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**JOINT PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT AND PACIFIC COMMUNITY (SPC)  
SUBMISSION**

**AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO  
THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE PACIFIC**

**INTRODUCTION**

This submission is jointly prepared by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Pacific Community (SPC) in response to the inquiry by the Parliament of Australia on how Australia can better engage with its Pacific neighbors to enhance opportunities for women and girls, with particular regard to:

- (i) the role of civil society groups in Pacific Islands in responding practically to domestic, family and sexual violence, and other human rights issues such as gender equality;
- (ii) the key figures and groups which advance the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific context;
- (iii) engagement of these groups with Australia's Pacific Step-up;
- (iv) the effectiveness of Australian overseas development assistance programmes in supporting human rights of women and girls; and
- (v) related matters<sup>1</sup>.

The submission is informed by survey responses from some Pacific governments and CSOs, and engagement of PIFS and SPC with the Australian government's aid program in the Pacific.

PIFS is the region's premier political and economic policy organization<sup>2</sup>. PIFS supports Forum Members to work together through deeper forms of regionalism in support of sustainable development, economic growth, social inclusion, good governance and security. It drives various policy processes to generate ideas and options for regional action for Leaders' to consider and endorse. PIFS coordinates the effective implementation of Forum Leaders' decisions leading to tangible improvements in the lives of the people of the Blue Pacific continent.

SPC is the principal scientific and technical organization in the Pacific region, supporting development since 1947. It is an international development organization owned and governed by 26 country and territory members<sup>3</sup>. The SPC contribution to this submission was co-authored by its Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) and Social Development Programme (SDP)<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign\\_Affairs\\_Defence\\_and\\_Trade/womenandgirlsPacific/Terms\\_of\\_Reference](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/womenandgirlsPacific/Terms_of_Reference).

<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1971, PIFS comprises 18 members: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.spc.int>. The following are members of SPC: American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn Islands, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, United States of America, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna.

<sup>4</sup> RRRT has operated for over 20 years as the region's pioneer in human rights and gender capacity building to Pacific states, institutions and civil society. RRRT provides a comprehensive suite of policy and legal advice, technical assistance and capacity building services, to support PICs to respond effectively to human rights priority areas. A truly 'home-grown' Pacific human rights programme, RRRT applies a contextualised approach to human rights, using Pacific values, cultures and faiths as enablers of human rights without comprising human rights principles and standards. SDP is the division of SPC mandated to "advance gender equality, youth development, and cultural diversity to obtain equal development outcomes in key settings across the region". SDP has been working with governments, regional organisations, civil society and other SPC divisions to build capacity, collaboration, knowledge and practice around gender equality, social inclusion, youth development, and the promotion of cultural heritage.

Both PIFS and SPC are members of the Council of Regional Organizations in the Pacific (CROP)<sup>5</sup>, established by Forum Leaders in 1988 to improve cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among the various intergovernmental regional organizations, and work toward achieving sustainable development in the Pacific. CROP is governed by the CROP Charter<sup>6</sup>.

## **PART 1: OVERVIEW OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE PACIFIC**

1. Pacific Leaders are committed to promoting human rights. Their vision is for a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion, and prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy, and productive lives<sup>7</sup>. Our Leaders support full inclusivity, equity and equality for all people of the Pacific through the endorsement of key regional policy frameworks.
2. Over the last decade, the Pacific has made good progress in achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls, particularly in education and health and, to some extent, women's participation in formal employment and national policy making. This progress is attributed to growing awareness of the need to address gender inequalities, as well as a significant dedication of resources to this end. This is evident in the implementation of national gender policies, passage of domestic violence legislation and protocols, ratification of related human rights conventions and steps taken to ensure gender-responsive government institutions, civil society and the private sector through policies and programmes<sup>8</sup>.
3. Gender equality is progressed through the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration<sup>9</sup> (PLGED) and the Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights (PPA), endorsed by the Ministers for Women in 2017. It is also prioritised in other relevant regional policies that recognize and promote human rights such as the Pacific Framework on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PFRPD – 2016), the Boe Declaration (2018) and Framework on Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP – 2016). The Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development (PRSD) guides regional efforts and support to Pacific Island Countries (PICs) for the implementation, monitoring and reporting on sustainable development commitments.
4. Today, there is growing appreciation amongst Pacific Island governments of the importance of human rights and the positive role they can play in helping to achieve sustainable development outcomes. In 2019, for example, Fiji took a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council, the first PIC to do so, and was joined by the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) in 2020. In March 2020, Samoa hosted the 84<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the first time a UN human rights treaty body has held a session outside of UN headquarters of Geneva and New York<sup>10</sup>. Interest amongst PICs in establishing national human rights institutions (NHRIs) has also increased in recent years – for example, Samoa (2013) and Tuvalu (2017) have joined Fiji<sup>11</sup> in establishing an NHRI while at least four other PICs are at various stages of assessing whether they should establish NHRIs. The rate of PICs reporting against treaties has increased significantly in recent years while participation in the Universal Periodic Review process has been positive although implementation of recommendations from the Human Rights Council and treaty bodies

<sup>5</sup> CROP comprises the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), The Pacific Community (SPC), the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO), Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO), Pacific Power Association (PPA), Pacific Islands Development Programme (PIDP), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), and the University of the South Pacific (USP).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/crop-charter-v9.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.forumsec.org/who-we-arepacific-islands-forum/>.

<sup>8</sup> First quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2018.

<sup>9</sup> The Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration was endorsed by Leaders at their annual Leaders meeting in 2012. It covers five core areas: (i) gender responsive government programmes and policies; (ii) decision making; (iii) economic empowerment; (iv) ending violence against women; and (v) health and education.

<sup>10</sup> RRRT was instrumental in having the Committee on the Rights of the Child hold its 84<sup>th</sup> session in Samoa.

<sup>11</sup> The Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission was created by Presidential Decree in 2009, succeeding the Fiji Human Rights Commission established as an independent statutory body under the Fiji Human Rights Commission Act in 1999.

remains a challenge, as has the domestication of human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

5. The status of human rights treaty ratification across PICs<sup>12</sup> is detailed in the table below.

### STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES RATIFICATION IN THE PACIFIC (15 July 2020)

	ICESCR	ICCPR	CERD	CEDAW	CAT	CRC	CRMW	CRPD	CPPED
<b>COOK ISLANDS</b>				11 Aug 06		6 Jun 97		8 May 09	
<b>FED STATES MICRONESIA</b>				1 Sep 04		5 May 93		7 Dec 16	
<b>FIJI</b>	16 Aug 18	16 Aug 18	11 Jan 73	28 Aug 95	14 Mar 16	13 Aug 93	19 Aug 19	7 Jun 17	19 Aug 19
<b>KIRIBATI</b>				17 Mar 04	22 Jul 19	11 Dec 95		27 Sept 13	
<b>MARSHALL ISLANDS</b>	12 Mar 18	12 Mar 18	11 Apr 19	2 Mar 06	12 Mar 18	4 Oct 93		17 Mar 15	
<b>NAURU</b>		S 12 Nov 01	S 12-Nov 01	23 Jun 11	26 Sept 12	27 Jul 94		27 June 12	
<b>NIUE</b>						20 Dec 95			
<b>PALAU</b>	S 20 Sep 11	S 20 Sep 11	S 20 Sep 11	S 20 Sep 11	S 20 Sep 11	4 Aug 95	S 20 Sep 11	11 Jun 13	S 20 Sep 11
<b>PAPUA NEW GUINEA</b>	21 Jul 08	21 July 08	27 Jan 82	12 Jan 95		2 Mar 93		26 Sept 13	
<b>SAMOA</b>		15 Feb 08		25 Sep 92	28 Mar 19	29 Nov 94		2 Dec 16	27 Nov 12
<b>SOLOMON ISLANDS</b>	17 Mar 82		17 Mar 82	6 May 02		10 Apr 95		S 23 Sep 08	
<b>TONGA</b>			16 Feb 72			6 Nov 95		S 15 Nov 07	
<b>TUVALU</b>				6 Oct 99		22 Sep 95		18 Dec 13	
<b>VANUATU</b>		21 Nov 08		8 Sep 95	12 Jul 11	7 Jul 93		23 Oct 08	S 6 Feb 07
	Indicates the date of adherence: ratification, accession or succession. ( <i>Italicized</i> = Accession)								
	Indicates the date of signature								
<b>ICESCR</b>	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights								
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights								
<b>CERD</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination								
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women								
<b>CAT</b>	Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, In human or Degrading Treatment or Punishment								
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child								
<b>CRMW</b>	Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families								

<sup>12</sup> Excludes Australia, New Zealand, Tokelau and the French territories.

CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities								
CPPED	Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance								
	ICESCR-OP	ICCPR-OP1	ICCPR-OP2	OP-CEDAW	OP-CRC-AC	OP-CRC-SC	OP-CRC-CP	OP-CAT	OP-CRPD
COOK ISLANDS				27 Nov 07					8 May 09
FED STATES MICRONESIA					26 Oct 15	23 Apr 12			
FIJI					S 16 Sep 05	S 16 Sep 05			S 2 Jun 10
KIRIBATI					16 Sep 15	16 Sep 15			
MARSHALL ISLANDS				5 Mar 19		5 Mar 19	5 Mar 19		
NAURU		S 12 Nov 01			S 8 Sep 00	S 8 Sep 00		24 Jan 13	
NIUE									
PALAU									11 Jun 13
PAPUA NEW GUINEA									
SAMOA					17 May 16	29 Apr 16	29 Apr 16		
SOLOMON ISLANDS	S 24 Sep 09			6 May 02	S 24 Sep 09	S 24 Sep 09			S 24 Sep 09
TONGA									
TUVALU									
VANUATU				17 May 07	26 Sep 07	17 May 07			
	Indicates the date of adherence: ratification, accession or succession. ( <i>Italicized</i> = <i>Accession</i> )								
	Indicates the date of signature								
ICESCR OP	Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights								
ICCPR-OP1	Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights								
ICCPR-OP2	Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty								
OP-CEDAW	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women								
OP-CRC-AC	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict								
OP-CRC-SC	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography								
OP-CRC-CP	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure								
OP-CAT	Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment								
OP- CRPD	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities								

## **PART 2: OVERVIEW OF PACIFIC CIVIL SOCIETY IN RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE, AND OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES**

### *Prevalence of Violence against Women and Girls and State Responses*

6. The prevalence of violence against women and girls (VAWG) is higher in the Pacific relative to the global average of 35%<sup>13</sup>. Statistics reveal that, consistently, over 60% of women in PICs have experienced physical or sexual violence or both; national research has revealed the following statistics – Tonga 79%, Samoa 76%, Kiribati 73%, Fiji 72%, Vanuatu 72%, and Solomon Islands 64%<sup>14</sup>.
7. The cost of violence per annum has been estimated at FJD290 million for Fiji, AUD22 billion for Australia and NZD8 billion for New Zealand<sup>15</sup>. Women and girls with disabilities are 2 to 3 times more likely to be victims of physical and sexual abuse than those without a disability. Increased information and awareness on domestic violence, in partnership with and in some cases led by civil society organisation (CSO) partners, has helped break the silence and initiated legislative reforms to increase protection for women and children. Nevertheless, access to justice and essential services for survivors including execution of protection orders remains inadequate and largely insufficiently resourced, particularly outside urban areas.
8. Domestic violence service providers in PICs have warned of an increase in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)/domestic violence with the onset of COVID-19<sup>16</sup>. The current context for VAWG is exacerbated by the increase in household tensions resulting from the socioeconomic and health impacts of COVID-19.
9. Women and girls living with disability are even more at risk as their social isolation, exclusion and dependency increase the extent of abuse they are subjected to and limit the actions they can take. In addition to the expected increase/severity in VAWG, it is expected a greater complexity to the violence being perpetrated. For example, women who are suspected to be infected with or exposed to COVID-19 may be face being removed from their homes. The public health strategies to contain COVID-19 compound the difficulties that women face in accessing the care and services they need. Other forms of GBV will also be exacerbated, for example, the economic impacts of the COVID-19 will place women and children at greater risk of exploitation and sexual violence<sup>17</sup>.
10. Efforts to achieve gender equality and improve the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific are hampered by systemic and structural barriers, including recognition of the essential role of women in achieving better development outcomes in the region. Key challenges facing

<sup>13</sup> Women who have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.

<sup>14</sup> Ending violence against women: <https://pacificwomen.org/our-work/focus-areas/ending-violence-against-women/>.

<sup>15</sup> First quadrennial Pacific Sustainable Development Report 2018.

<sup>16</sup> The limited information which SPC and PIFS have been able to collect from Tonga, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, for the purpose of this submission indicate some evidence of an increase in IPV/domestic violence since the onset of COVID-19 and, in the case of Vanuatu, tropical cyclone Harold. The Family Protection Legal Aid Centre (FPLAC) in Tonga – which was established by RRRT and the Ministry of Justice to provide free legal assistance, including representation, to women and girls experiencing domestic violence – provided data showing that from the easing of COVID-19 restriction on 13 April to 10 June 2020, the Centre saw 86 clients (about 10 per week), 66% of whom were new clients seeking assistance in relation to matters that occurred during the lockdown. This is a higher per weekly average compared to the period March 2018 and March 2020, when the Centre received 636 clients (about six clients per week). Data provided by the Access to Justice Project which RRRT implements in the Solomon Islands, indicates there has been an increase in the number of complaints received by lay magistrates in Malaita and Guadalcanal provinces, the pilot sites of the project. However, the Family Support Centre, an NGO working to address VAWG, and the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force Sexual Assault Unit, reported a decline in client numbers during March and April 2020. The decline could be related to COVID-19 restrictions on movement and/or the reluctance to leave home or visit services due to concerns regarding potential infection. The decrease in numbers could also be related to the mass migration of people back to their home provinces, where there are limited services to address domestic violence. In Tuvalu, police on Funafuti reported a decrease in the number of domestic violence cases during January to May 2020. According to the Social Welfare department in Tuvalu, this decrease should not be attributed to a reduction in domestic violence but is reflective of a fear of reporting during the period of COVID-19 related restrictions and the movement of people out of Funafuti. In Vanuatu, the Anglican Church reported that its emergency centre reported an increase in the number of women and girls who were experiencing domestic violence following tropical cyclone Harold.

<sup>17</sup> Fiji COVID-19 Response Gender Working Group; April 2020; Paper: Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 on Women in Fiji.

implementers of programmes on gender equality, ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG) and women's human rights vary across the Pacific region and may encompass a range of issues from community and institutional knowledge, support, capacity and resourcing.

11. In the last 10 years, the majority of Pacific Island governments have adopted domestic violence legislation that provides protection orders to assist those affected by family violence<sup>18</sup>. Despite these legal reforms, implementation and the actualisation of protection remains a stark challenge. In many countries, implementation of domestic violence legislation remains critically under-resourced, resulting in low awareness of the legislation even among those responsible for its implementation<sup>19</sup>.
12. Violence prevention work in the Pacific is highly challenging and requires significant investment in changing the attitudes and behaviours of women and men. Primary prevention and a holistic, whole-of-government/community approach need greater focus and investment.

#### *Governments' role in addressing VAWG in the Pacific*

13. National governments are primarily responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights, through national policies, legislation and ratification of international human rights instruments. They play a critical role in ensuring commitments, legislation, policies and interventions are resourced, implemented and monitored. Regionally, Pacific Leaders endorse regional policy frameworks to guide collective action on issues of common interest such as VAWG. Governments support CSOs to provide services that they may not be able to provide.
14. Governments participate at inter-regional and international intergovernmental processes ensuring issues of importance such as EVAWG are highlighted and use it as a platform to advocate for international support on these issues of collective importance at national and regional levels.

#### *Civil society organisations are primary actors in addressing VAWG in the Pacific*

15. Pacific CSOs have played a key role<sup>20</sup> and are primary actors<sup>21</sup> in work to EVAWG in the home, workplace and in communities. Pacific CSOs complement the work of governments to respond effectively to VAWG, and promote the rights of women and girls by informing the general public of laws designed to advance women's rights, enabling survivors to access essential services, promoting human rights and gender equality, and lobbying states to fulfil their human rights obligations. Over the last two decades in particular, their advocacy has contributed to the recognition of VAWG as a fundamental issue cross-cutting human rights, public health, and social and economic development, which has resulted in increased financial investment and more developed frameworks to address the issue<sup>22</sup>. National CSOs have successfully influenced policy and legislative reform in their respective countries, including the widespread adoption of targeted domestic violence and family protection legislation. Community and faith-based groups have long been a distinctive feature of development in the Pacific. UNDP Pacific Centre's Capacity Assessment of Civil Society Organisations in the Pacific puts the number of CSOs operating in

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.spc.int/updates/blog/2019/08/legislation-and-the-role-of-police-prosecutors-across-the-pacific-in-ending>.

<sup>19</sup> Pacific Women 2017, Ending Violence against Women Roadmap Synthesis Report: Informing the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Roadmap 2017–2022, viewed 25 March 2020, [https://pacificwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/EVAW\\_SynthesisReport\\_FINAL\\_updatedJan2018.pdf](https://pacificwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/EVAW_SynthesisReport_FINAL_updatedJan2018.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Penjueli, M (2015). Civil Society and the Political Legitimacy of Regional Institutions: An NGO perspective; Fry G & Tarte S (Eds), *The New Pacific Diplomacy* (pp. 65–78). ANU Press. Retrieved April 25, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt19w71mc.12](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt19w71mc.12).

<sup>21</sup> Barclay, A, Trembath, A & Russell, M 2018, Promising approaches for the prevention of violence against women and girls, *Care international in Vanuatu*, viewed 5 January 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.care.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Review-of-effective-strategies-for-the-prevention-of-VAWG.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Fulu, E, Kerr-Wilson, A and Lang, J 2013, Effectiveness of interventions to prevention violence against women and girls: A summary of the evidence. DFID, viewed 5 January 2020. 2020. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/337617/effectiveness-interventions-summary-evidence-G.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/337617/effectiveness-interventions-summary-evidence-G.pdf).



this region at more than 1000 although it should be noted that there is limited documentation and registration of CSOs in some locales and some Pacific community-based organisations present challenges to standard definitions of civil society.

16. In many countries in the Pacific, CSOs support and collaborate with government at the national and local level to tackle the issues of domestic and gender-based violence. It often falls to CSOs to ensure that essential services for women and girls, are widely communicated to the public. The majority of awareness-raising regarding the national legislation on VAWG is driven by CSOs.
17. At the regional level, the regional mobilisation and collective action of Pacific CSOs played key roles in several key normative frameworks, including the 2012 Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration and the Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2017–2030. CSOs have also represented the Pacific in global movements and mechanisms addressing the human rights of women and girls, including the Commission on the Status of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action.
18. Regional CSOs are critical to leveraging and mobilising coordinated support, resources and technical assistance for national CSOs, to build institutional capacity and to implement and manage their services to their issue-based clients, particularly on VAWG and gender equality.

*Pacific CSOs are often the primary providers of all services to survivors of VAWG; other functions become secondary*

19. In some countries in the Pacific, CSOs such as the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC), Family Support Centre (FSC) in Solomon Islands, the Women and Children's Centre (WCC) in Tonga, and Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) together with partner CSOs and government supported agencies are the primary service providers for survivors of VAWG. While a number of countries have some form of public legal aid available, this is often general in nature and without specialist expertise in domestic violence or VAWG. Similarly, key services such as shelter and accommodation, counselling and psycho-social support, operating helplines, and referral networks and pathways are limited or lacking in government service streams<sup>23</sup>. These services are overwhelmingly provided by CSOs. While a number of countries have various co-financing arrangements that directs some government resources to service provision, the actual implementation remains primarily the domain of civil society.
20. The emphasis on service provision, driven in part by the gap in government service provision and combined with the crisis nature of the problem of VAWG in the Pacific, has elevated it to be the main focus of many of the most prominent national CSOs. While these organisations take a broad spectrum of action to tackle VAWG, including community awareness and training, advocating for law or policy reform, research, and primary prevention and education, these activities often become ancillary to the main function. Many national CSOs are, first and foremost, service providers.

*Pacific CSOs, regional partners and governments are critical partners, working closely together to address VAWG*

21. The relationship between government and CSOs tackling VAWG in the Pacific is largely characterised by strong cooperation and reliance. Government support for the work undertaken by CSOs in EAWG is generally strong, evident in both the significant participation of CSOs in

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<sup>23</sup> The Family Protection Legal Aid Centre in Tonga, established with the support of RRRT, is the major exception to this rule.

policy process and the delegation of certain functions and services – in part or in whole – to CSO providers. Governments have also facilitated the connection of local CSOs with development partners and donors.

22. Some CSOs receive direct funding support from government; for example, with the direct provision of office premises for the Samoa Umbrella for Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO) and their EVAWG programme, government funding of the Family Support and Action on Violence Committee in Papua New Guinea, and joint support of the SAFENET referral network and pathway in Solomon Islands. In the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the government has a memorandum of understanding with WUTMI to fund the Weto in Mour Project, the first ever support service in the country to address VAWG in RMI.
23. CSOs are actively partnered with governments, participating in policy formation and implementation through shared mechanisms such as inter-agency task forces, working groups, committees and advisory bodies. These might have a perennial VAWG-focused mandate or respond to a specific and time-bound need such as Protection Clusters during humanitarian responses and the COVID-19 pandemic. Key achievements attributed to CSO participation in many countries include the adoption of No Drop Policies, Standard Operating Procedures, referral pathways, and training of police and public safety personnel and front-line responders. The FWCC has been conducting trainings for Pacific police officers since 2014, as well as for the Fiji Police. This training equips police officers with the appropriate skills and attitude to respond to women, LGBTIQ and youth victims of violence. What needs to be strengthened is broader social inclusion training/capacity development interventions that is sensitive to the needs of other groups such as women, girls and children with disabilities.
24. Most governments rely to some extent on CSOs as data gatherers and informers when it comes to generating information to guide policy or UN treaty reporting. Governments have assisted women's NGOs such as FWCC, VWC and Ma'a Fafine Moe Famili Incorporated in Tonga to conduct VAW prevalence studies using the World Health Organisation (WHO) methodology framework. These prevalence studies have formed key baselines for national measuring and reporting of VAWG statistics.
25. CSOs, particularly regional CSOs, provide information on best practices, challenges, and lessons learned from across the Pacific and other regions. This information is vital to understand where the gaps are in government responses to domestic and gender-based violence.
26. CSOs provide information to support state reporting on national, regional and global human rights commitments and obligations and, oftentimes, governments provide opportunities for CSOs to participate in national, regional and global development and policy dialogues and meetings.
27. Support from regional organizations ensure national CSOs and governments continue to provide services and develop policies that are relevant. This support has seen the development of innovative options and practices – for example in RMI, RRRT is implementing a programme (the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls/PPEVAWG) to support the public school system to connect human rights, gender equality/EVAWG and social inclusion, as well as rights and responsibilities, to Marshallese cultural values and practices in the school curriculum. This project will evolve into an opportunity for informal education components targeting out-of-school youths that can be introduced alongside the formal education module (that is, outreach trainings/workshops for youths on outer islands).



28. PIFS continues to ensure issues of gender equality, disability and social inclusion, and broader human rights are integrated into regional and international activities and discussions that Pacific Leaders engage with. This includes discussions on climate action, oceans management, disaster response, regional security and labor mobility to name a few. Human rights issues are also reported in the regional sustainable development reporting which provides an update on the region's progress against the SDGs, SAMOA Pathway and other key development commitments. Ongoing partnership with Pacific CSOs remains a critical part of these processes.
29. PIFS, through the Pacific Partnerships to End Violence against Women and Girls (Pacific Partnerships), is supporting CSOs through capacity building initiatives, grants and innovative monitoring approaches to encourage effective and active participation in monitoring gender equality and EVAWG commitments.

*Pacific governments can sometimes overly rely on CSOs*

30. This close relationship can, in some cases, create an overreliance of governments on the services provided by CSOs. Some governments see CSOs as extensions and implementers of government policies. This creates a risk that successive close cooperation between Pacific CSOs can lead to abdication of core responsibilities for government; this weakens government ownership of the problem of VAWG and its response, as well as being burdensome for the CSOs in question who struggle with ever-expanding responsibilities. Such CSOs come under increasing pressure from both government and donors to fully own solutions to national-in-scale problems well outside of the capacity of any single actor or entity to holistically address.
31. Pacific CSOs must therefore sometimes walk a fine line between maximising participation in, and complementarity with, the government agenda to address VAWG, and being saddled with unrealistic responsibility. This balancing act can be further problematized by the uneven distribution of funds, with some donors – for various reasons – having a preference for dispersing through civil society rather than government, while maintaining requirements around allocations that prevent local CSOs from going to scale (elaborated further in the final section of this submission, on aid effectiveness).

*Close cooperation between governments and CSOs – at what cost to the latter's 'watchdog' function including with respect to gender equality and VAWG*

32. The often close relationship between Pacific CSOs and governments, while yielding many positive results, also incurs a cost to the role of CSOs as 'watchdogs'. The proximity of – and sometimes overlap between (it is not uncommon for CSO figures to concurrently hold government positions) – CSOs and government at times weakens the accountability function exercised by civil society in many other parts of the world. Advocacy continues through various channels, but the dynamics of the relationship sets boundaries on the extent to which CSOs might make more direct demands of duty-bearers.
33. Fiji is a significant exception in this regard where, due to historical reasons, women's movements were both politically active and vocal, it is much more common for CSOs to make direct demands on the government. Since the 2014 election restored democratic rule, cooperation between the National Women's Machinery and CSOs has been steadily, albeit cautiously, increased and improved.

34. Across the Pacific, CSOs do play an accountability role to some degree, mainly by engaging with national and international processes, including:
- National Action Plans on VAWG;
  - Pacific Triennial Women's Conferences;
  - Regional Consultations on VAWG such as those convened by FWCC every four years, and other development agencies like UN Women, Melanesian Spearhead Group Secretariat, and SPC;
  - PIFS Reference Group on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (no longer in existence);
  - Spécial Rapporteur Reports on VAWG;
  - Country reviews conducted under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;
  - UN Commission on the Status of Women;
  - In "shadow" report processes of the UN conventions, especially CEDAW, and UPR stakeholder reports; and
  - Contributing to Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
  - Engaging with Pacific Leaders through the annual Leaders and ministerial meetings, and the convened Pacific regional CSO Forums.
35. Governments agree that CSOs have had some success in influencing policy and legislative reform and acknowledge the complementary role of CSOs in work to EVAWG. This agreement is regularly signalled in CEDAW State reports.

*The key figures and groups advancing the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific*

36. Different players have a stake in advancing the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific – governments, CSOs, regional intergovernmental and multilateral partners and the private sector.
37. National governments: national governments are primarily responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights, through national policies, legislations and ratification of international human rights instruments. In some countries it also carries out awareness programmes including in collaboration with CSOs. For example, in RMI, the government raises on human rights in partnership with CSOs. This it does through media programmes including the national radio station V7AB, the Marshall Islands Journal (privately owned) and the social media. The public school system and the Ministry of Health have regular information programmes on the national radio station that often touch on human rights issues including sanitation, parenting skills, and substance abuse in youth.
38. Regional intergovernmental organisations: The organisations that make up CROP prioritize and mainstream human rights and gender equality through their mandated work. CROP functions as a coordination mechanism between the heads of the regional organisations in the Pacific, and as a high-level advisory body, to provide policy advice and may assist in facilitating policy formulation at national, regional and international level. It provides a forum to enable CROP heads to collectively review progress with their respective organisations' contributions on the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, and other regional policy frameworks and priorities endorsed by Pacific leaders. PIFS and SPC are the lead agencies in coordination and implementation of regional interventions on human rights including gender equality. The Northern Pacific countries have indicated that they are more engaged in regional human rights, gender violence, gender equality and have more access to information and opportunities since the establishment of regional and multilateral organisations in the North such as the SPC North Pacific Office and the UN Country

Office in Pohnpei, FSM. These offices bring closer to both governments and CSOs expertise and opportunities for sharing with southern Pacific countries.<sup>24</sup>

39. Pacific regional ministerial meetings and councils: PIFS convenes the PIF Leaders and key ministerial meetings that provide a platform for Leaders and Ministers to discuss key issues of priority to the region. These meetings include the annual Pacific Island Leaders Forum, Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM), Forum Trade Ministers Meeting (FTMM), and Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting. SPC convenes the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting, and the Pacific Women's Triennial and Ministers of Women meeting. USP, through the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) Facilitation Unit, convenes the Forum Education Ministerial Meeting.
40. Regional coordination mechanisms: there are regional coordination mechanisms that exist to coordinate and promote coherence of support to Pacific countries. In the human rights space, these include the CROP Gender Working Group, the Gender Coordination Group (and as part of that the CSW Working Group), the Pacific Regional Reference Group on Disabilities, CROP Human Resource Development Working Group and Regional Disability Taskforce. PIFS also convenes an annual Regional CSO Forum which brings together CSOs from across the region to discuss key regional issues and in recent years recognized the issue of violence against women and girls. Furthermore, PIFS convenes quarterly meetings with CSOs providing further space for CSOs to discuss current issues and opportunities to coordinate and collaborate.
41. Multilateral Organizations: The UN agencies that operate in the Pacific work to support PICs bilaterally and regionally to progress issues of priority including human rights and gender equality.

*Different types and levels of operation of Pacific CSOs*

42. Pacific CSOs form a diverse tapestry and take a number of different forms, including:
  - Local, community-based CSOs such as the Kosrae Community Action Programme (KCAP) in Kosrae State, FSM, Tonoas Women Council (FSM);
  - National issue-based CSOs, such as the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) in Fiji, Cook Islands Family welfare Association (CIFWA), Punanga Tauturu Inc (Cook Islands Women's Counselling Center), Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI);
  - Churches and faith-based organisations, such as the Congregational Church of Samoa, Anglican Diocese of Polynesia, Wesleyan Church of Tonga, Pacific Uniting Church, and National Councils of Churches;
  - National umbrella organisations: Cook Islands Association of NGOs (CIANGO), FSM Association of NGOs (FANGO), Marshall Islands Association of NGOs (MANGO), Kiribati Association of NGOs (KIANGO), National Council of Women – Samoa, Samoa Umbrella of NGOs (SUNGOs), Soqosoqo Vakamarama I Taukei (SSVM), Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT), Cook Islands National Council for Women (Cook Islands) and Civil Society Forum of Tonga (CSFT);
  - Pacific Regional NGOs: Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO), Pacific Action Network on Globalisation (PANG), and Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), Pacific Youth Council, Pacific Disability Forum (PDF); and
  - International NGOs operating in the Pacific: Amnesty International, CARE, CARITAS, Greenpeace, Red Cross, Save the Children Fund, Oxfam Pacific, Oxfam Fiji/PNG/Solomon Islands/Vanuatu, Salvation Army, Lions Club, Rotary, and World Wide Fund for Nature.

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<sup>24</sup> As per responses to the survey questions for this joint submission.

43. At national level, there is a diversity of CSOs ranging from charitable and welfare-focused organisations, to issue-based CSOs working on gender equality and women's empowerment, young women, youth development, culture, indigenous people, self-determination, resilience and sustainable development, nature conservation, human rights, peace, security, sexual orientation and gender identity, and community development.
44. Registered regional CSOs have long been established to advocate on issues such as a nuclear free and independent Pacific, women's development and gender equality, sustainable development and governance issues, human rights, sexual orientation and gender identities, persons living with disabilities, youth and social inclusion, justice, climate change, cultural identities and culture protection, humanitarian concerns, environmental conservation, environmental preservation and conservation, globalisation, and provision of capacity development support for national umbrella bodies of CSOs including grass roots communities and faith-based organisations.
45. Regional CSOs vary in terms of size and mission, and are involved in various sectors ranging from service provision to youth, women, disability, faith based social services, and advocacy on gender equality, economic justice, environmental justice, conflict prevention and peace building, disaster and humanitarian response and human rights to democracy and NGO capacity-building.
46. There are two key regional umbrella NGO bodies:
- i. Pacific Regional Non-Governmental Organisations (PRNGO) is a group of regional organisations that meet regularly to discuss issues of common concern. This group was established as an informal grouping in 2002 to advance the process of regionalism in the Pacific, and engage collectively on the wide ranging political, economic, security, trade and development issues in the region. Its primary role is to be a catalyst for collective action, to facilitate and support coalitions and alliances on issues of common concern, and to strengthen the influence and impact of NGO efforts in the region<sup>25</sup>. There are currently 13 organisations<sup>26</sup> within the PRNGO group.
  - ii. The Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO) works to strengthen and build capacity of national NGOs and CSOs. Its primary role is to be a catalyst for collective action, to facilitate and support coalitions and alliances on issues of common concern, and to strengthen the influence and impact of NGO efforts in the region<sup>27</sup>.
47. A list of Pacific CSOs working on VAWG and the human rights of women and girls and a summary of types of activities they undertake is attached as Annex I. The list covers the countries that responded to the survey for this submission and those in which RRRT primarily works<sup>28</sup>. The list is not exhaustive due to the aforementioned difficulty in consistently tracking CSO activity, with CSOs regularly forming, changing and disbanding, and with a significant amount of informal community-level organisation that defies easy categorisation as 'CSO'. However, these actors represent the key figures and groups in the listed countries as we see them currently. The list is

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<sup>25</sup> [www.piango.org/](http://www.piango.org/).

<sup>26</sup> These organizations are: Council of Pacific Education (COPE), Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), Foundation of the People of the South Pacific (FSP), Greenpeace, Pacific Foundation for the Advancement of Women (PACFAW), Pacific Concerns Resource Centre (PCRC), PIANGO, Pacific Islands News Association (PINA), South Pacific and Oceania Council of Trade Unions (SPOCTU), Pacific Council of Churches (PCC), World Wind Fund (WWF), Pacific Network on Globalization (PANG), Pacific youth Council (PYC). <http://www.piango.org/our-members/regional-ngos/>.

<sup>27</sup> [www.piango.org/](http://www.piango.org/).

<sup>28</sup> Fiji, Kiribati, FSM, RMI, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. RRRT has CFOs based in these countries and information gathered through their assistance.

diverse, containing CSOs that operate at different levels from national to community-based, and with varying degrees of formalisation and professionalization.

*Main activities undertaken by key figures and groups*

48. Workshops, training and community awareness are the most common activities conducted by CSOs who work on VAWG and the human rights of women and girls, with every listed CSO engaged to some extent in this type of activity. Training and awareness campaigns often focus on the dissemination of existing laws and services, knowledge to assist and empower survivors, as well as targeted attitudinal and behavioural change. This reflects a strong emphasis on CSOs as bearers of EVAWG messaging to communities, extending the reach of government and international agency-led programmes, and also a common diagnosis that the high prevalence of VAWG arises mainly from local social and cultural conditions, and can be alleviated through education and awareness.
49. However, this emphasis also reveals some assumptions about the process of social change, how certain cause and effect logics are sometimes taken for granted, and how this leaves gaps in the strategy of some CSOs in approaching VAWG. This is a sense among some CSOs, for example, that raising awareness of the laws and issues will generate change more or less automatically. While this is indeed a critical component, evidence and experience suggest that many other enabling factors are required, including supportive laws and policies, competent state agents, accessible services, changes in practice, and more.
50. Another common activity is lobbying for law and policy reform although, as previously mentioned, the extent and depth of this activity varies significantly from country to country. All countries have some degree of CSO participation in law- and policy-making processes, and most Pacific CSOs have adopted appropriate local strategies to lobby given their specific context and proximity to government.
51. Common services provided by CSOs, directed primarily for VAWG survivors, include counselling and psycho-social support, safe houses and shelters, legal aid, hotlines, and referral advice and networks. However, as is apparent in Annex I, these services tend to be highly concentrated at the national level with one or two CSOs being the primary service-providers for the country. These services tend to also concentrate in the national capital, with limited reach to other islands and provinces.
52. Most national service providers are exploring ways to extend them to under-serviced regions. In the Solomon Islands for example, Family Support Centre (FSC) has established a network of community officers that can assist with advice and referral, and Christian Care Centre (CCC) has established satellite shelters in Malaita and Western Province.

*The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) – an example of uniting different approaches*

53. FWCC, established in the early 1980s, stands out in the Pacific region as a CSO that has successfully united service provision to survivors with advocacy, awareness-raising and other approaches to EVAWG. It has played a strategic regional role in supporting the capacity development of centres in other countries to start and manage EVAWG programmes. The Joint DFAT-MFAT Independent Evaluation of the FWCC released in 2015 found that “FWCC has made a significant contribution toward building the human resource capacity for eliminating violence against women and has been instrumental in the development of rights-based, gender transformative services that are accessed by increasing numbers of people. EVAW actors in the

region – including community members and those working with survivors in institutional contexts – articulated an understanding of gender inequality as the foundation of violence against women and indicated they have increased confidence in confronting violence-supportive norms.” FWCC is the secretariat of the Pacific Regional Domestic Violence Association.

54. In other countries, CSOs that have traditionally focused on provision of services are increasingly developing advocacy and other complementary programmes to address the root causes of violence. FSC and CCC in Solomon Islands, and the Tonga National Centre for Women and Children (TNCW) in Tonga are examples of this, supported by RRRT’s Pacific People Advancing Change (PPAC) programme.

55. A list of campaigns and approaches undertaken by different Pacific CSOs is attached as Annex II.

### **PART 3: EFFECTIVENESS OF AUSTRALIAN OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE IN SUPPORTING CSOs WORKING ON VAWG AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS**

#### *Australian funding of EVAWG programmes in the Pacific*

56. The Australian government is a key donor to Pacific countries on gender equality. Its international work is guided by DFAT’s Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy (2016), Foreign Policy White Paper (2017), and the 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. Development assistance is delivered through Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women, AU\$320 million, 2012-22), and relevant bilateral and regional programmes. *Pacific Women* provides funds to Pacific governments to fulfil some of their gender equality commitments for example, in RMI it funds priority activities identified by Government under the *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Republic of the Marshall Islands Country Plan*.

57. Australia remains the most important donor to the Pacific in terms of tackling VAWG and supporting states and CSOs alike to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of women and girls. Australian Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) is relevant and very much needed.

58. Civil society engagement is a critical component of Australia’s international engagement on gender equality and efforts to end domestic, family and sexual violence. It recognises the importance of civil society in advancing understanding of women’s and girls’ rights and enabling their full participation in society, shaping local policy and planning, delivering critical services, and in driving national change. Australia supports Pacific CSOs to deliver services to survivors of violence and advocate for violence prevention, in line with national domestic violence policy and legislation.

59. Australia’s support to women’s crisis centres (typically CSOs) is their biggest and longest investment on gender equality in the region, in recognition of the impact of violence on all aspects of women’s lives. DFAT provides support to improve quality of services for survivors of violence and establish new and/or expanded crisis services (safe shelter, counselling, psychosocial support, health and medical services, welfare and legal aid) in 11 countries: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, RMI, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

60. Through *Pacific Women*, the Australian government works with a range of regional, UN, government and civil society partners to EVAWG. This is done through improving women and girls’ access to justice, provision of crisis services and efforts to prevent violence from happening



in the first place, by improving gender equality and targeting harmful social norms that underpin violence against women and children.

61. Australia also works with other partners, including UN agencies, SPC, PIFS and women's machineries of government (Ministries of Women). Australia's bilateral development programmes include support to the law and justice sector (police and judiciary). In some cases, such as Tonga's first Legal Aid Centre, Australian development funding through *Pacific Women* has enabled the government of Tonga to take on funding in future years.
62. At the bilateral level, Australian development assistance for ending violence against women and girls works with Pacific partners to implement these activities:
  - i. Establish national legislation to criminalize domestic violence and guide responses (Cook Islands, Nauru, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Samoa and Kiribati);
  - ii. Enact comprehensive child protection laws in four countries (Kiribati, Nauru, Republic of Marshall Islands and Solomon Islands) with an additional four in draft (Fiji, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) through support to UNICEF's Pacific Regional Child Protection programme;
  - iii. Improve quality and availability of services for survivors of violence, including the establishment in January 2018 of the Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre, which is the first formal counselling and advocacy service for families experiencing violence in Kiribati; and
  - iv. Shift household gender dynamics and increase respect for women, through initiatives such as the PNG CARE Coffee project. A 2018 evaluation found that households in which women were involved in training reported a 22 per cent higher income, higher levels of joint household decision-making, increased sharing of household chores, and a positive shift in attitudes regarding violence against women.
63. Some national CSOs, for example in FSM, have indicated that it is difficult to provide meaningful assessment of the effectiveness of Australian ODA at national level as there is minimal direct engagement. Contact with Australian ODA has primarily been through regional programmes such as SPC, Pacific Women, the Pacific People Advancing Change (PPAC), and through bilateral aid to government. Australian ODA could become more relevant if there were greater awareness of what support is available for CSOs in these countries, and the more certainty of the sustainability of these funding sources.
64. Australia has made significant contributions to promoting gender equality and human rights in the Pacific. It has funded the only Pacific grown regional human rights programme, RRRT since 2006. Australia has funded the Pacific Disability Forum since 2009 to implement its work in the Pacific particularly building the capacity of national DPOs. This support has enabled PDF to partner with other regional organisations for example, the partnership with UN Women to address violence against women and girls with disabilities in Fiji, Kiribati and Samoa; through the Regional Prepositioning Initiative, UNFPA with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and PDF are working together to improve GBV in emergency programming for women and girls with disabilities, with a particular focus on programmes which support the procurement, storage and distribution of Dignity Kits.
65. However, the funding landscape for CSOs presents a number of challenges which, taken together, limit the effectiveness of Australian support (among other international donors), elaborated in the following sections.

*The Pacific CSO operating environment remains heavily resource-strapped, especially core funding*

66. In most cases, women-led CSOs that work on VAWG in the Pacific are plagued by inadequate resourcing – financial, human and technical. Operating budgets are extremely tight, often in a context with high service and material costs. As a result, most CSOs have no or limited physical premises from which to operate, and face challenges in terms of logistics and transport, technology, administration and project management. Human resource limitations make it difficult to attract and recruit skilled personnel. Most CSOs have few, if any, paid staff, and depend heavily on the participation and support of volunteers. These challenges are not unique to women-led CSOs or those working on VAWG and human rights only – they are common across the region. However, these challenges are exacerbated for CSOs led by marginalised groups including women, due to their lower overall surplus of both money and time to commit.
67. An extant challenge for Pacific CSOs remains the mobilisation and sustaining of core funding to meet these costs. Despite historical recognition and sector-wide agreement that, in order to effectively address the inter-generational challenges of VAWG and gender inequality, long-term sustained funding is required, a significant proportion of donor funding remains restricted by short-term cycles. A comprehensive survey does not exist, however anecdotally it is rare that CSOs can feel secure beyond the next twelve months of funding. Some funding agreements exist that are negotiated for mere months at a time. The need for sustained long-term funding must work against domestic pressure in donor countries to demonstrate impact with an immediacy that is, oftentimes, unrealistic. It is recognised that these factors remain in constant negotiation, however the resulting compromise seldom provides CSOs with the security to plan and execute the longer-term objectives that meaningful social change necessarily requires.
68. There is also a concerning trend, acknowledged by many CSOs, away from core funding and toward project-based support. This modality is appealing to donors because it increases accountability of operating costs; funding for staff and facilities is constrained and linked directly to project outcomes. However, this trend risks undermining the viability of Pacific CSOs who lack a minimum baseload capacity; turnover is high, and capacity fluctuates significantly as projects commence and conclude. Project-based allocations for costs such as staff salaries often assume a base capacity that is not necessarily there. CSOs see core funding decline and take on more and more projects to compensate. The result is that activity increases out of proportion with capacity; it is unsustainable and threatens the survival of nascent and developing CSOs.
69. Another issue raised is the delays in transfer of Australian programme funding to CSOs, which results in these agencies seeking emergency financial support from national governments to provide interim funding from already stretched resources. This frequent need for gap-bridging leads to insecurity and diverts human resources away from implementation.

*Funding is inaccessible for CSOs that are smaller, newer, less formally established, and community-based*

70. As alluded to earlier, a significant amount of work, often undocumented, occurs at the local level by organisations and individuals embedded in communities. Some organisations are unregistered, unaffiliated from national umbrella movements, and better resemble semi-formal community networks rather than more established, professionalised NGOs. This character, often a strength in terms of local praxis and the dynamics of communities, also presents challenges in terms of funnelling resources and support.

71. Institutional support for CSOs, largely influenced by the high levels of violence and the imperative for crisis response, has gravitated to the centres and focused on establishing and supporting national service providers. Capacity-building has, likewise, been targeted at improving service delivery, shelters, and referral networks. While support for advocacy, awareness, and behaviour change exists, it is also largely funnelled through this often too narrow nexus. Due in part to the pivot toward project-based funding outlined above, the capacity of these CSOs does not scale in proportion to the scope of interventions.
72. While the main national CSOs become overburdened with implementing diverse activities on a large scale, many smaller and community based CSOs cannot access funding at all. Models of granting imported from contexts with very different forms of social organising ignore the dispersed, cellular nature of a significant part of Pacific civil society. Many requirements of existing grant programmes – including having undergone formal audits, having certain policies in place, or being able to conduct in-depth scoping, analysis, or evaluation – exclude community-based CSOs. Similarly, many smaller organisations do not have the absorptive capacity to take on larger grants or execute significant budgets, especially when project-based funding has only marginal allocations to management and administration.
73. While Pacific CSOs are many and diverse, the field of organisations that can consistently meet the eligibility criteria of most donors is actually quite narrow. Support from national governments is limited; these CSOs face competition for resources and have a heavy reliance on donors.

*Funding sometimes drives mandate creep*

74. Some Pacific countries have seen the establishment of new CSOs or the expansion in mandates of existing CSOs primarily for the purpose of accessing donor funding. This creates a tense environment particularly when CSOs new to the VAWG space are successful in receiving the funding. Collaboration with the successful funding recipients can be on the surface only to satisfy donor requirements, and when the funding is expended, the newly established CSOs cease operation or revert to their original missions<sup>29</sup>.

*Use of existing mechanisms and organisations for greater ownership*

75. It is critical that Australian ODA is responsive to the needs of Pacific stakeholders (governments, CSOs and regional organisations) as identified by these stakeholders. Related to this is the need to prioritize and better utilise regional organisations such as PIFS and SPC for regional support to Pacific countries (government and CSOs). This will ensure greater ownership, sustainability and most importantly, put to rest the perception that Australia aid programming is primarily driven from Canberra.
76. In addition, it is important for Australian ODA to utilise existing programs and governance mechanisms and build on lessons learnt from its own programs to continue to support Pacific needs. This includes building on/strengthening activities that have gained strong support from the region. Also, for consideration is the need for Australian aid funding to support Pacific grown initiatives as these are driven from gaps identified by Pacific communities, CSOs and/or regional agencies. An example is the Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) which supported and promoted an innovative, contextualised way of building leadership through a Pacific lens.

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<sup>29</sup> This information is as presented in the responses from survey respondents.

### *Engagement of Pacific stakeholders with Australia's Pacific Step-Up*

77. Information on the Pacific Step-Up Initiative by the Australian government places engagement with Pacific countries at the centre of the initiative, and as one of its highest foreign policy priorities.
78. Pacific groups<sup>30</sup> (governments and civil society) consulted have heard of Pacific Step-Up, however most are not across the details of the initiative, particularly how it fits with existing interventions and support for regional and national human rights commitments. Stakeholders consulted for this submission were able to identify just two specific activities under Pacific Step-Up:
- i. In 2019, Football Federation Australia partnered with the Australian government as part of the Pacific Step-Up and the Australia Pacific Sports Linkages Programme. This partnership saw the Westfield Junior Matilda's visit Tonga, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands to support the development of football internationally, strengthen the links between Australia and its Pacific neighbors and empower Pacific girls.
  - ii. In late 2019, Australia supported nine Pacific church leaders to visit Canberra to attend Micah Australia's 'Voices for Justice' training. The training supported the delegates to consider how the Pacific Step-up is prioritizing the needs of the region's most vulnerable populations and gave them the opportunity to advocate with Federal parliamentarians.
79. Some stakeholders consulted for this submission were unsure whether or not they had been engaged or involved with Pacific Step-Up.
80. It is important for Pacific stakeholders (governments, CSOs, regional organisations and multilaterals) to be informed of and involved in the design of the interventions under the Pacific Step-Up, for sustainability and to ensure the actions address the identified needs and gaps. It remains unclear to many the extent to which the Initiative links with existing programmes both regionally and bilaterally, and how it directly contributes to progressing the realisation of human rights through its interventions.
81. Some suggestions from Pacific CSOs on how the Pacific Step-Up Initiative could be more responsive to Pacific needs include conducting regional activities where there is a common need across Pacific countries and supporting sustainable funding for local services where needed and accessible. Most importantly, the Initiative needs to continuously and proactively engage Pacific stakeholders including local, national and regional CSOs.

## **PART 4: OTHER MATTERS**

### *The importance of a contextual approach to gender equality and VAWG in the Pacific*

82. A truly 'home-grown' Pacific human rights programme, RRRT applies a contextualised approach to human rights, using Pacific values, cultures and faiths as enablers of human rights without comprising human rights principles and standards. It is submitted that a contextualized approach must be at the centre of any strategy to EVAWG and improve gender equality.
83. The diagnosis and communication of the root causes and enabling environment of VAWG in any given country should be made through a contextual lens and solutions are embedded in cultural and religious norms and practices. This has two consequences. First, it increases the understanding

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<sup>30</sup> Those that have provided responses.

and acceptance of the issue by couching it in terms that are relatable at the national level. Second, it fosters ownership and sustainability of solutions by drawing on practices and values that are already familiar and proven. It is important to note that this does not amount to cultural relativism and that a contextual approach conveys and applies human rights standards using national values and practices and does not attempt to find a mid-point between the two.

84. RRRT applies contextualised approaches to EVAWG in the course of its work, most notably through the Social Citizenship Education programme and in supporting the work of the Samoa National Human Rights Institution in implementing the findings of its 2018 National Inquiry into Family Violence<sup>31</sup>. That inquiry found a ‘pandemic’ of violence that had become normalized in Samoa as a result of the breakdown of traditional social protection mechanisms and the misinterpretation of religious and cultural values. The recommended solutions sought to re-establish those protection mechanisms and address the misinterpretations that created the enabling environment. Within a year of the recommendations being made a national pilot programme has established family safety committees within five traditional village councils and 17 villages have enacted bylaws to address family violence<sup>32</sup>.

#### *The role of men and boys in addressing VAWG in the Pacific*

85. One of the main findings of the National Inquiry Report into Family Violence was that “Samoa is a patriarchal society where women are seen as subservient to men. This gender inequality is the primary cause of family violence in Samoa as violence is the key tool in maintaining male superiority.”
86. VAWG cannot and should not be viewed as a ‘women’s issue’; it is essential for the role of men and boys to be understood and acknowledged and for them to play a part in prevention and redress efforts, where it is safe for them to do so. Specific programmes to address patriarchy and its harmful impacts should always be a key component of any comprehensive programme of work to prevent VAWG, starting in childhood to break the inter-generational cycle of violence.
87. Notwithstanding, there is a need to be cognizant of the harmful attitudes and beliefs that exist within many essential services and institutions, often arising from their male-dominated structures. This necessitates short, medium and long term strategic approaches to VAWG which ensure compliance with the principle of do no harm. It is counter-productive to place further power to address VAWG in the hands of those who are either perpetrators or complicit in its perpetration, as is often the danger under the current patriarchal status quo.

#### *Integrated Approaches*

88. There is a need to take a wider/holistic approach to EVAWG and gender equality and consider how it can be better integrated into the curriculum, early childhood development, health, education and law and justice interventions, and in other relevant spaces to ensure the responsibility is not only with gender stakeholders but across government and community.
89. SPC has recently committed to a greater emphasis and investment in mainstreaming a people-centred approach (PCA) across its three pillars (people, programmes and organisation). The PCA encompasses human rights, gender equality and social inclusion, culture and sustainable

<sup>31</sup> <https://ombudsman.gov.ws/office-of-the-ombudsman-launches-first-ever-state-of-the-human-rights-report/>.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/sep/03/family-abuse-epidemic-uncovered-in-samoa>.

environment considerations. Mainstreaming the PCA through SPC programmes should have a multiplier effect across the Pacific.

90. The PIFS Strategic Framework (2017 – 2021) identifies four key interlinked outcomes through which the Secretariat facilitates political dialogue amongst Forum Leaders to advance their vision for the region. A core focus is promoting people centered development to support PIF realize the potential of Pacific people through people focused policies that address current and emerging needs of the region<sup>33</sup>. It encompasses social inclusivity and promotes a coherent and coordinated regional response to support Pacific Islanders lead productive and healthy lives.
91. In 2018, Pacific Leaders endorsed the Boe Declaration, a call to action for stronger and cohesive regional security cooperation and coordination. Recognizing that climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific, the Declaration acknowledges that the Pacific is faced with a regional security environment confronted with complex security challenges framed by an expanded concept of security, within a dynamic geopolitical environment. This expanded concept of security is inclusive of human security providing a mechanism to address inequality and social exclusion including EVAWG within the security space.

## **PART 5: RECOMMENDATIONS**

92. This submission recommends that the Australian government, through its ODA to CSOs working on EVAWG and the human rights of women and girls, consider the following:
- a) Support a comprehensive, coordinated, multi-sectoral and holistic approach to addressing VAWG and fulfilling the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific.
    - (i) Such an approach should include essential service provision from the health, social services, police and justice sectors, as well as guidelines for coordination. Key service provision approaches must be rights-based; advance gender equality and women's empowerment; be culturally sensitive and age-appropriate; be survivor-centered; ensure that safety is paramount; and ensure perpetrator accountability.
    - (ii) Such an approach should also encourage the greater involvement of men and boys in addressing VAWG, as well as a contextualized approach to human rights in the Pacific which uses Pacific cultures, values and faiths as enablers of human rights, including with respect to women and girls in the Pacific.
    - (iii) Further, consideration could be given by the Australian to assessing whether Australian government ODA should incorporate a rights-based approach, regardless of the sector in which the ODA is provided.
  - b) Promote an integrated approach to gender equality and human rights that looks at a range of dimensions of inequality and discrimination, including legal frameworks, behavioral norms and attitudes about gender roles and access to services.
  - c) Increase investment and resourcing of primary prevention strategies, access to justice and access to and availability of services.
  - d) Direct specific and targeted support to strengthen the accountability functions of CSOs across the region, and support programmes that build multiple and complementary capacities in advocacy, lobbying, and human rights monitoring.
  - e) Invest in and build concurrent capacity of responsible ministries, departments and

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Forum-Secretariats-Strategic-Framework-2017-2021.pdf>.



agencies to shift some of the responsibility for EVAWG and gender equality activities away from CSOs and back to duty-bearers, and support work to sensitize them to advocacy and rights claims.

- f) Support the extension of key services to survivors of VAWG – including shelter and safe houses, legal aid, counselling and psycho-social support, referral advice and networks, and hotlines – to rural areas, outer islands, and towns and provinces away from national capitals.
- g) Invest, improve and strengthen resourcing for gender budgeting and audits, women in hardship assessments, youth statistics and analysis, and prevalence data for cross-country comparison.
- h) Re-introduce a stronger focus on flexible core and longer term (multi-year) funding for CSOs to build sustainable capacity, provide security and facilitate the pursuit of long-term objectives for social change.
- i) Ensure that project-based funding for CSOs and other institutions includes strong elements to build organizational capacity.
- j) Adopt models of grant funding that are maximally accessible to CSOs that are small, less formal and more community-based, with the lowest possible threshold of eligibility, and the simplest possible procedures for application, implementation, and reporting. In conjunction, support models that build CSO capacity in line with locally identified visions of civil society and community, such as SPC's Pacific People Advancing Change (PPAC) programme.
- k) Support work to improve women's access to economic opportunities, access to sexual and reproductive health, and improved educational outcomes. Development assistance should empower women and girls to be independent and to live free from violence.
- l) The Pacific is susceptible to natural disasters and the impacts of the climate change crisis. Any development assistance needs to engage Pacific stakeholders (governments, CSOs and regional partners) and support their efforts to respond to natural disasters, impacts of climate change and the effects of the Covid-19 global pandemic.
- m) Continue investing in regionalism and the regional architecture, namely PIFS and SPC. These organisations are of the Pacific and for the Pacific.