



Mr. Luke Simpkins MP  
Chair, Human Rights Sub-Committee  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Dear Mr. Simpkins,

**Re: Submission by the Australian National Committee for UN Women and UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office on Human Rights for Women and Girls – Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific Region**

On behalf of the Australian National Committee for UN Women and UN Women I would like to submit the attached document outlining the major challenges to human rights for women and girls in the Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific region.

The main barriers to women's enjoyment of their full human rights are identified as follows:

**Low levels of women's leadership:** Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) have the lowest levels of representation of women in parliaments and local governments globally. Representation of women in national parliament in the Pacific (excluding the French territories) is three percent; the lowest of any region in the world.

**High levels of violence against women and girls:** Violence against women and girls (VAW) in the Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific region is among the highest in the world. Women and girls with disabilities are especially vulnerable and face even higher risk of physical and sexual abuse and violence in their homes, communities and institutions.

**Lack of access to justice:** Many countries in the region function under a dual legal system: the formal justice system based on written law and the informal justice system based on customary practice. Although in some countries the constitution outlines that the formal legal system prevails over customary law, the enforcement of these clauses are weak.

**Limited economic opportunities:** Pacific Island Countries and Territories are estimated to have the second highest rates of vulnerable workers of all developing country groupings. Most rural and outer island economies are still semi-subsistence, with women usually performing a greater share of food growing and inshore fishing activities, which limits their availability for formal employment.

The document highlights the progress that has been made in advancing women's human rights in these key areas, noting that inclusive processes involving key stakeholders have been most effective and delivered better returns on investments.

The document underscores the negative impact that violence against women, women's political and economic marginalisation and discriminatory access to justice have on the economic, social and political development of the countries under question. It argues that addressing women's human rights and the barriers to inclusive economic growth will have exponentially positive impacts on entire communities and countries.



Finally the document highlights the role of Australian programs to support women and girls in the Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific Region realise their full human rights. It corroborates findings that projects and interventions planned and implemented in full consultation and cooperation with all stakeholders, and that place women's needs at the heart of programming, are the most cost-effective and sustainable.

The Australian National Committee for UN Women is pleased to submit this document and would like to thank the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for the opportunity to comment on these important issues.

Sincerely,

**Julie McKay**  
Executive Director  
Australian National Committee for UN Women

Title: Opportunities for Realisation of Women and Girls' Human Rights in the Pacific through Women's Leadership, Access to Justice, and Economic Empowerment

Submitted to: Human Rights Sub-Committee, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, Parliament of Australia

Submitted By: Australia National Committee for UN Women and UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office

Date: 22 May 2014

Women and girls' ability to fully realise and enjoy their human rights is at the core of successful and sustainable social and economic development. A comparison of the countries that rank highest on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index<sup>1</sup> indicate that countries with the highest levels of gender equality, have some of the highest GDP per capita globally. Studies also demonstrate that improving the situation for women with regard to more political representation, economic participation, better access to health and education improves state capacity and good governance. According to 2010 UN estimates by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Asia-Pacific region loses up to \$47 billion in output each year due to lack of female participation in labour markets. This demonstrates that in addition to the social costs, the economic costs of inequality are too high for women and girls, their communities and countries.

This report has been prepared by Australian National Committee for UN Women (UN Women ANC) and the UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office (UN Women). UN Women works to address and overcome the barriers and impediments for women and girls in realising their full human rights. UN Women Fiji Multi-Country Office (UN Women Fiji MCO) covers 14 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) and UN Women has a country office in Papua New Guinea (PNG). UN Women also has a presence in the Indian Ocean Rim, including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Kenya, Tanzania, Thailand, Seychelles and South Africa.

The Australian National Committee for UN Women is one of 16 global National Committees for UN Women. It was established in 1989 as an Australian NGO and has its headquarters in Canberra. UN Women ANC's role is to:

- Raise funds to support UN Women's projects and programs;
- Challenge attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality in Australia and the region; and
- Engage with the Australian Government to raise awareness of UN Women's work.

UN Women has worked closely with global and regional partners including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to address issues of gender inequality. Australia is a member of UN Women's Executive Board and over the years, through the

---

<sup>1</sup> The Gender Gap Index ranks countries gender equality standards based on 4 indicators: economic, political, education- and health-based criteria

Australian aid programme, has partnered with UN Women to implement programmes and projects that address issues of women's empowerment, gender equality and human rights in political participation, economic security and ending violence against women.

UN Women ANC and UN Women Fiji MCO welcome the opportunity provided by the Parliament of Australia Human Rights Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade to make submissions to its inquiry on the situation of human rights for women and girls in the Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific region. This submission outlines some of the key barriers to women and girls realising their human rights in the Pacific region and the implications of these barriers for economic and social development in the region. The submission also highlights progress made in addressing these barriers through UN Women work and indicates the challenges and gaps that remain.

This submission complements a submission by the UN Pacific Gender Group, which speaks to violence against women and girls in the Pacific region and the need for comprehensive legislation.

## **Key issues**

### **1. Low Levels of Women's Leadership**

Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) have the lowest levels of representation of women in parliaments and local governments<sup>2</sup> globally. Representation of women in national parliament in PICTs (excluding the French territories) is three per cent; the lowest of any region in the world. Although Pacific women have the legal right to fully participate in local and national decision-making, the numbers of women in national and local decision-making positions remains low and are even decreasing when compared to the global statistics, which show women's political participation has increased<sup>3</sup>. The Federated States of Micronesia and Vanuatu are among the few countries in the world with no women elected or appointed officials in national parliament.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) upholds women's right to participate in public life, while the Beijing Platform for Action calls for removing barriers to equal participation. There are five upcoming elections in the Pacific region in 2014 – Fiji, the Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Tonga and the Solomon Islands. Together these represent more than a million people, half of them women.

A World Bank study in India has found that longer exposure to women's political representation at both national and local levels increases women's overall labour force participation, the share of public employment opportunities allocated to women and

---

<sup>2</sup> Women's Representation in Local Government in the Asia Pacific- Status Report, UNDP, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank 2012

women's increased access to public goods such as roads and health services<sup>4</sup>. Increasing women's political participation has also proven to be good for economic development. Australia National University research has found that each percentage point regarding female parliamentary representation on average increases annual per-capita economic growth by around 0.16 percentage points<sup>5</sup>. This demonstrates that higher representation of women in parliament has led and can lead to faster economic growth.

UN Women Fiji MCO in partnership with DFAT and the European Union has developed a programme of support to build the pipeline of women candidates. This programme began in June 2013 and has delivered on a number of substantive results by relying on UN Women's global comparative advantage and Pacific expertise to adapt better practices to the Pacific context. Through the UN Women Advancing Gender Justice in the Pacific programme the five women who were elected in the Vanuatu Municipal elections were able to strengthen their capacity in order to successfully stand for the elections. These women have credited the training with strengthening their skill sets and ability to lead effectively.

UN Women also entered into partnership with the Office of the Electoral Commission in Samoa to successfully update and create gender-responsive resource tools for women and men candidates. The resulting candidate's handbook has become a better practice standard in the region, which is being implemented in other PICTs. Finally, through the programme, UN Women has supported building the pipeline of women candidates by empowering young women through supporting the establishment of the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance (PYWLA) Secretariat and supporting activities like an online dialogue, which informed young women's capacity to participate in intergovernmental processes.

This project needs an additional **AUD2,600,000.00** to be rolled out across the seven PICTs where there are elections in 2014-15 and to support the additional nine PICTs where elections will be held in 2016-2018 in order to increase women's political participation. The National Committee is hoping to raise some funds to support this work, and additional funding from DFAT is being sought. It is important to note that many of the activities that will be rolled out speak to promoting a better practice exchange on engaging women and girls across countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

## **2. High Levels of Violence against Women**

Violence against women and girls (VAW) in PICTs is among the highest in the world. Evidence shows that two out of three Pacific women have experienced violence. Women and girls with disabilities are especially vulnerable and face even higher risk of physical and sexual abuse and violence in their homes, communities and institutions.<sup>6</sup> Social norms can normalise intimate partner violence as the woman's 'fault' and responsibility,

---

<sup>4</sup> Ghani, E, Mani A., and O'Connell S.; *Can Political Empowerment Help Economic Empowerment: Women Leaders and Female Labour Force Participation in India*; Policy Research Working Paper, World Bank, October 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Jayasuriya D. and Burke P., *Female Parliamentarians and Economic Growth: Evidence from a Large Panel*, Australia National University and Development Policy Centre, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Stubbs D. and Tawake S., *Pacific Sisters with Disabilities: At the Intersection of Discrimination*, UNDP (2009).

and are barriers to reporting. Recent VAW studies using the WHO methodology show high rates of partner and non-partner violence in the Pacific, and reported child exposure to violence and sexual abuse is also high<sup>7</sup>. Compounding factors include the low status of women legally and culturally, and the lack of access to services including the legal system and other protective measures.

The economic costs of VAW are high, with increased healthcare, social services, and policing costs. The impact on children is enormous. There is now evidence that shows VAW increases levels of child mortality as well as emotional and behavioural problems.

Each PICT has a different manifestation of how violence affects women and girls. Sorcery murders in PNG have been highlighted by Amnesty International as a cause of continued concern.

In 2007, AusAID's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) commissioned a study to assess the effectiveness of current approaches to addressing violence against women and identify promising practices in five countries: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and East Timor.

The ODE report found that violence against women was severe, pervasive and constrained development. It caused trauma to women and their families and communities and severely limited women's social, economic and political participation. It also created a significant financial cost for countries, with increased spending required for healthcare, social services, policing and the justice system.

These findings are corroborated by CEDAW Shadow Reports, while a 2012 World Bank report "[The State of Gender Equality in East Asia and the Pacific](#)" explicitly links violence against women and their marginalisation from public life as a factor in the slow economic growth of the Pacific region.

For more than seven years UN Women Fiji MCO has been actively working with partners to address violence against women. The programme supports Pacific-led activities to improve the policy environment on ending VAWG as well as meets the immediate needs of women and men at the community level who are experiencing violence today. It also supports Pacific organisations to deliver services that meet the needs of survivors. The programme is implemented through two initiatives:

**i) Joint Programmes in Kiribati and Solomon Islands.** A key part of UN Women's approach is to work jointly with other UN agencies to provide intensive multi-sectoral support to the governments of Kiribati and Solomon Islands to implement their National Actions Plan on VAWG. The key areas for assistance through the UN Joint Programmes are:

---

<sup>7</sup> For example, in Kiribati, around 68 per cent of ever-partnered women reported experiencing at least one act of physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner, and in Solomon Islands, 37 per cent of women reported having been sexually abused before aged 15. In Samoa, 46 per cent of women experienced one or more kinds of partner abuse.

- Intensive technical support to governments of Kiribati and Solomon Islands to strengthen whole-of-government governance and coordination mechanisms for NAPs.
- Development of integrated response protocols and referral/coordination mechanisms across sectors.
- Technical support to relevant government ministries and agencies to plan, coordinate and monitor VAWG response services and systems.
- Strengthen coordinated data collection systems to ensure available data is analysed to monitor service delivery.

**ii) Pacific Regional Facility Fund to End VAW (Pacific Fund).** The Pacific Fund makes grants available in eight countries: Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. The Pacific Fund has been a central part of UN Women ERAW work in the Pacific through the provision of grants and an extensive capacity-building programme. Between 2009 and 2013 more than 40 grants were authorised to partners with total funding of over AUD1,300,000.

Key activities include:

- Grants to selected service providers for delivery of services to survivors of VAW (counselling, medical, legal assistance etc.) especially in remote and rural areas.
- Intensive capacity building including in-country training, mentoring and technical advisory services.
- Support regional and national level exchanges on promising practices, innovations and evidence.
- Documentation of innovative practices for replication across the region.

Key achievements of UN Women's ERAW programme include support to the Samoa Victim Support Group (SVSG), a UN Women Pacific Fund grantee, which in 2013 established a 24-hour helpline to address a gap in services provided to victims of gender-based violence. Since its launch in April 2013, the helpline has had a dramatic impact in Samoa. Not only has access to counselling for survivors of violence against women in Samoa improved but it has also encouraged witnesses to speak out, and in doing so has saved lives. In the first five months, the service answered more than 1,764 calls, 83 of which were life-threatening domestic violence cases requiring overnight shelter assistance.

UN Women also strengthened capacity among regional parliamentarians on ending violence against women, by sharing better practices in VAW legislation and how to integrate and implement CSW 57 agreed conclusions.

These achievements would not have been possible without DFAT Australian aid support. The UN Women ANC has also raised funds to support the capacity development hub for

the Pacific Fund. The Pacific Fund needs an additional **AUD5,000,000** to continue working in the eight PICTs that are eligible for grants.

The Joint Programme in Kiribati needs **AUD3,200,000** and the Joint Programme in Solomon Islands needs **AUD2,500,000** to be able to implement activities fully over the next four years.

*Please note that many of these issues related to the Pacific are also highlighted in the UN Pacific Gender Group Submission*

### **3. Lack of Access to Justice**

Many PICTs function under a dual legal system: the formal justice system based on written law and the informal justice system based on customary practice. Customary law has constitutional status in all priority countries. Although in some PICTs the constitution outlines that the formal legal system prevails over customary law, the enforcement of these clauses are weak.

Application of customary law tends to be interpreted by traditional leaders and is often linked to attitudes rooted in traditional notions of equality that enforce gender stereotypes. In most PICTs the informal justice system is easier to access (and in many cases is the only option) for women compared to the formal legal system. A major challenge to monitoring the enforcement of the law in the Pacific is that cases from lower courts are almost never recorded in full. Although a lower court magistrate must record the decision, s/he is not obligated to record the reasons why a decision has been made.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the international women's right treaty. It sets the standard for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment by setting out the concrete steps to eliminate discrimination against women. Only two PICTs have not ratified CEDAW. Often PICTs that have ratified CEDAW and other human rights treaties experience difficulties with timely human rights reporting and effective implementation. In the past individual government bodies have addressed human rights conventions separately and often national and international consultants were utilised to finalise treaty reports. This has led to lack of ownership and slow implementation of human rights obligations. This is critical in countries' ability to implement policies and programmes to promote human rights.

Some PICTs passed legislation to provide for protection orders for victims of violence, for example the Vanuatu Family Protection (2008), the RMI Family Protection Act (2011), the Samoa Family Safety Act (2013), Palau's Family Protection Act (2013), Tonga Family Protection Act (2013) and the Kiribati Family Peace Bills. Although the legislative change is commendable these new laws are limited to protection orders and provide low sentencing for domestic violence offences compared to other violent offences under national criminal codes. Solomon Islands amended their Evidence Act in 2009 to outlaw the common law rule of corroboration. However, even though the law has been amended a case review conducted by UN Women suggests that the corroboration



warning is still applied in Solomon Islands. The amended Evidence Act 2009 also prohibits the questioning of the plaintiff in relation to prior sexual conduct to establish consent in sexual violence cases.

The legislative amendments that have been achieved in the Pacific often lack the requisite policies and mechanisms that are necessary for enforcement, and to enable women to actually exercise their rights. The implementation of new or amended legislation is hampered by the lack of:

- Sufficient, or indeed any, budget allocation for implementation;
- Enforcement strategies including training of law enforcement officials;
- Civic education; and
- Monitoring strategies.

In collaboration with government and civil society partners UN Women Fiji MCO has begun analysing domestic law to assess how well it complies with international CEDAW standards and domestic practice both from a legal standpoint and in practice, and what relevant socio-cultural and legislative steps can be taken to ensure that it does. One of the findings is that only 17 per cent of women in Solomon Islands live in an area where legal aid is easily accessible.

Women's lack of access to justice has a direct effect on their economic empowerment especially as it pertains to child maintenance, and access to resources such as land rights. In order to fully roll out UN Women Fiji MCO's programme on increasing women and girls' access to justice in 14 PICTs over the next two years, **AUD3,000,000** is needed.

#### **4. Limited Economic Opportunities**

Detailed information on the economic situation of individuals in PICTs is limited e.g. there is no wage data, and poverty data is mostly on households, however at an aggregate level, PICTs are estimated to have the second highest rates of vulnerable workers (in the subsistence economy, working for family, own account workers and in the informal economy) of all developing country groupings. The majority of PICTs reported less than 50 per cent of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector. In most PICTs, rural areas and outer island economies are still semi-subsistence, with women usually performing a greater share of food growing and inshore fishing activities, which limits their availability for formal employment. These areas are especially vulnerable to disasters. About 18 million people in PICTs are affected by weather related disasters compared to 1.8 million in the 1980s. This is a significant challenge to PICTs' economies; the estimated cost of damage caused by disasters is AUD3.45 billion

At an aggregate level, PICTs are estimated to have the second highest rates of vulnerable workers (in the subsistence economy, working for family, own account workers and in the informal economy) of all developing country groupings. In the Pacific, women are more likely than men to be in vulnerable work (84 per cent versus 71 per cent), shoulder

the major responsibility for unpaid domestic and childcare work and, on average, have lower earnings.

The economic situation is further influenced by the fact that family and clan ties are strong, and traditional obligations are linked to communal land tenure. Weak economies and urbanisation are contributing to stresses on traditional support<sup>8</sup>. In most countries, the state has not played a strong role in social protection beyond health and education and what social protection there is, is limited to employment-based provisions including savings for retirement, which only reach a minority of the population – estimated at around 20 per cent of the workforce (and 60 per cent male) in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands<sup>9</sup>.

Historically, gendered norms, behaviours and social relations have played a big part in disadvantaging women economically. 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. Women often also have reduced access to education and skills, as well as other resources such as credit and land.

Rural women in most PICTs are responsible for the majority of agriculture for family and community use and have key roles in fisheries and aquaculture, but have less access than men to extension and training services, planting materials, and infrastructure; receive less information on farming and aquaculture techniques and new crop types; and have less control over productive resources<sup>10</sup>. Support for women's involvement in the agricultural and aquaculture sectors will boost the economy and assist with climate change adaptation. Ensuring equal access for men and women could increase agricultural output by up to 4 per cent<sup>11</sup>.

In Papua New Guinea, annual food production, which is mostly done by women, is valued at approximately US\$55 million a year<sup>12</sup>. If women receive training and information on the types of crops which are resilient to climate change, for example, or learn new techniques for farming in areas with more salt water intrusion into agricultural land, this will increase crop yields, ensuring both food security for their families and increased income from crop sales<sup>13</sup>.

Despite women's economic roles, one survey from Solomon Islands found that women are less involved than men in making decisions about how their family's money is spent on major household purchases, daily needs, their own health care, and visits to their

---

<sup>8</sup> Kidd, S., M. Samson, S. Ellis, N. Freeland and B. Wyler (2010) *Social Protection in the Pacific: a review of its adequacy and role in addressing poverty*, Canberra: AusAid, [http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/AusAID\\_SP\\_Study.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/AusAID_SP_Study.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Dwyer M (2013) Social protection in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands *Policy Quarterly – Volume 9, Issue 2 – May 2013 – Page 63* <http://igps.victoria.ac.nz/publications/files/903773c45c8.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> UN Women, 2012. Rural Pacific Island Women in Agriculture. Evidence, Data and Knowledge in Pacific Island Countries.

<sup>11</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), 2012. Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting, July 2012. Briefing paper Session 1: Economic Empowerment of Women

<sup>12</sup> IFC, 2010. Economic Opportunities for Women in the Pacific

<sup>13</sup> GIZ, 2010. Climate Change and Gender: Economic Empowerment of Women Through Climate Mitigation and Adaptation? Working Paper, October 2010.

family. 54.6 per cent of women participated in all these four household decisions; 40 per cent did not have a say in one or more of these decisions; and 6.4 per cent have no say in any decisions made for the household<sup>14</sup>.

Enhancing women's involvement in the formal economy in the Pacific could help to reduce the financial and social impacts of disasters. Labour force participation (LFP) rates vary across Pacific Island Countries, from 78 per cent in Niue to 16 per cent in Papua New Guinea. Women have lower LFP rates in the region from 71 per cent in Niue, as compared to 85 per cent for men; to 12.2 per cent in PNG, as compared to 19.2 per cent for men. In Melanesia, only 33 per cent of jobs in the formal economy are held by women, and men on average earn 20-50 per cent more than women. Industries that generate a lot of income like logging, mining, and fishing generally provide more income opportunities for men<sup>15</sup>.

Participating in economic activities allows women to effect positive changes not only in their own lives but also within their communities, with positive ripple effects for the whole nation. As small and geographically dispersed countries far from international markets, PICTs face volatility in economic growth and prices as well as problems achieving economies of scale, increasing labour productivity and gaining access to markets.

Addressing and removing barriers that prevent women from participating in certain sectors and occupations that are usually seen as the domain of men, could increase labour productivity by up to 25 per cent in some countries<sup>16</sup>. Provision of improved infrastructure – such as electricity, improved water and sanitation facilities – has health benefits for communities, and provides women more time to engage in activities that generate income and contribute to the economy<sup>17</sup>.

UN Women's strategy for women's economic empowerment recognises that, even though there is economic growth in PICTs, it is often uneven and there are insufficient formal sector job opportunities to absorb the emergent labour force.

Targeting market vendors through the Markets for Change project, which is a collaboration with DFAT, will not just improve their lives, it will also allow some of the vendors to consider other business opportunities, increasing their economic activity from vending to small enterprises and perhaps formal sector enterprises in agriculture, retail and hospitality sectors.

Rural and urban markets in the Pacific, especially in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, are central to the livelihood strategies for a majority of the population, especially for poorer households. Many small-scale market operations, especially vending, are

---

<sup>14</sup> SPC, 2014. Pacific Climate Change and Gender Toolkit. Draft

<sup>15</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), 2012. Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting, July 2012. Briefing paper Session 1: Economic Empowerment of Women

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

dominated by women, who comprise between 75 per cent and 90 per cent of all vendors. Hours are long, profits are often low, and conditions difficult.

Targeting markets and improving economic and social outcomes at marketplaces is expected to improve efficiency along farm to market supply chains, reduce food wastage, and increase revenues for vendors and councils.

Exposure to new business models through training, south-south exchange and other learning opportunities are especially efficient when provided in marketplace environments, offering value for money.

Not only have infrastructure improvements been made across markets in the Pacific through the Markets for Change project, in August 2013, rather than requiring vendors to come into the branch, UN Women negotiated for the Bank of the South Pacific to take its services to the market. The Honiara City Council then facilitated the issuing of papers that allowed the bank to waive identification and other requirements. This partnership led to more than 150 market vendors opening bank accounts. This has created in a very tangible way access to financial services to market women. UN Women has also delivered financial management training to market women in Fiji in Solomon Islands.

*Please note that many of these issues related to the Pacific are also highlighted in the ILO Pacific Submission*

## **Recommendations**

Although there has been progress there are still many obstacles to overcome before women and girls in the Pacific can fully realise their human rights and in so doing become full and active economic agents in their countries. In order to address some of the on-going inequality and challenges to women and girls achieving their human rights in PICTs it is recommended that short-term investments be made in the following areas:

- Strengthening the capacity and pipeline of women leaders and decision-makers at the national and local levels.
- Working with parliamentarians to strengthen comprehensive policy and legislation that strengthens women and girls human rights.
- Support governments and civil society to address access to justice gaps for women and girls.
- Supporting the implementation of present EVAW legislation and the development of comprehensive legislation.
- Supporting South-South collaboration between Pacific and Indian Ocean Rim in sharing better practices to promote women's human rights regarding women's political participation and ending violence against women especially among small island developing states (SIDS) in strengthening government and civil society.
- Researching women's economic situation and security in PICTs particularly focus on the development of robust indicators and data.

- Deepening the understanding of how and implementation on how disaster management and preparation affects can strengthen economic resilience among women and girls.

In order to facilitate long term sustainable change for women and girls in the Pacific a rigorous and long-term investment should be made in comprehensive programmes that:

- Promote women’s leadership and participation in decision making at all levels;
- Ensure that women, especially the poorest and most excluded, are economically empowered;
- Empower and enable governments, civil society organisations and individual women and girls to create communities that are free from violence;
- Women’s leadership and participation also shape peace and security and humanitarian action;
- Governance and national planning fully reflect accountability for gender equality commitments and priorities; and
- A comprehensive and dynamic set of global norms, policies and standards on gender equality and women’s empowerment is in place and is applied through action by Governments and other stakeholders at all levels.

UN Women’s mandate is to assist countries and the United Nations system to progress more effectively and efficiently towards the goal of achieving gender equality, women’s empowerment, and upholding women’s rights. As such, UN Women can be a strong partner in achieving these goals.