sets the international standard for achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment. While most PICTs have ratified CEDAW, many experience difficulty with timely human rights reporting and effective implementation.

Pacific governments are trying to meet the needs of their citizens by developing more gender-responsive legislation, and positive perceptions about women as leaders are also starting to spread. Increasing women’s political participation and their inclusive access to justice and human rights relies on continued changes in these areas.

ADVANCING GENDER JUSTICE IN THE PACIFIC AT A GLANCE

**Timeframe:** 2013-2017.

**Countries:** 14 Pacific Island countries and territories.

**Funding sources:** UN Women, European Union, Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

**Initiatives:**
- The Pacific Women’s Access to Justice and Human Rights Initiative (Women’s Rights Initiative) to promote harmonised human rights reporting as well as de-jure and de-facto implementation of CEDAW.
- The Gender-Responsive Political Governance Initiative to promote women’s political participation and representation and gender responsiveness of state structures, systems and processes.
ADVANCING GENDER JUSTICE IN THE PACIFIC PROGRAMME

UN Women’s Advancing Gender Justice in the Pacific (AGJP) programme has been designed using nationally-identified priorities that acknowledge and highlight the complexity in changing social norms, values and cultural practices around human rights, access to justice and women’s political participation.

The programme builds on UN Women’s global and regional comparative advantage and is closely monitored to highlight consistent measurable results and effective, strategic collaboration using CEDAW to guide programme implementation.

In order to enhance the gender-responsiveness of justice and political governance systems in 14 PICTs, the AGJP programme supports government and civil society partners in implementing:

- **Increased women’s political participation:** UN Women works with UN and regional partners to address country-specific barriers to women’s full political participation. This involves strengthening the pipeline of women candidates and supporting government and civil society partners in the creation of enabling environments for women’s political participation.

- **Harmonised human rights treaties reporting:** UN Women works in collaboration with UN and regional partners to support governments in developing platforms and strengthening capacities to undertake multi-sectoral and harmonised human rights reporting and implementation processes.

- **Gender-responsive access to justice:** In collaboration with government and civil society partners, UN Women has begun analysing domestic law to assess how well it complies with international CEDAW standards and domestic practice both from a legal standpoint and in practice, and what relevant socio-cultural and legislative steps can be taken to ensure that it does.

- **Women’s engagement in peace and security:** UN Women’s work on peace and security issues supports projects that focus on increasing women’s participation in decision-making, promoting the use of gender perspectives in policy development.

- **Gender-responsive planning and budgeting:** UN Women provides practical support to PICT governments that have indicated interest in designing and implementing gender-responsive budgeting strategies.
KEY RESULTS TO DATE

• The five women who were successfully elected in the Vanuatu Port Vila municipal elections participated in UN Women-supported Transformational Leadership Training workshops in 2013 and credited the training with strengthening their skill sets and ability to lead effectively.

• In Solomon Islands, UN Women worked closely with government and civil society partners to complete a legal mapping project in order to identify barriers for women in accessing legal services as well as to provide recommendations that inform the implementation of initiatives that result in more gender responsive legal systems.

• The Office of the Electoral Commission in Samoa, in partnership with UN Women, successfully updated and gender-mainstreamed resource tools for candidates. The resulting candidate’s handbook has become a better practice standard in the region and is being implemented in other PICTs.

• UN Women supported the Samoa Law Reform Commission in developing a CEDAW Legislative Review based on country-specific concluding observations. The review will inform legislation and policy reform to advance gender equality within the socio-cultural context relevant to Samoa.

• In partnership with Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, UN Women has developed advocacy tools to highlight the challenges and opportunities for women’s political participation in Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

• In 2013 UN Women worked with regional organisations for young women, including the Pacific Young Women’s Leadership Alliance (PYWLA), to strengthen the pipeline and capacity of young women leaders. UN Women provided technical and financial support to the PYWLA gender and development dialogue. UN Women will continue this support through training and mentorship within the framework of transformational leadership principles.

CASE STUDY: PORT VILA MUNICIPAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Vanuatu is one of the few countries in the world that currently has no women in national parliament and only five women have been elected to the national parliament in the 34 years since independence.

In 2013 the Vanuatu government amended the Municipal Act to reserve 30 to 34% of seats at a municipal level for women. The Port Vila Municipal Council was the first to put the legislation into action in January 2014 and five women were successful.

In December 2013, UN Women ran a one-week Transformational Leadership Training workshop for 45 potential Port Vila candidates, including the five who would go on to become councillors. It was the first time participants had been exposed to concepts such as transformational leadership and emotional intelligence, and for many it was their first time speaking in public.
THE WAY FORWARD

Strengthening and enhancing stakeholder capacity to increase women’s political participation, human rights and access to justice through gender-responsive processes.

• Supporting civil society organisations to train Pacific women and young women leaders.

• Facilitating south-south/north-south collaboration to strengthen capacity and promote better practices among leaders in the peace and security field.

• Supporting the training of paralegals, who will then be deployed to rural communities.

• Providing support to PICTs when it is requested in order to establish family justice institutions that help expand access to justice.

Developing and implementing advocacy and communications tools to encourage behavioural change.

• Collaborating with the media to develop and implement innovative national and regional communications campaigns to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.

• Strengthening capacity among the media to identify and address the ways in which gender inequalities can lead to negative representations of women.

• Increasing the availability of training modules and resources for justice officials.

• Conducting legal empowerment community initiatives.

Coordinating with organisations and partners to create synergies that challenge the roots of gender inequality.

• Supporting PICTs in their efforts to engage in inter-governmental processes.

• Collaborating through UN Joint Programmes to enhance access to justice for women in Kiribati and Solomon Islands.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Increasing the number of women in leadership roles is essential, but it is equally important to ensure that candidates are capable of transforming their societies by championing the principles of equality.

It is also critical to develop a viable pipeline of younger women who are interested in leadership and decision-making.

The transformational leadership approach is based on the understanding that leadership starts with the individual, before moving into groups and institutions. This process leads to the redefinition of power and power relations and the strengthening of bold and innovative leadership, as well as building on the skills of both women and men.

UN Women supports and works with national institutions and regional organisations to strengthen women candidates’ technical skills and personal capacity.

These activities will not only create a foundation of women of all ages with the tools required to run successful campaigns, but will also create opportunities by building and strengthening networks that encourage women and girls to pursue leadership positions.

For more information please contact:
UN Women
Level 3, Kadavu House
Victoria Parade, Suva, Fiji
asiapacific.unwomen.org
www.facebook.com/unwomenpacific

FOOTNOTES
1 Measures taken and progress achieved in the promotion of women and political participation, UN SG Report, 2011.
3 Preliminary research on gender-responsive legal aid in Solomon Islands, 2013-14, UN Women.

CAPTIONS
Page 4: Transformational Leadership training workshop participants, Solomon Islands, 2013. Credit: UN Women/Marni Gilbert.