Welcome to UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office’s Annual Report for 2015.

It has been a busy year for UN Women’s Fiji MCO. From high profile and coordinated Pacific advocacy within international processes such as the 20th Anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, to the launch of a joint programme to end violence against women in Solomon Islands, continued success stories from UN Women’s Markets for Change project, and a highly visible 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign. UN Women was instrumental in the development and launch of two new ending violence against women toolkits created specifically to support the Pacific region, and a critical joint programme on increasing women’s political participation in Samoa.

The destructive impact of Cyclone Pam cast a long shadow over the Pacific, in particular Vanuatu. It was heartbreaking to see such devastation, but also heartening to see the level of resilience consistently on display, especially among women of all ages. While there remains so much more to be done in supporting the rebuilding of infrastructure, livelihoods and homes, it is encouraging to have been able to work so closely with so many partners on ensuring that women’s needs, voices and capabilities were actively included and considered during all stages of the humanitarian response. I look forward to building on these foundations as we move into the recovery stages and build resilience and preparedness ahead of the next cyclone season.

This year has seen UN Women’s programmes in the Pacific reach more women than ever before. There is evidence of progress and that the needs, potential and contributions of Pacific women are being prioritised and included in the private and public sectors alike. There is still, however, much to be done.

While the international community’s adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals – and the level of recognition they gave to the need to achieve gender equality – is a milestone, now the hard work really begins. We have set a deadline for achieving gender equality and now we have 15 years to bring about the intended changes on the ground. To do this, we have to work together at every level – UN, government, civil society and members of the community.

On behalf of the UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office team, I would like to thank all of our partners and donors, without whose continuing support UN Women wouldn’t be able to achieve the results that are included in this report. I hope you enjoy reading about our work this year and the changes it has supported on the ground, and we look forward to working with you going forward for the benefit of women and girls in the Pacific.

UN Women is the UN organisation dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women’s equal participation, ending violence against women, engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women’s economic empowerment and; making gender central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system’s work in advancing gender equality.

UN Women would like to acknowledge the work of Ellie van Baaren in the writing and design of this publication.

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**PACIFIC CONTEXT**

Pacific Island countries and territories are vastly diverse in many ways, from language and natural environments to politics and culture. Most nations have small populations, based on multiple outer islands or atolls, spread over large distances. There are few transport or communication resources, limited government services and many islands depend on imports of basic goods. Challenges related to governance capacity, inadequate blending of traditional and modern forms of governance and leadership, high levels of gender inequality, migration and urbanisation, resource extraction and intergroup tensions cause significant challenges to social and economic development in the region. This is further aggravated by factors such as physical isolation, varied natural resources, inadequate infrastructure and costly transportation, as well as the impact and variability of climate change, natural hazard risks and economic shocks, all of which constitute key development challenges in the Pacific.

There has been progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment in the Pacific, but it remains a key challenge. While the Millennium Development Goals helped create awareness and gain political support for efforts to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development, the Pacific region’s progress against these targets was slow and uneven. Women in the Pacific still face unequal access to productive resources and low levels of employment outside the informal sector. The Pacific has the world’s lowest number of women in parliament and violence against women is at pandemic levels. Many women face cultural, economic and systemic barriers, including little or no access to decent work, land and financial resources, leadership opportunities, legal representation, basic education and healthcare, as well as the unequal direct and indirect impacts of disasters.

Gender equality is not only a basic human right, achieving it has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth, and yet gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society around the world. The new Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in late 2015, largely recognise the importance of gender equality for achieving overall sustainable development, both through a standalone goal (Goal 5) and targets spread across all of the other 16 goals. Localising these new goals and targets provides further opportunities to work towards effectively addressing persistent gender disparities.

Women play an essential role in the Pacific when it comes to ensuring the overall health and prosperity of their families, communities and nations. For instance, they are responsible for most of the growing and selling of small-scale agricultural produce in Pacific marketplaces, in fact between 75 and 90 per cent of market vendors in the Pacific are women. Discrimination, however, prevents many women from fully realising their rights, reaching their potential and participating fully in their communities.

While the region still has a long way to go, there is a growing recognition at the highest levels of government and in regional bodies that achieving gender equality is essential for the region’s future and needs to be prioritised. This commitment and momentum is a result of high-level commitments from Pacific Island Forum leaders, increased accessibility of data, and the development of specific legislation and policies on gender equality and violence against women.
The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) was established in 2010 to address the challenges facing women around the world, providing them with a powerful voice at the global, regional and local levels.

UN Women works with governments and civil society organisations across 14 Pacific Island countries and territories through its Fiji Multi-Country Office (MCO), with field presences in Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa (covering Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau), Solomon Islands and Vanuatu and a programme presence in Tonga. UN Women is also represented through the United Nations Joint Presence Offices in Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu.

Outside of the Fiji MCO, UN Women also has a separate, fully fledged office in Papua New Guinea, with country-specific programming.

In recognition of the importance of gender issues in the region and as part of its commitment to the Pacific, UN Women has continued to strengthen its presence and capacity regionally during 2015.

This strong presence allows UN Women to work across a number of thematic areas:

- Ending violence against women
- Women’s human rights
- Women’s economic empowerment
- Gender and climate change
- Gender and disaster risk reduction
- Intergovernmental coordination

In order to maximise the efforts of the UN to deliver on gender and to implement its coordination mandate, UN Women also co-chairs the UN Pacific Gender Group, which supports the UN’s gender work within the Pacific development and humanitarian contexts. UN Women’s work with the Gender Group allows it to support the entire UN system in the Pacific to deliver on gender.

Photos:
1, 4, 8, 9 UN Women/Ellie an Baaren | 2 UN Women/Murray Lloyd | 3 UN Women/Israel A Abrahamson | 5 UN Women/Nicolas Bumate
Globally, violence against women and girls is one of the most serious human rights violations; both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality and discrimination. Pacific countries have some of the world’s highest documented rates of violence against women, with data showing that over 60 per cent of women living in the region experience physical and/or sexual violence from a partner.1

Prevalence studies have now been completed in 11 Pacific countries and territories, drawing a compelling picture of the shape of violence against women across the region, including its causes, consequences, and how women access support services.

In many cases across the region, women face social norms demanding that they be obedient to their husbands. These are often linked to deeply held beliefs that there are therefore “justifiable reasons” for husbands to use physical violence to “discipline and control” their wives.

The traditional silence around violence against women makes it difficult for women to talk about their suffering and to seek help in breaking the cycle of violence; the shame and stigma associated with domestic and sexual violence means that survivors often experience a sense of isolation and fear retaliation. For those women who do look to escape an abusive situation, services are limited, with many providers based in capital cities rather than rural areas where the majority of people live.

Many women have difficulty accessing the formal justice system, while informal justice systems often further compound the discrimination faced by survivors. In some countries customary law has constitutional status which mean customary practices – many of which discriminate against women – influence formal criminal and civil procedures.

There have been encouraging signs of progress in the Pacific on ending violence against women and UN Women has been actively working to support Pacific-led activities to improve the policy environment and to meet the immediate needs of women who are experiencing violence.

March 2015 saw the launch of a comprehensive, well-resourced joint programme aimed at effectively addressing violence against women and girls in Solomon Islands. Titled “Keeping the Promise in the Solomon Islands: From Policy to Action”, the programme is a landmark effort by UN Agencies to coordinate a coherent and cohesive approach to addressing violence against women and children through targeted support to national government and civil society actors.

Through this programme, a new data collection system for key government agencies has been developed, which has led to further collaboration and cooperation among government ministries. The increase in visibility of the joint programme itself has in turn raised the profile of the other joint activities in ending violence against women, as well as increasing further collaboration with other stakeholders and donor partners.

UN Women’s coordination and technical assistance in Solomon Islands has strengthened the capacity of healthcare workers when it comes to compassionate clinical care for survivors, and of police officers on the dynamics of family violence. UN Women is also coordinating closely with the Australian Government on their health system review, which links closely with the review of SafeNet, a multisector gender-based violence coordination entity housed within the Department of Social Welfare.

In July 2015 UN Women launched How to Design Projects to End Violence against Women and Girls, a user-friendly toolkit to help organisations design ending violence against women.
ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN TOOLKIT: FIRST OF ITS KIND IN PACIFIC

When Are’i’ki Women’s Association’s Programme Officer Moana, found out that the rape of a young woman by her boyfriend was not an isolated incident, she decided to do something about it. While her idea showed promise, she wasn’t sure where to start, how to design and implement a project, or where to source funding for it.

Moana, her organisation and community of Are’i’ki are fictional, but the challenges she faces in getting her project off the ground are similar to those faced by activists and organisations across the Pacific.

Moana’s story is woven through UN Women’s toolkit, launched in July 2015, providing an evolving case study that helps to guide readers through the different steps of creating and implementing an effective project that makes a meaningful difference on the ground for women and girls, as well as secure the funding needed to make it sustainable.

The how to design projects to end violence against women and girls toolkit is the first of its kind in the Pacific, it incorporates a number of group activities, assessments, workplans, data collection, media outreach, and capacity in this area. This intensification of UN Women’s primary prevention training in the Pacific has influenced the regional debate and dialogue on what works when it comes to stopping violence, and the role of men, boys and the faith-based community in violence prevention efforts.

It is encouraging to see such a noticeable increase in the inclusion of primary prevention in discussions on ending violence against women at national and community levels, something that has been lacking. This includes discussions led by Aleta Miller of UN Women’s Pacific Regional Ending Violence Against Women Facility Fund (Pacific Fund).”

According to Ume Wainetti, National Convener of the Papua New Guinea Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee, the handbook provides guidelines that have been needed in the Pacific for a long time.

“We have attended trainings on preparing project submissions but we have not had any trainings specifically on gender-based violence. I found the handbook very easy to read and understand, and I’m looking forward to using it to help other NGOs that are seeking funding.”

The toolkit was developed through UN Women’s Pacific Regional Ending Violence Against Women Facility Fund (Pacific Fund), with funding from the Australian Government.

How to design projects to end violence against women and girls: a step-by-step guide to taking action is available for download free of charge: http://ow.ly/p3gicypqozw

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It is encouraging to see such a noticeable increase in the inclusion of primary prevention in discussions on ending violence against women at national and community levels, something that has been lacking. This includes discussions led by Aleta Miller of UN Women’s Pacific Regional Ending Violence Against Women Facility Fund (Pacific Fund). South-south exchanges facilitated by UN Women helped improve the ability of Pacific Fund grantee organisations to run successful ending violence against women campaigns, and advocate and lobby effectively. UN Women partnered with the Pacific Community’s Regional Rights Resource Team to host a workshop for 17 Pacific Fund grantee organisations from six countries and territories. During the exchange, workshop participants shared lessons, successes and opportunities to advance country strategies to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. They also shared lobbying tools and campaign strategies, as well as discussing navigating sensitive issues, environments and personalities. Participants noted the benefits of learning from each other, one stating: “This process of getting people together to exchange learning is a good idea. It should be done more often. We learn quite a lot in a short time.”

UN Women and UNESCO partnered with the National Council of Churches of Samoa to host two workshops as part of a process to produce a “Preach against Violence” brochure. The publication is a resource for clergy and faith-based organisations, giving them guidance on appropriate Biblical quotes to frame discussions about healthy families, respect for women, and zero tolerance of violence with their congregations. More than 100 men received the brochure during a “Men in Faith-based Organisations” symposium hosted by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign. UN Women through its Pacific Fund.

During 2015, Joseva took part in UN Women’s Primary Prevention Awareness on Ending Violence Against Girls and Women training, and a Training of Trainers workshop with the Change Makers Toolkit, jointly run by UN Women and IPPF. Read Joseva’s full story here: http://ow.ly/4lFG0yo5re

THE JOURNEY OF A YOUTH VOLUNTEER

Joseva Maikitu started volunteering with the Fiji Red Cross when he was 16. Now, as a Gender Champion Volunteer, he conducts awareness-raising sessions in communities and schools around his base of Labasa on laws related to gender-based violence and gender discrimination.

“Being involved with the Fiji Red Cross has helped me raise my voice against gender-based violence and also have the courage to talk about the barriers, particularly religious and cultural, that are used to suppress and oppress women in the communities I work with,” he says.

Through his outreach activities he is working to end stigma and discrimination against women, but he is also working to make change in his own home.

“Change starts at the family level,” he explains. “Being non-violent is all about changing social norms. Respecting women does not make men weak but it helps in promoting peaceful communities.”

A survivor of violence, himself, Joseva credits a series of trainings from the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre, UN Women and International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) with giving him the courage to share his own experiences and empowering him to support gender-related projects at work. In particular, he was able to assist the Fiji Red Cross Team in Suva develop information, education and communications materials for the gender and emergencies project, which receives funding from UN Women through its Pacific Fund.

Joseva’s full story here: http://ow.ly/5cG0Dy5sV
Pacific Fund Grantee Organisations Key Successes

UN Women’s Pacific Fund provides grants of up to US$100,000 and extensive capacity building support to government departments and civil society organisations for projects working specifically towards ending violence against women and girls in the region. Funded by the Australian Government, each of the projects receiving support through the Pacific Fund is making a difference on the ground.

Tonga: As part of Ma Fafine Mo e Famili’s Transformational Leadership programme, male participants have acknowledged their own attitudes and behaviours that support violence, and developed action plans to start practising different approaches in their homes and communities.

Tonga: A new partnership between Talitha Project and the Tonga Rugby Union, led to the integration of UN Women’s HeForShe campaign and increased awareness-raising on ending violence against women. The Tongan national teams have been training in specially designed gear bearing messages on ending violence against women, as well as using social media channels to promote key messages. During the Hong Kong round of the World Rugby Sevens Series, the Tonga team also visited local schools to talk with students on ending violence against women. “Developing [players] physically to bring out the best of their ability is desirable, but I seriously doubt if they can be wholesome men if they do not recognise gender equality,” explains Tonga’s Sevens rugby coach Andy Katoa.

Fiji: The House of Sarah’s project, “Prevention and Response: Strategies to achieve Zero Tolerance of Violence against Women in Church Communities” is the second phase of the Anglican Church Diocese of Polynesia’s implementation strategy of the ‘Zero Tolerance’ motion passed at the Synod meeting in 2013. The project aims to change mindsets within the church by training clergy, lay leaders, and leaders of women’s, men’s and youth groups by demonstrating the interface between Biblical and theological teachings, and human rights, gender equality and gender-based violence.

Fiji: The Fiji Girl Guides Association is the first guiding association to implement the Voices against Violence curriculum in the Pacific region, piloting it in nine schools during 2015. The curriculum provides young people with tools and expertise to understand the root causes of violence in their communities, to educate and involve their peers and communities to prevent such violence, and to learn about where to access support if they or someone they know does experience violence. Designed for girls aged 5 to 25, the curriculum was developed through a partnership between the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and UN Women, in association with experts in gender-based violence and non-formal education.

Vanuatu: Following training given to 28 women, men and youth church leaders by Vanuatu Christian Council, individual churches across seven denominations (Anglican, Presbyterian, Catholic, Apostolic, Assemblies of God, Seventh Day Adventist, and Church of Christ) identified gender-based violence prevention plans. UN Women provided technical support for the training, ensuring all member churches were informed on the Training Manual on Human Rights, Faith and Gender so they could use it in their programming activities.

I’m trying to build up to the strength that Vanessa Amos [Talitha Project] has. She’s really influenced me and really encouraged me, picked me up from where I fell and she’s given me a lot of opportunities to realise what I’m good at. Workshops like this actually encourage us young people to stand up and to know our rights.

Lupe Puloka
Youth activist, violence survivor and participant in UN Women training Tonga

2 in 3 women in the Pacific have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

89% of women in Federated States of Micronesia who experienced violence did not go to a formal service or authority for support.

44% of ever-partnered women in Vanuatu experience sexual violence in their lifetime.

70% of women in Samoa believe that partner abuse can be justified under certain circumstances.

44% of ever-partnered women in Vanuatu experience sexual violence in their lifetime.

Photo: UN Women/ Ellie van Baaren

Photo: UN Women/ Ellie van Baaren
16 Days of Activism

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign in 2015 was one of the most visible and active the Pacific has seen, with a wide range of events taking place across the region—from marches to panel discussions, sporting tournaments to film festivals, media events to art.

The campaign originated from the first Women’s Global Leadership Institute, sponsored by the Center for Women’s Global Leadership in 1991. Running from 25 November—International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women—to December 10—World Human Rights Day—every year, the campaign is a platform for raising awareness of violence as a human rights issue, strengthening local work around violence against women, demonstrating the solidarity of women, men, boys and girls, and creating tools to pressure governments to implement their promises around eliminating violence against women.

In 2015, UN Women looked to involve both traditional and non-traditional partners in campaign activities, including the private sector, government, donor community, faith-based organisations, civil society and UN agency partners.

Some of the highlights of the 2015 campaign included the first Nothing Less than Equal Film Festival in Fiji, the inaugural Ending Violence against Women Rugby Sevens tournament in Samoa, retail campaigns in both Fiji and Samoa, and public marches in Tonga, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Photos:
1. House of Sarah held a series of Bible studies on ending violence against women in Fiji. UN Women/Ellie van Baaren
2. UN Women’s Alia Bloom raises awareness of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign in Suva, Fiji. UN Women/Ellie van Baaren
3. A mother and child take part in activities on International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in Port Vila, Vanuatu. UN Women
4. Half-time entertainment at the Ending Violence against Women Rugby 7s tournament in Samoa included modern dance dedicated to the cause. UN Women/Berta Solis
5. A Ministry of Health nurse completes a health check on a woman market vendor in Tavua, Fiji as part of UN Women’s Orange the Market event. UN Women/Ellie van Baaren
6. Audience members at one of a series of panel discussions on transgender rights held around Fiji. UN Women/Ellie van Baaren
7. UN Women’s Erana Aliklik joins other participants in a walk to end violence against women in Nauru. UN Women/Martin Child
8. UN Women’s Betty Toa joins a march in Port Vila, Vanuatu on International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. UN Women/Murray Lloyd
9. Families, students and budding artists created murals calling for the elimination of violence against women at a UN Women event in Suva. Fiji
10. UN Women’s Orange the Market event in Suva, Fiji
11. The Bahai Community joined a march through Port Vila, Vanuatu on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. UN Women
WOMEN’S HUMAN RIGHTS

Despite the fact that gender equality is a fundamental principle of the UN Human Rights Charter, women across the Pacific and the world continue to experience legal, social, economic and political discrimination. Harmful gender stereotypes continue to define what a woman “should” do and be, rather than recognising their individual rights as a human being. These stereotypes inform and reinforce formal and informal restrictions on women’s active participation and involvement in all aspects of public and private life in the Pacific – from decision-making in the home to political representation, from having access to their earnings to owning land and businesses, from feeling safe in public places to being able to trust the formal justice system.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) provided the first globally agreed definition of discrimination against women, and was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. It sets out a framework for achieving gender equality and any state that ratifies the convention is legally bound to eliminate discriminatory practices against women and girls and incorporate gender equality into law. CEDAW has since been ratified by 188 states, including all but two of the Pacific Island countries and territories – Palau and Tonga.

Effective implementation and timely reporting on CEDAW commitments has long been an issue in the Pacific, however, significant progress has been made. In 2015, the governments of Federated States of Micronesia and Nauru submitted initial CEDAW State reports after substantial delays, and a Tuvalu delegation attended the constructive dialogue of its combined third and fourth periodic report (see page 20). Submission of initial reports from the Governments of the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Kiribati were also anticipated by the end of 2015 and early 2016 respectively. When that occurs, every CEDAW state party in the Pacific will have submitted at least an initial report, a significant milestone in a context where delays of 10 years or more have been commonplace.

UN Women has provided both governments and civil society organisations with support at every stage of the process; from resourcing and reviewing draft reports, to preparatory sessions for state delegations and facilitating consultations on implementing the concluding observations. In particular, UN Women held capacity-building workshops for government and civil society in the Solomon Islands, as well as providing technical assistance and advice to help finalise initial state CEDAW reports in Nauru and the Republic of Marshall Islands. This assistance is geared toward building a critical mass of reporting and implementation experience in both partner governments and CSOs.

Additionally, UN Women’s coordination role within the UN Gender Group helped ensure that inputs from multiple UN agencies strengthened the confidential UN Country Team reports on CEDAW for Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

All but two of the countries and territories covered by UN Women in the Pacific have ratified CEDAW. The first Pacific country to do so was Samoa in 1992.6

66%

The percentage of domestic violence cases across seven Pacific countries where gender-discriminatory factors led to a sentence reduction.8

3

of the countries in the Pacific are listed as “Least Developed Countries” by the United Nations – Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.7

12
“There are always opportunities to challenge myths about rape and gender-based violence, and it’s important that we do so in our own personal space – among friends and families, in the churches, in the educational system. Change is happening and there is always hope.”

Tura Lewai
Member of UN Secretary General’s Network of Male Leaders
Fiji

CEDAW TUVALU

In 2015, UN Women supported the Government of Tuvalu throughout the CEDAW cycle: from providing training and a mock dialogue session, to supporting the State delegation to attend the constructive dialogue in Geneva, through to providing follow-up training and facilitating a community consultation that resulted in the incorporation of the Concluding Observations into future policy plans.

After the two-day pre-dialogue workshop, which was also supported by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community’s (SPC) Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT), Tuvalu delegation head Puatai Etutiai, Senior Assistant Secretary with the Office of the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, said the mock sessions gave her and the delegation a real feeling of what to expect in Geneva.

“It showed us we need to be really focused, and to really hit the question when we respond to the Committee. Without this session, I would not be as prepared.”

The dialogue took place on February 20 and the resulting report highlighted several areas for improvement, including: the impact of climate change on Tuvalu and in particular on women; participation of women in decision-making; economic empowerment of women; a large number of discriminatory provisions in laws and long delay in revision of national legislation; elimination of all forms of violence against women.
Women’s Political Participation

Increasing the levels of women’s participation in leadership and decision-making continues to be a challenge across the Pacific. While women have the right to vote and stand for election in all Pacific countries, to do so they must often challenge and overcome negative gender stereotypes, as well as the cultural norms that support them. The region has the world’s lowest rates of women in parliament, and in 2015 four Pacific countries had no women in their lower or single houses of parliament.1

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 or regulations. The continued absence of women in decision-making and leadership only reinforces negative perceptions both amongst potential candidates and the general public, undermining efforts to build the skills, networks and confidence women need to change the statistics.

Three Pacific countries – Republic of Marshall Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu – held elections in 2015, the results of which saw a marginal decrease in the overall number of women in Pacific parliaments. In 2015 the overall percentage was 5.4 per cent, or 30 women out of 559 parliamentary seats; in 2014 the level was 5.7 per cent and in 2013 it was 4.7 per cent.10 Opportunities for Vanuatu to elect its first woman member of parliament since 2008 took a further hit after the government called an early snap election for January 2016. The short lead-up time undermined efforts to groom and support female candidates and only eight of the 263 candidates were women, two fewer than in 2012.

Despite this, there are numerous signs that years of advocacy and programming are starting to bear fruit and that mentalities are finally shifting so that further progress is possible.

The election of three women to parliament in the Republic of Marshall Islands represented an 300 per cent increase in women’s representation in the North Pacific country (three MPs versus one in 2011), and in January 2016 Hilda Heine (pictured below) was elected as the country’s first female president. She is also the first woman to be elected to lead a Pacific nation.

In Kiribati the number of women candidates was double that of the 2011 election, something that was attributed to the increase in awareness-raising by a number of groups, including UN Women. Samoa was also preparing for its first election – scheduled for March 2016 – since an amendment to the Constitution reserved 10 per cent of parliamentary seats for women.

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
the un Women-unDp increasing political participation parliament had three women out of the 49 seats, ranking wide trends. Before the march 2016 election, Samoa’s Samoa’s level of women in parliament reflects region- to 23%. Before the training 68% of the students believed significant shift in thinking among the journalism students women in politics in a transformative and gender-sensitive in leadership, as well as develop their skills in covering media coverage can affect public perceptions of women and looked to boost participants’ understanding of how parities. The programme included training for journalism students on gender-sensitive elections reporting, workshops for NGOs on social media advocacy, development training for the programme included training for journalism students participating in the parliamentary process, and providing information and training to political parties ahead of the election. It also includes post-election mentoring support for all members of parliament on subjects such as gender- responsive budgeting and gender-sensitive legislation.

The programme also included training for journalists on gender-sensitive elections reporting, workshops for NGOs on social media advocacy, development training for community outreach officers, live elections talkback radio shows and a seven-part radio drama. The training for journalism students was delivered through a partnership with National University of Samoa and looked to boost participants’ understanding of how media coverage can affect public perceptions of women in leadership, as well as develop their skills in covering women in politics in a transformative and gender-sensitive manner. Pre and post-training attitudinal surveys showed a significant shift in thinking among the journalism students who participated. For example, before the training 68% of the students agreed that men were naturally better leaders than women; after the training this had dropped to 23%. Before the training 68% of the students believed there was no such thing as sexist language; this had dropped to 40% after the training.

Funded and supported by IPPWS, the weekly radio talk show “Fa’asoa i Le Pola” or Elections Talk, aired from September 2015 to March 2016. Hosted by Samoa Alia Mai, an NGO that aims to develop leaders and promote women in office, the radio shows covered three thematic areas: the Constitutional Amendment and voter registration awareness; promoting women in leadership and encouraging women to run for office; and providing female candidates with a platform to promote their campaigns. More than half of the 24 female candidates running in the election were interviewed on air. Samoa Alia Mai chair Lenalu Nele Leulia said in the past people in Samoa rarely talked about elections because they didn’t know their rights as voters. “Now that more people know their rights, they are beginning to make noises. Why haven’t we been discussing [women’s representation] all along? There is a hunger for it and we are looking forward to tough questions.”

Fa’atino Lou Vala’aienia was modelled on “A Time to Stand,” the radio drama developed through UN Women’s Strongim Mere project ahead of the Solomon Islands election in 2014. Written specifically for the Samoan context, the drama follows the story of Laupele Mekatai Losini, from her decision to run for parliament right through to the eve of the elections, detailing her trials and tribulations and how both support and resistance come from unexpected corners.

Listen to Fa’atino Lou Vala’aienia: http://ow.ly/6FlgsqTZKJ

The percentage of women representatives in parliaments in the Pacific region in 2015. This represents 30 women out of a total of 559 parliament seats across the Pacific.” The global average is 22%.12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palau</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Niue</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
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Overall, the Women in Samoa (IPPWS) programme, which included discussions on barriers to women’s political participation, and highlighted case studies of Pacific experiences of temporary special measures to raise the number of women in parliament.

Conference delegate and Speaker of the Cook Islands Parliament, Hon. Nikki Rattle said the conference was an excellent opportunity to see what other countries in the Pacific are doing to address the issue. “We know that getting more women into parliament is a significant issue for Pacific Island countries, and each country will need to address this issue in its own particular way. A conference like this allows us to see firsthand how places like Samoa and New Caledonia are using temporary special measures to address these issues.”

As part of the Strongim Mere project in Solomon Islands, supported by the European Union, UN Women supported a series of radio dialogues featuring the four women members of either provincial or national parliaments. The dialogues aimed to give women a platform for discussing their experiences in standing for election and participating in governance, in an effort to shift public perceptions of women in leadership and provide role models.

Hon. Jocelyn Wesley Ipei is the only woman member of the Temotu provincial government and she spoke of her belief that women are needed at all levels of government. “That is why I contested the elections, because I believe that women have good qualities that should be recognised and we have the potential in us to help our people in the community too. Not only that, but I have qualifications that I believe I can use to address the needs and issues in my ward.”

In April 2015, UN Women and UNDP launched the Increasing Political Participation of Women in Samoa (IPPWS) Programme, a joint initiative in partnership with the Government of Samoa and the Australian Government. The programme aims to raise the visibility and understanding of the importance of having more women in Parliament, the barriers to getting them there, and the constitutional amendment reserving 10 per cent of parliamentary seats for women. The programme included workshops targeting journalists, NGOs, political parties, potential candidates and community trainers, which paved the way for more extensive community outreach and advocacy through traditional and emerging channels. Live talkback shows and a seven-part radio drama series following a first-time woman candidate created specifically for the Samoan context were broadcast widely. More than 15,000 new voters registered to vote in the 2016 general election, 5,000 more than was anticipated by the Office of the Electoral Commission, a tremendous result in part attributable to successful IPPWS outreach.

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. Representatives from 13 Pacific Island countries and territories gathered in Papua New Guinea in 2015 to learn about different measures that have been taken to increase women’s representation in government by countries in the region and around the world. UN Women partnered with UNDP, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Government of Australia to host the Pacific Regional Conference on Strengthening Women’s Participation in Parliaments, which included discussions on barriers to women’s political participation, and highlighted case studies of Pacific experiences of temporary special measures to raise the number of women in parliament.

PREPARING FOR A HISTORIC ELECTION

Samoa’s level of women in parliament reflects region-wide trends. Before the March 2016 election, Samoa’s parliament had three women out of the 49 seats, ranking Samoa 16th out of 18 countries, in the 2011 election, just eight of the 162 candidates were women.

The UN Women-UNDP Increasing Political Participation of Women in Samoa (IPPWS) joint programme focuses on awareness-raising, capacity building for women participating in the parliamentary process, and providing information and training to political parties ahead of the election. It also includes post-election mentoring support for all members of parliament on subjects such as gender-responsive budgeting and gender-sensitive legislation.

The programme included training for journalists on gender-sensitive elections reporting, workshops for NGOs on social media advocacy, development training for community outreach officers, live elections talkback radio shows and a seven-part radio drama. The training for journalism students was delivered through a partnership with National University of Samoa and looked to boost participants’ understanding of how media coverage can affect public perceptions of women in leadership, as well as develop their skills in covering women in politics in a transformative and gender-sensitive manner. Pre and post-training attitudinal surveys showed a significant shift in thinking among the journalism students who participated. For example, before the training 68% of the students agreed that men were naturally better leaders than women; after the training this had dropped to 23%. Before the training 68% of the students believed there was no such thing as sexist language; this had dropped to 40% after the training.

Funded and supported by IPPWS, the weekly radio talk show “Fa’asoa i Le Pola” or Elections Talk, aired from September 2015 to March 2016. Hosted by Samoa Alia Mai, an NGO that aims to develop leaders and promote women in office, the radio shows covered three thematic areas: the Constitutional Amendment and voter registration awareness; promoting women in leadership and encouraging women to run for office; and providing female candidates with a platform to promote their campaigns. More than half of the 24 female candidates running in the election were interviewed on air.

Samoa Alia Mai chair Lenalu Nele Leulia said in the past people in Samoa rarely talked about elections because they didn’t know their rights as voters. “Now that more people know their rights, they are beginning to make noises. Why haven’t we been discussing [women’s representation] all along? There is a hunger for it and we are looking forward to tough questions.”

Fa’atino Lou Vala’aienia was modelled on “A Time to Stand,” the radio drama developed through UN Women’s Strongim Mere project ahead of the Solomon Islands election in 2014. Written specifically for the Samoan context, the drama follows the story of Laupele Mekatai Losini, from her decision to run for parliament right through to the eve of the elections, detailing her trials and tribulations and how both support and resistance come from unexpected corners.

Listen to Fa’atino Lou Vala’aienia: http://ow.ly/6FlgsqTZKJ

The percentage of women representatives in parliaments in the Pacific region in 2015. This represents 30 women out of a total of 559 parliament seats across the Pacific.” The global average is 22%.12

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Women’s Economic Empowerment

Participating in economic activities allows women to make positive changes in their own lives and their communities, with positive ripple effects for the whole nation. Historically, however, institutions, systems and structures often restrict women’s economic opportunities, while gendered roles and status can limit women’s voices and choices when it comes to household and community decisions.

The Pacific region is estimated to have the second highest rate of vulnerable workers in the subsistence economy. Overall labour force participation is also lower than in other regions and the rates for women are particularly low—from 23 per cent in Samoa to 65 per cent in the Cook Islands, compared to 58 per cent (Samoa) and 77 per cent (Cook Islands) for men.

In most Pacific countries, rural areas and outer island have semi-subistence economies, with women usually performing a greater share of food growing and inshore fishing activities. This, along with discriminatory and traditional practices, often limits women’s availability for formal employment. Women are also responsible for the majority of household and care work, which continues to be largely unremunerated.

Markets provide great opportunities for increasing women’s economic empowerment because they are central to livelihoods in many Pacific island countries and territories, and most of the vendors are women. In this context UN Women’s Markets for Change project represents an important opportunity to make a fundamental difference in the lives of Pacific women. Principally funded by the Australian Government through its Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development programme, Markets for Change is a six-year initiative that focuses on ensuring markets in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are safe, inclusive, and non-discriminatory, promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment.

A key focus of the Markets for Change project has been supporting vendors in establishing or reinvigorating vendor associations that defend vendors’ interests with market management and local authorities. In 2015 the Markets for Change project continued to provide trainings to market vendors in this area and as a result, more than 10,000 market vendors were represented by vendor association executive committees.

While many of these associations are still relatively new, local authorities are recognising the important role they play by including them in official consultations. In many cases it’s the first time such consultations have been held. In Fiji, the Lautoka and Labasa City Councils have started systematically inviting the local Market Vendor Association Executive Committees to participate in sessions of the Councils’ management meetings that are related to market management. In Solomon Islands, the Honiara City Council invited the Market Vendor Association Executive Committee to participate in consultations on the market budget for 2016.

In Vanuatu, the Silae Vanua vendors association has been invited by the Port Vila Municipal Market to participate in community consultations undertaken as part of the Port Vila Urban Development Project. This project is looking at drainage, public toilet and sanitation facilities in Port Vila, including the re-development of those facilities at the Port Vila Central Market. Improvements to physical infrastructure at Labasa and Lautoka Markets in Fiji helped promote safety and access for its users, directly benefiting 1,600 market vendors (1,100 women and 500 men). These improvements included a new accommodation centre at Labasa that provides rural women with a safe space when they stay at the market overnight, as well as a covered accommodation centre at the Port Vila Central Market.
LEADING RECOVERY & CELEBRATIONS

Winnie Douglas’ daily responsibilities are typical of many women in rural Vanuatu and the wider Pacific. They include everything from feeding the family, keeping the house tidy, doing the washing, tending the garden, making mats, overseeing the market, helping the church association, teaching Sunday school, visiting sick people, preparing food for single men, and helping provide for families in need.

But it is her business responsibilities at the market that Winnie says are most critical for the well-being of the village: “The market is very important. This is our business. It must grow and we have to look after it for our children and grandchildren.”

The quiet spoken treasurer of the Emua Market Committee, Winnie was born in Emua, Vanuatu, and is married to the village chief, Chief Albert Manlaesinu. Under Winnie’s guidance the Emua market operates as a co-operative of around 40-50 growers.

Having money in the bank meant the market house could be rebuilt quickly, and, with encouragement from local women and leadership from Chief Manlaesinu, the market re-opened just eight weeks after Cyclone Pam, the first of Efate’s rural markets to do so. The income has helped village residents rebuild their lives.

Winnie is grateful for the guidance UN Women and other organisations provide.

“The advice you give, I pass on and it helps us improve all the time. We move to the next level with the help we get,” International Day of Rural Women is something Winnie says is particularly special.

“Thank you to the UN for thinking of rural women. Thank you for this day. Women will realise they are special and have rights and we will celebrate together. This day will warm the hearts of all women.”

The International Day of Rural Women celebrations at Emua village included a public march and an official celebratory event with high-level participants. The events attracted more than 2,000 people.

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extension at Lautoka Market providing shelter for casual market vendors.

Through the partnership between UNDP and Westpac as part of UN Women’s Markets for Change project, 2,093 market vendors (91.7% women) in Fiji took part in Continuing Market Business Training Education in 10 markets, improving their financial literacy and business practice skills. The formalising of a similar partnership with Bank South Pacific (BSP) in Solomon Islands in September 2015 will see BSP providing financial literacy and business education training to market vendors at Honiara Central Market and Auki Market.

A new partnership between UN Women and the New Zealand Aid Community Police Programme is enabling the Markets for Change project to work with the Vanuatu National Police in order to improve security at market sites. As a result, 23 National Country Officers took part in an assessment workshop on how to address and identify safety and security risks. The workshop, focusing on Luganville Market house, involved decision-makers and senior managers, including inspectors, detectives, the Assistant Police Commissioner, and the Commander North.

UN Women held follow-up meetings with the Police to discuss concrete actions to improving the security situation in the market site.

ASSOCIATION HELPS WOMEN SPEAK OUT

On March 6, Auki Market’s first ever vendors’ association launched in the Malaita province of Solomon Islands, giving market vendors – the majority of whom are women – collective representation in decision-making processes about their workplace.

This step is part of UN Women’s Markets for Change project, which is working to help create an enabling environment for the economic empowerment of market vendors across Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The project is principally funded by the Australian Government.

"Women play a very important role in marketplaces but are often side-lined for any decision-making," Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, Ethel Sigimanu, says. "Through the association, market vendors, especially women, now have a voice – she now belongs to a group, can stand up, and now speak out through a group."

Joy Janet Ramo is one of 16 women who were voted onto the Association’s Executive Committee in 2014 by market vendors attending UN Women’s “Getting Started” workshop and took on the role of chairperson in 2015. She told the audience how big a step this is for Auki’s market vendors.

“We have a space for talking about any issues in the market place... We can put forward our voice together and start linking with others.”

Joy Janet says a second round of Markets for Change workshops focused on the concepts of gender and transformational leadership gave her a new understanding of, and confidence around, the word gender – a word she had previously been frightened of.

“When I went back to my house I storied with my sisters, and I storied with my husband. I believe I can help the church women. I work with understand this word gender that we often think is a threat.”
After making its way across the Pacific, on the night of 13 March 2015 Tropical Cyclone Pam – by then a Category 5 “super cyclone” – made a direct hit on the south-eastern islands of Vanuatu. Winds peaked at around 350kmph, leaving a path of destruction through urban and rural areas alike.

Around 90 per cent of the infrastructure in the capital of Port Vila was damaged or destroyed, up to 96 per cent of crops destroyed in affected areas, 15,000 home were destroyed and 75,000 people had to be housed in evacuation centres across the islands. The outlying islands, especially Tanna, were particularly badly hit, and could only be reached for the first time several days after the storm passed. It is estimated that 166,000 people, more than half the population, were affected.

In Tuvalu around 42 per cent of the population was affected, while several communities in Solomon Islands’ Eastern province were also affected and Kiribati experienced storm surges and flooding.

From a gender perspective, there were two main concerns in the immediate aftermath: income streams for women – many of whom rely on their gardens for food and income as market vendors; and an increased risk of gender-based violence. It was essential that women had access to information and services to support their recovery.
Providing Support and Leadership in the Wake of Cyclone Pam

Different groups in society experience disasters differently. A house for a woman is often more than a place to sleep and eat; it is also her office, her security, and her place of childcare, which means losing it has different implications. It is these kinds of differences that make gender such a crucial consideration in the recovery process.

As such, UN Women has been deeply involved in the humanitarian response and early recovery efforts in Vanuatu, working to ensure the needs and voices of women and girls across the affected areas were integrated into response and recovery planning and delivery. This involved putting in place special activities and adapting pre-planned programme activities to ensure that they fit into response and recovery efforts, all the while attempting to limit implementation delays.

UN Women supported the Vanuatu Government in identifying humanitarian needs and assessing the social-economic impacts of the disaster. Support was provided to the Gender and Protection Cluster by revising assessment forms, providing support to the National Disaster Management Office and Protection Cluster co-leads in coordinating assessments and disaster response, and developing the Protection Assessment report, which fed into the Humanitarian Action Plan.

UN Women's Gender and Protection Advisor was also deployed to provide direct training to all members of the impact assessment teams, to help ensure that gender-disaggregated data was collected and protection concerns were highlighted. The information collected through these assessments not only helped direct response and recovery efforts, but also identified areas where more could be done to ensure women and girls were safer.

UN Women's support helped ensure the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) was the first in the Pacific to include specific analysis of the gendered impacts under each sector. This is particularly important because the PDNA guides the recovery framework, including identifying priorities and the resources needed. With the Department of Women Affairs, UN Women led the assessment and drafting of the gender and social inclusion chapter within the PDNA and provided inputs into all other PDNA sector reports.

In its key role as a coordinating agency, UN Women also facilitated relief efforts by leveraging the resources of other stakeholders in order to respond to the needs of market vendors. Through its Markets for Change project, UN Women brought together the Ministry of Agriculture, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, and the Department of Women's Affairs to ensure seed distribution reached women market vendors previously excluded from distribution lists or who found themselves excluded from distribution. As a result of this intervention, 615 market vendors received seeds for planting new crops and vegetables.

Providing Shelter and Support

“This is the first time we are doing this, but we are listening to women and collecting their stories. We want to know how women have been impacted and what they want them to know that someone is listening to them.” Merilyn Tahi is the coordinator of the Vanuatu Women’s Centre (VWC), which plays a significant role in providing shelter and support to women survivors of violence. In the aftermath of the cyclone, VWC staff were on hand to advocate for women and help deal with the unexpected increase in cases of gender-based violence, especially once initial rebuilding was completed. “People are building themselves back up and just keep on going. Women are getting together in Port Vila just to hug each other and talk about how they are going, sharing their experiences and supporting each other.”

Assessing Women’s Needs

Vanuatu Christian Council’s (VCC) training on gender-based violence was put to immediate use in the aftermath of Cyclone Pam when trained volunteers were required to be part of the assessment teams. The seven volunteers – five men and two women – VCC was able to put forward had been trained with support from UN Women’s Pacific Fund in order to create male and female advocates within the church leadership for gender equality, human rights and ending violence against women. Pastor Manson Roy (pictured) was one of the volunteers. “The training increased my knowledge and understanding of gender-based violence and human rights, which has given me more confidence. That’s what impacted my life, I had heard about gender but not about what it means at the end.”

Restoring Women’s Livelihoods

“Markets are often dismissed as part of the informal economy but they are vital to national growth and the national economy. We need women to recognise that they are important and that they deserve help; we need to support them as much as we can.”

Cherol Ala, Director of the Department of Local Authorities, Vanuatu

The Department of Local Authorities in Vanuatu is one of UN Women’s partners through its Markets for Change project. As such, they were working hard in the immediate aftermath to repair and rebuild market buildings so that women could start selling and earning again as soon as possible. Cherol Ala stressed the importance of existing structures and networks in doing this, especially market vendor associations such as those formed through, and supported by, the Markets for Change project.
Climate change is a global issue, it is also a gender issue. Many Pacific Island countries and territories are already experiencing a variety of impacts, including an increase in extreme weather events, rising sea levels and increased soil and water salinity. These effects could jeopardise and even reverse development progress; they can also deepen gender inequality and undermine women’s economic empowerment. Conversely, gender equality and women’s economic empowerment lead to positive development outcomes.

Women, men, boys and girls are impacted by climate change in different ways and in turn find different ways of coping and adapting. Socially constructed gendered roles mean women are often more vulnerable than men, while inequality can limit their ability to adapt. Viewing women as victims only exacerbates this vulnerability. In fact, women have critical knowledge of their environment, economy and society, as well as practical skills that can be effective in responding and adapting to climate change. If women have a limited voice in decision-making and their skills are not used, it means half the Pacific region’s population is unable to meaningfully contribute to climate change adaptation, making the overall response less effective.

As a result of UN Women’s advocacy within government in Fiji, gender will now be mainstreamed across the ongoing community vulnerability assessments. UN Women staff were part of a recent pilot project to familiarise local government staff with the Integrated Vulnerability Assessment tool and to test the associated framework in communities. UN Women will continue to assist with this work throughout 2016, with expected outcomes including a more inclusive process for community consultation, data gathering on climate change risk, and improved efficiency in the identification of appropriate cost effective adaptation interventions for vulnerable communities.

Through protection monitoring at the community level in six pilot sites, UN Women provided support to UNDP’s Pacific Risk Resilience Programme and the Tonga Ministry of Internal Affairs in their work developing Community Protection Committees in cyclone-affected areas of Ha’apai Province. Improved knowledge of the needs of vulnerable groups will inform the Ministry’s work in its capacity as protection cluster lead in emergency situations, as well as its role in non-disaster periods as the lead ministry on all forms of social vulnerability. It will also mean that resources can be directed towards communities with particular needs. Tonga’s Community Protection Committees help individuals access existing services in their communities, and are responsible for identifying and supporting community-led solutions to locally-identified issues, thus building resilience at local levels. UN Women’s support ensures that these monitoring and referral systems are able to respond to the particular protection needs of women and girls, and that women are able to play active roles in the Community Protection Committees.

Female government staff from Foreign Affairs and Environment Ministries from 11 Pacific Island countries have an increased understanding of the importance of gender-sensitive international and regional climate policies as a result of a workshop jointly supported by UN Women, UN Institute for Training and Research, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Australian Government and Australian National University. The workshop specifically targeted government staff likely to be engaged in climate change negotiations, looking to strengthen their capacity in preparation for the Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Paris in December 2015. The training focused on honing the participants’ diplomacy skills and included simulated regional and international conference sessions.

The estimated annual cost of climate change to GDP in the Pacific by 2100.13

The projected reduction in coastal fisheries harvests in the Pacific by 2100. Pacific women perform a larger share of inshore fishing.65%

Of Vanuatu’s population – approximately 166,000 people – were affected by the Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Pam that hit in March 2015.16

Of the population of Federated States of Micronesia – approximately 100,000 – were affected by drought brought on by the 2015-16 El Niño weather pattern.18
DiSaSter riSK reDuction

As demonstrated by Tropical Cyclones Pam, Maysak and Racquel in 2015, as well as a strong El Niño weather pattern, the Pacific region is facing an increase in the frequency and severity of disasters and extreme weather events; examples of the progressively more acute impacts of climate change being experienced in the region.

Global research shows that women and children are 14 times more likely to die or be injured than men due to a disaster.20 This is often compounded by a number of secondary, intangible impacts they face in the aftermath, including an increased risk of gender-based and sexual violence, unequal access to food, water, medical and humanitarian assistance, a loss of economic opportunities and an increase in their workload. Most of these challenges are rooted in existing gender inequalities and discriminatory social norms that also mean the skills many Pacific women have when it comes to sourcing clean water, food preparation, and agriculture, are often not utilised.

Gender is not systemically considered in the Pacific region’s humanitarian responses, at either national or regional level. Data is not sex- or age-disaggregated, humanitarian assistance is often functionally inaccessible to, or fails to meet the needs of, women and girls. Women are also not consistently consulted, nor are their particular strengths and coping mechanisms utilised in recovery and resilience measures.

Pacific women tend to be home bound, looking after their children and homes. In cities, where the poor live on marginal lands, women and children are more likely to be swept away from their homes in a flood-related disaster, whereas men are often away from their homes pursuing economic activities in public places. Furthermore, women and children often do not receive timely early warning information, undermining their ability to take steps to minimise the impact. This is often because resources that provide access to critical early warning information about impending disasters, such as radios, mobile phones and television, are often controlled by men.

Recurrent and expensive climate-related disaster relief, recovery, and reconstruction also drain resources that could otherwise be used for social and economic development, including the advancement of gender equality.

UN Women’s technical support and coordination helped ensure that gender and protection were mainstreamed across humanitarian work in the Pacific in 2015.

As a result of UN Women’s engagement at various levels, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) Pacific Consultations featured the most comprehensive and prominent discussion of gender and protection issues of any of the other consultations. The Pacific round was one of several held around the world in preparation for the first World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, helping to shape the summit’s agenda and key issues for discussion.

A ‘Gender and Humanitarian Action’ background paper prepared by UN Women was the most downloaded background paper at the WHS-Pacific consultations. A pre-forum workshop for women delegates, co-hosted by UN Women, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and ActionAid, brought together a number of Pacific gender and humanitarian actors ahead of WHS. The event gave participants an opportunity to share knowledge and identify common challenges, gaps, and successes, as well as identify the gender priorities for the region.

Workshop participants developed a coherent communiqué on the issues that affect Pacific women and girls in humanitarian settings, gaps and trends in cluster responses, and recommendations to improve the responsiveness of Pacific humanitarian programming to the needs, risks and capacities of women and girls. Consequently gender was substantively addressed in the WHS Consultation Report.
A Gender Equality Strategy was adopted at 2015’s Pacific Humanitarian Partnerships meeting, establishing minimum commitments of Pacific Humanitarian Team member agencies when it comes to integrating gender considerations into preparedness, response and recovery actions. These actions will help ensure that all persons are protected from harm, given meaningful opportunities to participate in recovery and rebuilding efforts, and are able to benefit equally from Pacific humanitarian programming.

Gender and Protection in the humanitarian context was strongly represented at the regional meeting as a result of a preparatory meeting for protection cluster leads of Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga. The pre-workshop was organised by UN Women, UNDP’s Pacific Risk Resilience Programme and the Australian Government.

As a further result of the workshop, the ProPa Network was created, with participants producing an outcome document and their own Protection in the Pacific community of practice. The network is aimed at enhancing the capacities of national protection clusters through sharing information, experiences and best practices.

UN Women has also had an ongoing role in building the capacity of national and regional protection clusters to respond to the needs of women and vulnerable groups during disasters. This includes the Pacific Humanitarian Partnerships meeting (see left-hand column) as well as providing training to staff from ministries involved in disaster risk reduction and response.

At the request of the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) in Samoa, in October 2015 UN Women provided training on gender equality and disaster risk reduction to staff from line ministries that have varying mandates in disaster risk reduction and disaster response, as well as the Red Cross. The training aimed to enhance participants’ understanding of the link between gender equality and disaster risk reduction, develop practical skills to assist in mainstreaming gender equality in disaster risk reduction and help them use the skills they learned to provide feedback into the current draft of the Samoa Disaster Risk Reduction Gender Policy.

The training was well received and the trainees provided inputs into the Policy, and the NDMO appointed the attendees as members of the Samoa Disaster Response Committee to ensure they are able to influence disaster response from a gender perspective.

As a result of the workshop, the NDMO requested UN Women to develop a joint proposal to take forward and implement concrete gender response disaster risk reduction.
Global and intergovernmental processes around gender equality provide the countries of the world with opportunities to agree on, and measure progress towards, global norms and standards. These commitments serve as catalysts for adopting and enhancing laws, policies and programmes that bring about equality between women and men. The Millennium Development Goals, the Beijing Platform for Action and the post-2015 development agenda provide detailed roadmaps for governments, civil society and non-governmental organisations to follow, as well as highlighting ways to measure progress at all levels, from local to global.

The Millennium Development Goals expired in 2015 and in September 2015 UN Member States adopted the Sustainable Development Goals at the high level summit in New York, the culmination of an unprecedented UN-led global consultation process that connected more than 1 million people across the world.

The 17 new goals recognize that gender inequality remains the most pervasive form of discrimination globally and a crucial obstacle for sustainable development by including not only a standalone goal calling for the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment, but also through indicators attached to all other 16 goals.

Throughout the process of developing the post-2015 agenda Pacific representatives have come together as a block and demonstrated real leadership at the global level by pushing for the inclusion of stronger language around gender and human rights. This covered sexual and reproductive health and rights, the contribution of women’s human rights defenders, sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as gender and climate change. The Pacific has proved they are a force to be reckoned with.

The year 2015 also marked the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was adopted at the Fourth World Conference of Women in 1995. It set out 12 critical areas of concern in the achievement of gender equality and women’s rights, and the 20th anniversary provided a key opportunity to review global progress and reaffirm commitments.

The Pacific Platform for Action, which was modelled on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and revised (Revised Pacific Platform for Action, RPPA) in 2004, is currently under its second review. UN Women continues to work closely with regional intergovernmental organisations to implement commitments under the RPPA and has provided technical support throughout the review process. Phase 2 of the review is focused on the monitoring and evaluation framework for the strategy.

UN Women regularly convenes the Beijing Steering Committee, a group of civil society organisations comprising a diverse constituency representing gender equality, disability, youth and LGBTQI advocates from the region, as well as intergovernmental organisations in the Pacific. Since 2014, the committee has engaged in strategic and coordinated planning for other regional and international fora, such as the Beijing +20 reviews, the Triennial Conference for Pacific Women, localising the Sustainable Development Goals and global campaigns. Results of this collaboration were evident at the 59th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) where the Pacific achieved a high level of visibility through side events, panel presentations and strong youth leadership (see box on page 45). The overwhelming support from the Pacific for a standalone goal on gender equality was partly due to the advocacy and coordination efforts resulting from this collaboration.
In Samoa, we are acutely aware that we must make every effort to develop and release the full potential of our women. We have already made important strides... Still, much remains to be done. Samoa is committed to mainstreaming policy on gender equality and the empowerment of our women across all sectors of government.

Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi
Samoa Prime Minister

I propose that we reach our goal before its time. Micronesia has adopted a strategic development plan that was started in 2004 and will end in 2023. That plan includes the participation of women in all areas. The Government of Micronesia will pursue with more vigor the unfinished work of the MDGs, while focusing on Sustainable Development Goal 5 and its cross-cutting sectors of government.

Peter Christian
President
Federated States of Micronesia

Following CSW, UN Women provided technical and financial support to Pacific countries wanting to host national consultations as part of the Planet 50:50 by 2030, Step it Up for Gender Equality campaign. Three countries also took part in the "Global Leaders Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Commitment to Action," joining more than 80 countries around the world committing to ending discrimination against women by 2030. Leaders from Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji and Samoa publicly announced ways their countries are working to advance gender equality and voiced their support for Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Fiji MCO partnered with UN Women’s Women, Peace and Security section to provide support to FemLink Pacific for the organisation of a regional consultation on the 15th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325. The consultation resulted in the production of a report titled Pacific Policy for Peace which was launched in a伙伴关系 between FemLink Pacific, the Fiji MCO and the Fiji Speaker of the House in parallel to the launch of the Global Study.

This year the UN Country Teams of Fiji and Samoa approved, cost-shared and fully engaged in the rollout of the Gender Scorecard, as a result of UN Women’s and the UN Gender Group’s advocacy and coordination. The results reveal that the joint UN Country Teams meet or approach the minimum standards for gender mainstreaming processes in the areas of planning, UN Country Team capacities, decision-making and accountability. Recommendations from this process will be used to improve coordination and will inform the UNDAF planning process beginning in 2016.

The UN Gender Group, co-chaired by UN Women, was active in building UN staff capacity in the area of gender equality and women’s empowerment in 2015. In April, a Gender Learning Workshop for approximately 60 UN staff utilised technical expertise from UN Women, OHCHR and UNFPA in the area of gender equality and human rights. The workshop included presentations on International Human Rights mechanisms, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and sexual orientation and gender identity. UN Women supported a second Gender Learning Workshop for UN staff in July focusing on gender-responsive evaluations and utilising technical expertise from UN Women Headquarters. Feedback from both workshops was positive with several participants highlighting the need for more regular UN-wide learning experiences on gender equality and requesting more time dedicated to each topic.

STEPPING IT UP FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Through UN Women’s continued advocacy and partnerships with regional intergovernmental organisations and civil society, and through targeted support of Pacific delegations to the Asia Pacific Conference on Gender Equality and the 59th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Pacific stood out as one of the loudest voices in support of the standalone goal for gender equality and in advocating for gender mainstreaming across the Sustainable Development Goals.

As a result of continued advocacy and coordination work by UN Women and its partners, 16 Pacific countries declared their support for the Standalone Goal on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women through regional statements delivered by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the Pacific Small Island Developing States.

Two Pacific side events – one hosted by the Governments of Australia and New Zealand and another organised by UN Women and Pacific countries – ensured increased visibility at CSW 59 for the Pacific region. UN Women played a key role in ensuring that the Pacific CSO delegation was amongst the most representative through the funding of individuals from organisations representing people with disabilities, the LGBTQI community and youth.

The Fiji MCO also successfully supported the inclusion of Pacific delegates in a number of events and panels including UN Women’s Intergenerational Dialogue and the UN Women/OECD/Twitter event on social media. Youth representative Miki Wali of the Pacific CSO delegation sponsored by the Fiji MCO was also selected as a co-facilitator of the CSW59 youth wide declaration.
In bringing together our expertise and resources we become a powerful force for progress in achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment, which means that genuine partnerships are crucial. Partnerships with regional agencies, civil society organisations, private sector companies, donors and volunteer agencies are critical to the success of UN Women’s work on the ground. The Fiji MCO works with a number of partners to complement and support each other’s work through a consistent people-centered, gender-sensitive and rights-based approach.

With the finalisation of the post-2015 development agenda and the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action both dominating global processes in 2015, UN Women has been working closely with Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) agencies, governments and civil society partners to ensure Pacific voices are heard during these processes. These partnerships include the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the members of the Pacific Civil Society Steering Committee, including Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM), Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era (DAWN), FemLINK Pacific and DiVA for Equality.

These partnerships, as well as relationships with other UN agencies, strengthened the substance and visibility of activities during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign. The wide variety of partnerships during this campaign meant that audiences and participants at activities and events were hugely diverse, from leading women’s human rights defenders, activists and advocates from the LGBTQI communities, private sector, embassies and UN agencies, CSOs, young people, and members of the general public.

UN Women is grateful for the continued support of its donor community and looks forward to widening and deepening its partnership base. The Australian Government, the European Union and UN Women’s National Committees are just some of the donor partners vital in providing funding and support to UN Women’s work in the Pacific. The Australian Government has provided substantial funding for the Markets for Change project as well as the Pacific Fund, while the EU is a key partner in the Strongim Mere project on political participation and CEDAW in Solomon Islands.

During 2015 the Fiji MCO has been actively exploring engagement with a variety of private sector partners, including telecommunications companies such as Digicel Fiji and Samoa; banks including Bank South Pacific and Westpac; retail outlets including Damodar Cinemas, Morris Hedstrom supermarkets, Evenci Carruthers, and the Samoa Beverage Company and local cafés. Many of these relationships were initiated through coordinated events, but have outlasted the initial intent, laying foundations for increased collaboration on other grassroots education and community mobilisation initiatives, including gender-sensitisation workshops.

The partnerships with UN Women’s National Committees continue to develop and the National Committees have been extremely active and supportive of the work in the Pacific region. A number of UN Women projects have benefited from funds raised by the National Committees in Australia and New Zealand, especially in the areas of women’s economic empowerment, ending violence against women and political participation.

UN Women also continues to develop its partnerships with a number of key volunteering agencies in the Pacific. UN Women assignments offer volunteers the opportunity to contribute through a range of different roles and specialities, from humanitarian support in emergencies, to project coordination and communications. In particular, Volunteer Service Abroad in New Zealand has provided volunteers to support UN Women’s programme work and strengthen the capacity of UN Women’s staff and partners.
Too often women’s rights issues are embraced and debated within small, specialised audiences, and often predominantly among women. The Pacific is no exception. Part of UN Women’s role from a communications perspective is to help drive and support the broadening and deepening of these conversations and debates, so that they begin to occur regularly at home, in public places, at community meetings, in businesses and governments.

Not only do effective communications activities help raise the visibility of UN Women’s work in the Pacific, they also help build an understanding of the issues facing women in the region by painting a picture of what women’s lives are like; the challenges they face, the contributions they make, the support they receive, and the organisations they work with. Effective communications can highlight what can be done to help achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment, can support and drive advocacy for change, and demonstrate the impact of interventions on the ground.

The modern global communications environment is highly dynamic and online media offers a lot of opportunities to reach more people far quicker than ever before. However, we also need to take into consideration the disparities in access to these mediums both between and within countries, something that is a particular concern in the Pacific region where a majority of people live in rural areas.

Engagement with the media across the region (including Australia and New Zealand) saw an increase of 15% in media articles appearing online that specifically referenced UN Women projects or originated from UN Women activities and press releases in 2015, when compared with 2014. These articles were published directly in seven of the countries covered by the MCO; however, the 34% increase in coverage through regional outlets makes it highly likely that the actual reach was greater.

The Fiji MCO’s social media reach continued to increase, particularly with the addition of a UN Women Pacific Twitter account, which was launched at the end of March 2015. By the end of 2015 the UN Women Pacific Facebook page had more than 13,200 likes, while the Twitter account had more than 1,680 followers. The Facebook posts that attracted the most engagement during 2015 each reached more than 30,000 people with an average of more than 200 shares, likes and clicks.

Effectively combining the potential of social media, online platforms and traditional media releases for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign in 2015 made it one of UN Women’s most high profile media campaigns in the Pacific. A total of 37 articles were published in local media across three countries with 13 appearing in regional media channels. The general level of media coverage of violence against women and girls in Fiji was given a particular boost by the Fiji Times dedicating one page every day for stories about 16 Days of Activism activities and issues. A UN Women Pacific Facebook album of photos from across the region reached more than 13,000 people and generated more than 4,300 post clicks and more than 100 shares. This level of coverage and the high attendance at public awareness events was made possible through a combination of UN Women’s direct activities across the region, a wide range of partnerships, as well as the creation of a Wordpress website to act as a one-stop information hub for the Pacific.
13,717
Number of likes on the UN Women Pacific Facebook page at the end of 2015.

1,682
Number of followers on the UN Women Pacific Twitter page at the end of 2015.

175
articles specifically mentioning UN Women Fiji MCO’s work appeared online via national print or broadcast agencies in seven Pacific countries.

345%
The increase in the number of articles referencing UN Women appearing in regional channels in 2015 when compared to 2014.

BENEATH THE BULA SMILE

Rural women spend hours and sometimes days travelling to sell their produce at local markets, often staying from Thursday to Saturday before heading back home to tend their crops and their families. While some of these women have a place to stay, many sleep in women’s accommodation centres built specifically to provide them with shelter and protection at night. This series of portraits was taken at the Suva Market women’s accommodation centre in August 2015 as the women relaxed after a long day at the stalls.

Photos: UN Women/Eva Schroeder

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

Women and men, boys and girls from across the Pacific joined millions more worldwide in celebrating International Women’s Day on and around March 8.

In 2015 the official UN theme was Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity: Picture It! in recognition of the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Market vendors in Fiji and Vanuatu participated in a number of events in Nadi, Suva and Port Vila, while the public came out in force for the Family Fun Day in Suva organised by Fiji Women’s Rights Movement. Heavy rain in Solomon Islands – a precursor to Tropical Cyclone Pam – hampered the planned event in Honiara, but a hardy crowd still turned out for entertainment, speakers and Zumba.

In Samoa churches of all denominations were encouraged to focus on women and gender equality in their Sunday services, while young women and entrepreneurs took part in two separate events. In Papua New Guinea, UN Women joined more than 100 women from the country’s Customs service in their celebration. Events also took place in Tonga, Kiribati and Nauru.

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ACRONYMS

CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSW Commission on the Status of Women
GIZ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ILO International Labour Organisation
MCO Multi-Country Office
NDMO National Disaster Management Office
Pacific Fund Pacific Regional Ending Violence against Women Facility Fund
PIFS Pacific Island Forum Secretariat
SDGs Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS Small Island Developing States
SPC Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SPC-RRRT Secretariat of the Pacific Community Regional Rights Resource Team
SVSG Samoa Victim Support Group
UN United Nations
UNDAF United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
UNOCHA United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOHCHR United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
UNOCHA United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOHCHR United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
WHO World Health Organisation

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I call on all stakeholders to join together and to work towards ensuring a safe and secure space for women at home, in the workplace and all public spaces.

Ethel Sigimanu
Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs
Solomon Islands