

**Desk Review of the Factors Which
Enable and Constrain the Advancement
of Women's Political Representation
in Forum Island Countries**

By

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Executive Summary

This report focuses on both the enabling and constraining factors which impact on women's representation in political decision-making at all levels in the Forum Island Countries (FICs).

I. The main enabling factors are:

1. The Pacific region does not endorse discrimination against women in the area of decision-making. On the contrary, FICs have committed internationally and regionally (and in some cases nationally) to promoting the advancement of women in different spheres of public life, including that of political representation.
2. Most countries of the region have adopted constitutions which prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex and four countries have affirmative action provisions which may be used to promote the advancement of women. In addition, a few countries have adopted women's policies which have begun to address the representation of women in decision-making. These policies are complemented by the activities of non-governmental partners who have been promoting the advancement of women in politics.
3. In many FICs, women have traditionally been valued as complementary partners to men with specialised knowledge and functions to ensure the well being of society.
4. Many countries have a pool of well educated women who are already leaders in various fields. In addition, women are increasingly active in the formal sector and hold positions of public leadership in many sectors (although additional Pacific-wide data collection is necessary for accurate quantification).

II. The second part of the report focuses on the barriers to the advancement of women and points to reasons why women's rights to political representation remain formal rather than actual:

- There is a prevailing view in the region that women have an equal chance to run for office and participate in decision-making on the grounds that they are constitutionally protected from discrimination but in fact, this is not accurate. There are institutional factors, such as unequal access to land and titles and outdated laws which continue to discriminate against women. In addition, national governmental machinery designed to address the promotion of women in all spheres of public life, continues to be weak in most FICs.
- Contemporary culture in the Pacific tends to be conservative and patriarchal, reflecting a colonial and missionary heritage as well as a reluctance to change a status quo which favours men politically and administratively.

- Women are not fully integrated socio-economically. In the Melanesian countries, access to education is still limited for girls. Women's roles in and contribution to the formal and informal economy is still considered secondary and their access to wealth is limited, which directly impacts on their ability to participate in politics. In addition, domestic violence continues to affect women throughout the region.
- Women find it difficult to enter the 'world of politics' due to its closed, male-dominated and frequently hostile nature. There are both demand and supply side factors which limit their candidacies and chances for political representation, including the lack of political party support for women candidates and the reluctance of women to run.

The political advancement of women is constrained by both institutional and attitudinal factors. Dealing with these will require both a regional and national level approach, which views women's lack of representation as a problem which needs to be tackled with urgency.

Part three of this report provides recommendations for addressing the lack of women's political representation in FICs at regional level.

PART 1

Factors Enabling and Constraining Women's Political Advancement in the Pacific

Part 1 is divided into two sections which are structured similarly sometimes using the same headings. The rationale for this is that under each heading category there are both positive or enabling factors, as well as negative or constraining factors. For instance, Government can on one hand set policy, but on the other, not implement it. Culture can promote the status of women on the one hand, and prevent women from participating in decision-making on the other. The Church can serve as a training ground for women in public life but prevent them from taking on leadership positions even though it has given them the confidence to lead.

By beginning with a focus on the enabling factors, we aim to show that the region is in many ways prepared to promote the political advancement of women and that the current low levels of women's representation in politics are at odds with commitments made by Forum Island Countries (FICs) and with the social and economic contribution and status of women in the region. This part shows that it is more out of inertia than out of a fundamental prejudice against women that the region has not yet acted pro-actively to match its political commitments to promoting women in politics.

"It is in the interests of society as a whole that women's values and women's sense of justice be integrated into political life."

— Gro Harlem Bruntland
Prime Minister of Norway, 1981, 1986-89, 1990-96
Chair of the 'Bruntland Commission'
Director of World Health Organisation, 1998-2003

Section 1 Enabling factors

This part of the study examines the factors which are conducive to the political advancement of women. These factors can be built on to assist in a policy of promoting women in public decision-making.

The factors which are conducive to the representation of women in decision-making are:

- The Pacific region does not endorse discrimination against the role of women in decision-making. On the contrary, the FICs have committed internationally and regionally (and in some cases nationally) to promoting the advancement of women in different spheres of public life, including that of political representation.
- Most countries of the region have adopted constitutions which prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex and four countries have affirmative action provisions which may be used to promote the advancement of women. In addition, a few countries have adopted women's policies which have begun to address the representation of women

in decision-making. These policies are complemented by the activities of non-governmental partners who have been promoting the advancement of women in politics.

- In many FICs, women have traditionally been valued as complementary partners to men with specialised knowledge and functions to ensure the well being of society.
- Many countries have a pool of well educated women who are already leaders in various fields. In addition, women are increasingly active in the formal sector and hold positions of public leadership in many sectors (although additional Pacific-wide data collection is necessary for accurate quantification).

1. Regional and International Commitments

1.1 The Pacific Plan

Pacific Island Countries have made a number of regional and international commitments and there is recognition that the participation of women in political decision-making at all levels needs to be enhanced. As stated, a clear indication emanated recently from the Eminent Person's Group (EPG), which in its review of the Pacific Islands Forum and regional cooperation in 2004, affirmed that Pacific Islands leaders should respond to the need to "increase the current low level of participation by women at all levels in decision-making processes and structures..." (EPG, 2004: 31). The review and subsequent establishment of a Pacific Plan were endorsed at the Pacific Islands' Special Leaders' Retreat in their April 2004 Auckland Declaration.

The Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration endorsed by Leaders at the Pacific Islands Forum meeting in October 2005¹ which sets out the path for the region in the coming 10 years, lists "improved gender equality" as one of its strategic objectives under its goal of "sustainable development".² It notably sets as one of its initiatives in the first three years under its goal of "good governance", to "develop a strategy to support participatory democracy and consultative decision-making... and electoral process" (PIFS, 2005: 18) in which women and other groups are better included.

1.2 The Revised Pacific Platform for Action

All Pacific Islands Countries and Territories have endorsed a Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (PPA) 2005-2015³ which affirms as one of its goals the "Full participation of women in political and public decision-making". A specific objective under this goal is to achieve "equitable participation by women and men in public life" through the "increase [in] the number of women appointed and elected to public office".

The 9th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, which adopted the revised PPA, urged governments to, *inter alia*:

- "Take affirmative action by promoting and putting in place policies and practices that enhance gender parity in political representation.
- Take an affirmative approach by encouraging capable women of our modern society to participate in politics at all levels of decision-making in various institutions.

- Provide security mechanisms for women candidates in the national general elections.
- Encourage equal participation of men and women in public life, in political parties, statutory bodies and Boards and management roles in governments, the private sector and civil society organisations⁴.

1.3 The United Nations⁵

As members of the United Nations all FICs have endorsed the resolutions and recommendations of the United Nations which deal with the promotion of women's representation in decision-making.

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995)

All Member Governments notably pledged to “set specific targets and implement measures to substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through positive action, in all governmental and public administration positions” as per the 1995 Beijing Women's Platform for Action (BPA) (Beijing Declaration, 1995:75).

The commitments made to implement the BPA were subsequently reaffirmed through the Commission on the Status of Women's 41st Session Outcome 1997/2 which underlined that the equal participation of men and women was important to reinforce democracy and achieve sustainable development, and that there was a need for member states to implement action programs which deliberately sought to promote women in the area of decision-making.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000)

The UN Security Council in 2000 unanimously urged all Member States to “ensure increased women's representation at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict”. All UN member states (including Pacific members) are party to this resolution.

The General Assembly Resolution on Women in Political Participation (2004)

In its 58th Session (2004), the General Assembly adopted a resolution on Women in Political Participation⁶ in which, *inter alia*, it urged States to:

- promote gender balance in all public positions and encourage political parties to take measures to encourage political parties to promote more women in elective and non-elective positions;
- review the impact of electoral systems on women's representation and to modify them where the impact is negative;
- address negative social attitudes towards women's equal representation;
- eliminate discriminatory laws and practices which impact on women in decision-making, and,

- monitor the progress of women's representation through the collection, analysis and dissemination of data.

The Fourth World Summit (2005)

All the Pacific UN member states also endorsed the Fourth World Summit Outcome in which the General Assembly undertook to “promot[e] increased representation of women in government decision-making bodies...” (UN, 2005) and reaffirmed the goals and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and BPA. The Summit also reaffirmed the need for progress with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000, notably goal 3 of the MDGs which specifically calls on countries to: “Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women”.⁷

The Millennium Development Declaration, to which all members subscribed, emphasizes gender equality throughout and states notably that: “The equal rights and opportunities of women and men must be assured”.⁸ It views gender equality as necessary to promoting development, peace and security, and resolves: “To promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable”.

The 50th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) (2006)

In its 50th Session (February-March 2006) the CSW, in its conclusions, urged governments, as well as international and regional organizations, to take specific actions (there are 25 measures listed) to enhance the equal participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels.⁹

1.4 CEDAW

All FICs have ratified CEDAW¹⁰ with the exception of Nauru, Palau and Tonga. The Republic of the Marshall Islands presented its instruments of ratification to the United Nations in March 2006. So far Fiji and Samoa have reported to the UN CEDAW committee. The Cook Islands' Cabinet recently approved the country's (first) combined report which was launched on March 8 2006. Vanuatu has completed the drafting of its combined first and second report. Tuvalu is in the process of writing up its first report. Kiribati is beginning to consider reporting after ratifying in March 2004. CEDAW specifically addresses the issue of representation of women in its Article 7¹¹ which affirms that:

“States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country”.¹²

CEDAW also provides for the adoption of “temporary special measures aimed at accelerating the *de facto* equality between men and women” in its Article 4. This provision is aimed at encouraging countries to adopt affirmative action to redress the imbalance in men and women’s positions in society, including political representation.

1.5 The Commonwealth Plan of Action (2005-2015)

The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015 was agreed to at the 7th Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women’s/Gender Affairs Meeting (7WAMM) held in Fiji on 30 May- 2 June 2004. In its Critical Area on Gender, Democracy, Peace and Conflict, the plan of action has established a target of “at least 30 per cent of women in decision-making in the political, public and private sectors”¹³ and for those countries which have achieved this target to strive for a higher target (ComSec, 2005: 29-30). Governments are “encouraged to take action to”, *inter alia*:

- “Increase women’s representation to a minimum of 30 per cent in decision-making in parliament and local government by creating an enabling environment for women (including young women) to seek and advance political careers and by other measures such as encouraging political parties to adopt a 30 per cent target for women candidates as part of their manifestos and to provide leadership training for women;
- Review the criteria and processes for appointment to decision-making bodies in the public and private sectors to encourage increased women’s participation and representation.”

2. Constitutional provisions, legal measures and national policies

2.1 Constitutional provisions

While most FICs’ constitutions protect their citizens from discrimination on the basis of sex (with the exception of Tuvalu, Kiribati and Tonga), Fiji,¹⁴ Vanuatu, Samoa and Papua New Guinea specifically provide for affirmative action for disadvantaged groups, including women.¹⁵ Solomon Islands is also considering including provisions for affirmative action for women in its new Constitution.

Fiji

The Constitution of Fiji in its Article 44.-(1) states that “The Parliament must make provision for programs designed to achieve for all groups or categories of persons who are disadvantaged effective equality of access to” (*inter alia*)... “participation in commerce and in all levels and branches of service of the State”.

Vanuatu

The Vanuatu Constitution refers to women specifically as one of the groups which are entitled to benefit from affirmative action. In its Article 5(1)(k), it provides for:

“equal treatment under the law or administrative action, except that no law shall be inconsistent with this sub-paragraph insofar as it makes provision for the special benefit, welfare, protection or advancement of females, children and young persons, members of underprivileged groups or inhabitants of less developed areas.”

Samoa

The Samoan Constitution contains a special measures provision (Part 2, Section 15 (3)) for the ‘protection and advancement’ of women. It notably states that nothing (under the freedom from discrimination clause of the constitution), shall :

“(b) Prevent the making of any provision for the protection or advancement of women or children or of any socially or educationally retarded class of persons”.¹⁶

Papua New Guinea

The Constitution of Papua New Guinea (Section 55, subsections 1 and 2) states that the equality of all citizens “does not prevent the making of laws for the special benefit, welfare, protection or advancement of females, children and young persons, members of under-privileged or less advanced groups or residents of less advanced areas”. The Preamble of the Constitution also calls for “equal participation by women citizens in all political, economic, social and religious activities...” (South Pacific Forum Secretariat, 1998).

In addition Section 102 of the Constitution allows the parliament to appoint, from time to time and with approval of a two-thirds majority, a nominated person as a member.

Bougainville

So far only Bougainville has constitutionally reserved seats in its legislative assembly specifically for women. However the number is proportionally low: three out of 41, well below the ‘critical mass’ of 30 per cent advocated internationally (see box).

Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands is currently in the process of reviewing its constitution, and in its White Paper on the constitution, the Government has included a section on gender which states that:

“The new constitution must reflect a commitment to full, free and equal participation of women in the new Solomon Islands. The role women play in contributing to and sustaining our economy is grossly undervalued. Women have a rightful role in helping build democracy and to enable a new Solomon Islands to evolve. Adverse practices and discrimination have denied women their respect and contributions they play in society.

The new Constitution will guarantee equal rights for women and men in all spheres of public and private life, create affirmative mechanisms whereby the discrimination, disabilities and disadvantages to which women have been subjected are rapidly removed, and in doing so will actively affirm the country's commitment to the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* and ensure that women are heard in all issues, their contributions recognised and are able to participate actively in all levels of society" (SIG, 2005: 33)

Should this White Paper be followed, the Constitution of Solomon Islands will also provide for affirmative measures for the promotion of women in political life.

2.2 Legislation

Thus far only Papua New Guinea has a law which provides specifically for the political advancement of women. Fiji and Samoa have passed laws which provide for the elimination of discrimination of women. Even though these do not relate directly to politics, they could be used as grounds to effect changes in the area of political representation. Tuvalu has passed the Falekaupule Act which provides for the appointment of a women's representative at the Kaupule level.

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea's Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-Level Governments enacted in 1995, provides for the nomination of women representatives at the Provincial and Local level Governments. It specifically allows for one women's representative to be nominated in each of the 20 Provincial Assemblies and for two women to be appointed in the rural Local Level Governments and one in urban Local Level Governments as well (Sepoe, 2006:5).¹⁷

Papua New Guinea's Organic Law on Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPPAC) (2001) stipulates that a representative of the National Council of Women must serve on the Central Fund Board of Management (CFBM). Section 62 of the law provides financial incentive to political parties to put forward women candidates. The law states that if a woman candidate gets 10 per cent of votes in her constituency, the CFBM is required to refund 75 per cent of expenses associated with campaigning for the woman candidate.

Fiji

In Fiji's case, in order to accelerate the equality between men and women, the *Human Rights Commission Act* 1999, s 21 provides for affirmative action on any prohibited ground in the Constitution (which includes gender, sexual orientation, disability) in the areas of: employment, training for employment, provision of services goods or facilities including facilities by way of banking or insurance or for grants, loans, credit or finance; provision of land, housing or other accommodation and access to and participation in education. *Under the Social Justice Act* 2001, affirmative action allows for cash allowances and relief supplies to be provided to widows, solo parents and deserted women (Forster and Jivan, 2005). Although neither of these acts are refer to politics, they do set precedents for legislating affirmative action on the basis of gender.

Samoa

In Samoa, legislation has allowed for the establishment of a body to monitor the implementation of non-discriminatory law and policy for the advancement of women. Under the *Ministry of Women's Affairs Act, 1990*, the Ministry is empowered to identify gender discrimination against women and make recommendations for its progressive removal.

Tuvalu

The Falekaupule Act which was voted by Parliament in 1997 made it mandatory for a Kaupule (local government body) under section 99 (1) to have 5 permanent office positions. These positions are responsible for the everyday management and administration of the Kaupule. One of these permanent office positions is the Women's Community Worker which serves to look after the affairs of both women and youth in all eight Kaupule in Tuvalu. The Women's community worker directly links the Kaupule to the Departments of Women and Youth at the National Government level.

2.3 Policies

Even though all FICs have made commitments to promote the advancement of women in decision-making, through their endorsement of the Beijing Platform for Action and (for most FICs) ratification of CEDAW, so far only the Fiji Government has translated this into official policy. The Department of Women in Vanuatu has also been very active in developing policy to promote women in politics, but is yet to gain Cabinet endorsement.

Fiji

In 1993 Cabinet made a decision to increase women's membership on boards to 30-50 per cent within a five-year period. In 1999 the Fiji Government endorsed its Women's Plan of Action (1999-2008) in which it committed to:

“Working towards achieving a gender balance partnership at all levels of decision-making and assign 50 per cent of representation, participation, training, appointments and promotions at all levels of government to women on merit, and encourage the same in the private sector”.

At present therefore Fiji is the only country to have established a Cabinet endorsed policy, with specific targets, to increase the number of women in positions of public responsibility. This was reiterated in Fiji's 2002-2005 Strategic Plan which determined to increase women's participation in government to 30-50 per cent by 2005 (Siwatibau et al, 2005:6) However, efforts to implement the 1999-2008 policy and the Strategic Plan have been erratic and not entirely successful: the number of women on boards has not yet reached 30 per cent. It can be argued though that the policy statements and intentions have been useful in raising awareness of the importance of increasing women's representation, and that they can serve as a platform for taking affirmative measures to advance women politically.

Vanuatu

Vanuatu has also given serious attention to the promotion of women in public decision-making and has considered and/or drafted strategies to do so. However, implementation has been weak.

In 1996 the Government and NGOs developed a strategy to promote (*inter alia*) the “equal participation of women in decision making with one of the targets being a quota system... to have 50 per cent of women in decision making bodies” (Vanuatu CEDAW, 2004:37). A year later Vanuatu adopted its ‘nine gender benchmarks to progress towards equity’, as part of its Comprehensive Reform Program (CRP) drafted in 1997. (The CRP was designed as a blueprint for governance in Vanuatu). One of those benchmarks is: “Equal and meaningful participation in decision-making”.¹⁸ The Department of Women’s Affairs subsequently drafted a Gender Policy 2001-2003, which was adopted by the Government and was designed to promote the gender benchmarks. (Today, the CRP portfolio, along with that of Women, is currently held by the Hon. Isabelle Donald, the only woman minister).

In 2002, the Vanuatu Electoral Commission recommended that the Government substantially increase women’s representation by “enact[ing] specific provisions in the Representation of the People Act (CAP 146) to encourage women’s participation in contesting elections”. It notably recommended that in the 2006 General Elections women constitute one-third of the elected members with the aim of achieving a 50-50 balance in the future (Vanuatu CEDAW, 2004: 38).

This forward-looking recommendation was followed up with a Commonwealth study commissioned by the Government of Vanuatu in 2003. The study concluded that Government and Parliament should support “the role of women in the Electoral Process as both Parliamentary candidates and voters”. It also recommended that the Electoral Commission, with local NGOs, develop a program to improve the participation of women voters and candidates (Vanuatu CEDAW, 2004). Momentum for this measure was apparently lost in 2004 with the snap election, and no further progress has been made on specific measures to advance women in politics beyond the efforts of the Department of Women’s Affairs (DWA).

In 2001, the DWA, after consultations with local stakeholders and donors, submitted a ‘Women in Government Policy’ for Government endorsement. The policy was held back by the (then) Prime Minister to check the legal ramifications of changing the constitution to allow for reserved seats for women in Parliament. In the meantime, the DWA continued with the provision of support and training to women candidates and their campaign managers in the 2002 election, and with conducting innovative and useful research into women’s representation in politics.

Throughout 2004 and 2005, the DWA updated its ‘Women in Government Policy’ and a new policy (2005-2012) was approved by the Acting Head of the DWA but is currently under review and is likely to become one part of a larger policy to address all women’s needs. The draft policy recommends that a Committee led by the DWA examines the “feasibility of a Constitutional Quota for National Government, an Election Law Quota for National Government, a political party quota for electoral candidates and/or a constitutional or legislative quota for sub-national Government” (DWA , 2005:9).

Progress in planned women’s representation has however been made at the provincial level. According to Vanuatu’s CEDAW report, “SHEFA [Shepherd Islands and Efate) Province has announced that it is seeking to have seven women representatives in the next Provincial Council”:

“As the only Province that has adopted CEDAW as its platform for action for women, it has consciously targeted Article 7 as the first step to advancing women in the highest decision making body in the Province. Awareness campaigns articulating the Council’s

adoption of CEDAW, recommendations from the Electoral Office and the provision under Article 7 of CEDAW have been provided throughout the Province since May 2004. As a further step in assisting candidates, the Provincial Council has already targeted areas for training for both women and men. Such training includes administrative and financial procedures of the Council plus procedures and processes in Parliament, information on national and international commitments to women such as CEDAW, commitments under the SHEFA REDI Programme, the Gender Equity Policy of the CRP, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and how to implement CEDAW itself” (Vanuatu CEDAW, 2004: 38).

Other countries

Other countries in the region have also adopted women’s policies and plans which mention the need to advance women’s role in decision-making but they do not set targets or benchmarks. For instance Kiribati had a Women’s Policy Document 1997-2001 in which women and decision-making was listed as one of the nine areas to be looked at, but there have been no concrete outcomes. Currently, the Kiribati Office for Women is hoping to develop an Action Plan which aims to tackle, *inter alia*: modifying laws that discriminate against women and carrying out advocacy on political and public decision-making, beginning in July 2006. Another area to be addressed is cultural and male discriminatory attitudes and behaviours which prevent women from entering politics.¹⁹

Tonga has adopted a National Policy on Gender and Development which aims at achieving equity by 2025. One of the policy areas it looks at specifically is Gender and Politics in which it seeks to, *inter alia*:

- Promote equitable representation at all levels of the political process and public life.²⁰

In addition (and significantly) as part of the current political reform process in Tonga, one of the three models of political reform being proposed by the Human Rights Democracy Movement (which is to be submitted to the National Committee of the Kingdom of Tonga on Political Reform – NCPR), is to reserve six seats for women representatives out of a total of 30 seats (i.e. a proportion of 20 per cent).²¹

2.4 Non-governmental initiatives

Many countries of the region have established Women in Politics (WIP) organisations as part of the Women in Politics Programme sponsored by UNIFEM. Members of the Women in Politics Centre (WIPPaC) included Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Niue, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.²²

In Samoa, the National Council of Women (NCW) has taken up the issue of women in leadership and politics particularly through O le Inailau a Tamaitai (Women in Leadership). O le Inailau a Tamaitai is a network of women leaders in a variety of sectors whose aim is to promote women in all areas of leadership. The network is registered as a member of the NCW for which it acts as a programme. It has established an action plan which includes activities to 1) improve women’s understanding of the political process and national institutions through voter education and training, 2) support of women MPs and candidates, and, 3) to have political parties introduce women’s wings. O le Inailau a Tamaitai was instrumental in supporting women in the 2006 election.

Samoa Women Celebrate International Women's Day With a Difference

On International Women's Day (8th March 2006), in line with the theme 'the role of women in decision-making', O le Inailau a Tamaitai Womens Leadership Network (IWLN) in partnership with the Ministry of Education organized a half day event that included addresses by Samoa's past and present women MPs, a tour of the Parliamentary Fale Fono and a "Young Women's Parliament" mock debate session on the introduction of a quota system to allow more women to enter politics. The effort was designed to raise public awareness about women's concerns regarding their lack of political representation, to increase the understanding of parliamentary democracy among Samoa's future leaders and to encourage more young women to participate in political life in Samoa.

High school students who were chosen to represent Samoa's 49 electoral districts had to debate the motion 'that the Electoral Act be amended to provide mechanisms to ensure representation by Women in Parliament of at least 30% of the total number of seats'. Samoan women's share of seats in parliament has become a hot topic on local talkback radio stations and on television. Currently, only 3 of the 49 Samoan MPs are women. By increasing the proportion of women MPs to 30%, Samoa would have at least 15 women in Parliament. An advocate for more women in politics, (then) woman Minister for Education Hon. Fiame Naomi Mataafa, was on hand to encourage the young women. She lauded the mock debate session saying that it was a great opportunity for young women to experience first hand what a parliamentary session is like.

As advocates for increasing the participation of women in politics, the IWLN recognizes that there are many reasons for involving women and girls in decision-making processes. Firstly, women bring a different perspective to the decision-making table, thus increasing the pool of ideas from which creative solutions are made. Women are also the first educators of children and are the primary custodians of family, health, spiritual and cultural values. Launching the IWLN in 2003, Luamanuvae Winnie Laban, a well-known Samoan female Politician and current MP in New Zealand, said that "one of the great gifts Samoan women can give to politics is shifting the balance away from individualism towards the community. Samoan women do not live as individuals; we live in partnerships, families and communities."

To date, 29 women have stood for Parliament since independence in 1962 and 13 have been elected. In 2006, the number of women candidates running in the national elections has hit record levels with 18 women contesting parliamentary seats.

Source: *Inailau a Taimaitai Womens Leadership Network*. 2006. Article written for International Women's Day, 8 March 2006.

3. Culture

Pacific cultures have traditionally valued the complementary if (often) separate roles of men and women. In many matrilineal societies women were highly valued for their custodianship and knowledge of land matters and genealogies. In research conducted in Turaga nation (Pentecost Island in Vanuatu) Bolenga and Huffer were told that “out of human beings, the woman is the most important as she has a role as custodian of customs and knowledge. She is valuable from the toes to the tip of the head. In the chiefly system, women had the knowledge to perform [in ceremonial exchanges] and associated values – before women were the keepers of knowledge and wisdom, and men came to them for knowledge”. It was added, though that “now women generally have less knowledge and wisdom” in large part because they have been excluded from the public sphere with the influence of colonial administration, Christianisation and economic changes.²³

In the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) as in Palau, matrilineal land ownership has given women considerable influence. In RMI “matrilineal succession of land rights gave women a position of great importance and influence in society” – a status that is reflected in the Marshallese proverb that “*an Koran ailin kein*” (these islands belong to women) (Leban et al, 2006: 7). In Palau, women have considerable decision-making roles when it comes to land. Although the men are given trusteeship and administration of the land, sisters (particularly the eldest) are the ones who have title of the land and decide how to distribute it.²⁴

Up until the present, men in many communities in the Pacific cannot obtain ranks or titles without the express support of women. In Vanuatu it is the women who prepare the traditional exchange goods – without their backing, men cannot obtain their ranks. In addition as the husbands rise in rank, so do their wives (in the islands with ranking systems). Thus the relationship is one of partnership: if one party declines to cooperate, the other cannot advance. In Palau, men are chiefs but they are chosen by their female counterpart (usually a sister or aunt) who has the authority to depose them.²⁵

In countries such as Samoa, the bestowing of *matai* titles requires sisters’ approvals (and sisters are often offered the titles themselves). In Tonga, sisters especially, elder sisters are regarded in a special sense as the chiefs of the brothers’ family. Brothers as fathers and heads of the nuclear and extended families take account of their sisters’ wishes in the management of their families. “Family relationships are hierarchical, and organized by age (seniority) and by gender, females having precedence over males of the same generation” (James, 1997: 49-50).²⁶

In addition, women, in the past, were not confined to nor expected to only look after children and household. In Tonga, Samoa and Cook Islands, there were examples (not just mythical) of women warriors who fought alongside the men, of women chiefs and priestesses. This has been documented²⁷ but it would be useful to compile research across the Pacific of women’s roles as leaders, warriors and chiefs in the past.

Chiefly rankings and positions were held by women in the past and in many cases continue to be held throughout the region today, although modern changes have diluted women’s access to chiefly roles. In the Raga language of Turaga nation (Pentecost Island) *ratabigi* is the word for chief – and comes from *ratabi* which means mother; “mother of everything”. In North Pentecost, the highest ranking chief who died in 1994 got his rank transferred from his mother; no male had ever attained this level.²⁸

In the Isabel Province of Solomon Islands, Geoffrey White (2004: 22, n.1) writes that “historically there were a number of examples of women who achieved prominence as traditional leaders.”

The Pacific has had ruling Queens in the past. This is the case of course of Tonga with Queen Salote

Traditional Governance in Palau

Women in traditional Palau have always made their own decisions in their home, their families, their lineages, and in their clans. Women wield power, make decisions and also appoint their male relatives to bear chiefly titles, but when not satisfied with their men's performance, they may strip them of the titles and transfer them to someone else or as a last resort, assume the titles themselves and carry out the duties and responsibilities thereof. This is a matrilineal society and has remained so to this day. Women control but remain behind the scenes. This is probably why women go out, campaign for their husbands or brothers, put them in elected office, and then sit back and observe. Titles belong to women but they bestow them upon male relatives. There are titles for both men and women, usually in tandem, so a male chief would have a female counterpart and it is the female counterpart that appoints the male title bearer.

– Sandra Pierantozzi, former Vice-President of Palau

(who ruled between 1918 and 1965) but also of Hawai'i (Queen Liliulokalani, 1891-93), Tahiti (Queen Pomare, 1827-77) and Wallis which has had four Queens. The first Queen of Wallis (known as Lavelua) was known as Toifale and ruled in pre-European times (1825). Another, Falakika Seilala (sister of the King Soane Patita Vaimu'a) ruled from 1858 to 1869. Queen Amelia Tokagahahau (daughter of King Soane Patitu Vaimu'a) ruled from 1869 to 1895. The most recent Queen was Aloisia Brial who ruled from 1953 to 1956 and was forced to abdicate by some of her ministers.

It is important to point out that women have held prominent political positions in the past and have exercised leadership in different ways because of widespread contemporary perceptions that women have only ever been responsible for a restricted domestic sphere. This was not the case in the past nor is there any reason for it to remain so today.

In addition, today, in spite of many prejudices, women are viewed as reliable, hard working and high achievers throughout the region. There is a widespread feeling that they are the 'backbone' of countries, the 'doers'. It is not infrequent to hear that if a community, leader or family wants something done, they must get the women's support. Women are thus respected for their commitments and achievements on behalf of the family, community and churches; and are generally considered trustworthy. For instance in Samoa, as Tuimaleali'ifano (2000: 179) writes, "In both legend and fact, Samoan women are reputed to have inherited a sustained capacity to complete work left undone by their men folk". In Palau, women's assets are considered to be their "balanced life styles", their trustworthiness, and their strong sense of public relations as well as their leadership skills.²⁹ This is an asset for women which they can build on in the political sphere. As Afu Billy writes of her experience in running for election in Solomon Islands: "... Many of the voters felt that I would not be dishonest because I was a woman.... Voters appreciated ... my honesty, simple image, caringness, approachability (this was especially important to many women voters)..." (Billy, 2004: 6).

Women are also considered the drivers of the family, even if men are officially viewed as the heads of families. In addition they are often instrumental in running political campaigns. As Sandra Pierantozzi reiterates in the case of Palau: "women are the best campaigners but they are content to be behind the

scene". This is similar to the Republic of Marshall Islands where many of the campaign teams are led and organized by women but very few women stand.³⁰

Women are also viewed as bridge-builders and peace-makers in many FICs. They are valued for giving life and solving disputes. For instance, women in the Marshall Islands are expected to solve family disputes, particularly "in matters involving members of the lineage and Iroj" (Leban et al, 2006: 6). This is a public role but one which demands subtlety and quiet diplomacy. It should not be seen as being incompatible with women playing a much more prominent role in politics but it points to one of the reasons why women have often been in the background rather than at the forefront in management of public affairs.

Custom is often condemned as one of the reasons which prevents women from taking their place in the political arena. Yet when political candidates in Vanuatu were asked if "kastom was a barrier to their access to political life... the general view amongst the participants was that kastom was not a barrier" (Strachan and Dalesa 2003:). Misinterpretation and abuse of custom are more frequently the cause of the marginalization of women in public decision-making.

4. Socio-economic

In many countries of the region women are becoming economically empowered as their access to tertiary education improves and as they participate more actively in the formal sector. Although in most countries men still have more paid work than women, Samoa is an example of a country where there are more women employed for wages than men. In most countries even though the majority of low paid jobs (including the majority of clerical positions) are held by women, there are also more women than men who hold "jobs classified as 'professional occupations' (SPC, 2004: 17). Below is a snapshot of two areas (education and employment) in which women have achieved substantial progress and which indicate that qualified women are not in short supply in the region. In the area of health, women's overall situation has also been improving.

4.1 Education

"Although small in population, the Cook Islands has a cadre of highly competent and qualified women, with the number increasing as more women with families are able to find time and support systems to allow them to continue personal development and educational goals". (File, 2004:29).

As stated, the Pacific is endowed with well educated and capable women. Young women are surpassing their male counterparts when given the opportunity to reach secondary and tertiary level. This is particularly the case for Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga and Kiribati where more girls than boys qualify to attend secondary school.³¹ At the tertiary level (for those funded) their numbers drop to half as many as boys. In 2005 half of the graduates of the Fiji School of Medicine (a regional but Fiji-based institution) were women.

Fiji has achieved equality in post-primary education, including at the tertiary level. The literacy rate for women and men between 15 and 24 years old is close to 100 per cent and since the mid-1990s, tuition fees for primary school pupils are paid for by government. In addition, the Ministry of Education has also sought to reduce or eliminate any gender bias in access to education, including within school curricula.³²

In many countries of the region, tertiary level scholarships are awarded on a parity basis. In Cook Islands, “women now hold 50 per cent of overseas training awards (due to a quota system) compared to 37 per cent in 1997”. (Girls had already overtaken boys in the senior levels of high school by the 1990s.) In Kiribati women have been obtaining 51 per cent of overseas scholarships in past years. Attendance at Tarawa Technical Institute was already slightly in the favour of women at 51 per cent in the mid-1990s. At present though, women still are less well represented in in-service training programs: for the period 1991 to 1996 they constituted only 25 per cent of the total numbers of in-service trainees.³³

It is only in the Melanesian countries of Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea that girls are not being enrolled equally in schools. There are indications that this is being addressed, notably in Papua New Guinea which has developed a Gender Equity in Education Policy, and has a quota system imposed by the Office of Higher Education, which should go some way to redressing the current imbalances in education between young women and men.

In spite of the educational challenges for girls, there are many well educated and capable women in the Melanesian countries also. There is therefore generally no lack of qualified women throughout most countries of the region: this can no longer be used as an explanation or justification for the absence of women from political representation.

Table 1: Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education (girls per 100 boys)

Country	Primary		Secondary		Tertiary	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
Cook Is	98	89	112	94	86	100
Fiji	94	98	105	107	80	100
FSM	92	94	98	104	79	107
Kiribati	98	93	116	114	120	100
Marshall Is	85	83	91	104	50	91
Nauru	103	115	75	84	60	250
Niue		85		83	190	330
Palau	89	97	108	88	74	130
PNG		86		67		55
Samoa	98	93	102	104	170	140
Solomon Is	80	86	57	70	30	30
Tokelau		96		112	250	100
Tonga		90		99	90	100
Tuvalu	87	93	105	86	37	92
Vanuatu	88	91	84	93	40	50

Source: Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2004. *Pacific Islands Regional Millennium Development Goals Report*. SPC, Noumea.³⁴

4.2 Employment

Women are increasingly economically active throughout the region. The gap between economically active women and men is narrowing and “overall, in countries where women’s education attainments are equal with men, women are rapidly increasing their share of employment in the formal economy including self employment” (SPC, 2004a: 17).

In addition women throughout the Pacific are increasingly involved in small businesses with which they earn income to look after their families. In Fiji, for instance, there is an increasing number of micro-enterprises managed by women individually or in cooperatives. “Such forms of economic empowerment have resulted in increasing confidence amongst village women, enabling them to experience the changing roles demanded of them in managing their community whilst at the same time exposing them to leadership roles. There is a high degree of mobility of women living and moving residences between towns and villages both for economic and educational reasons. As they become increasingly aware of their changing roles, their ‘partners’ are also changing and are more supportive to those who may show an interest or are approached to take up positions in ‘political parties’ etc.” (Fiji Submission, 2006:2).

Table 2: Economically active population (as per cent of working age population)

Country	1980		1990		2001	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Cook Islands	70.6	86.5	73.0	85.0	74.0	85.0
Fiji	70.6	86.5	73.0	85.0	74.0	85.0
Kiribati	8.7	37.3	14.2	38.2	78.0	91.0
Marshall Islands	15.2	44.7	30.1	77.2	35.4	66.3
FSM	n/a	n/a	n/a	56.8	50.1	67.2
Nauru	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	46.0	65.0
PNG	68.6	89.4	67.4	87.5	68.0	86.0
Samoa	14.6	78.7	40.2	77.3	n/a	n/a
Solomon Islands	86.0	89.1	82.1	89.8	80.0	86.0
Tonga	13.5	71.8	36.0	75.0	41.0	73.0
Tuvalu	10.2	39.0	14.7	37.5	86.0	85.0
Vanuatu	78.1	89.4	79.3	88.6	n/a	n/a

Source: Asian Development Bank. 2003.

In a notable change in attitudes towards women’s work, since 2003 women in Kiribati have been allowed to work on foreign ships and undergo training at the Maritime Training Centre. This change was fuelled by the National Council of Women’s (AMAK) submission of a Cabinet paper in 2002 designed to help two female students get permission to go for training. To build their case, AMAK used examples from German

ships which have hired women captains. The Kiribati Government subsequently asked the Norwegian Cruise ship company to hire I-Kiribati, women and men. The company was very supportive of this and began hiring women in 2003. This opened the door to the Maritime Training Center employing women.

Attitudes towards women's work are changing and their numbers are gradually increasing in areas from which they were previously excluded and/or absent. Policy changes have been instrumental in allowing for this evolution. In Papua New Guinea, for instance, an Equal Employment Opportunity Policy has been established for the disciplinary forces, ie the Police, Defence and Correctional Services.³⁵

4.3 Health

Life expectancy for both males and females has increased over the ten years since 1990 (except for Tuvalu and Nauru where people were living shorter lives in 2001 than they did in 1990). This most probably reflects the deterioration in their national health care systems.

Table 3: Life expectancy at Birth (Years) for PIC 1990 and 2001

Country	1990		2001	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Cook Islands	73	69	74	70
Fiji	69	65	72	68
Kiribati	59	55	66	62
Marshall Islands	63	61	64	61
FSM	66	62	68	65
Nauru	69	64	66	59
PNG	56	54	61	58
Samoa	68	65	70	67
Solomon Islands	65	64	68	65
Tonga	71	67	71	68
Tuvalu	72	66	65	62
Vanuatu	66	63	67	65

Source: ADB, 2003

Maternal health

A country's maternal and infant mortality rates reflect the availability and skill level of their medical and health personnel and the standards of their medical facilities. PNG has the lowest per centage of births (47 per cent in 1997) attended by skilled personnel. As a result, PNG also has the highest maternal mortality ratio in the region. However, overall, health related services for pregnant women have improved for the region.

Table 4: Births Attended by Skilled Personnel (%)

	1990	Latest year
Cook Islands	No data	100 (1998)
Fiji	100	99 (1998)
Kiribati	72	85 (1998)
Marshall Islands	No data	95 (1998)
FSM	No data	93 (1998)
Nauru	No data	No data
PNG	No data	47 (1997)
Samoa	52	100 (1998)
Solomon Islands	85	85 (1999)
Tonga	94	92 (2000)
Tuvalu	No data	99 (1997)
Vanuatu	79	No data

Source: ADB, 2003

With the exception of Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia and Nauru, women in the region are having fewer children. As of 2001 Fiji had the lowest number of births per woman at 3.0 while the Marshall Islands has the highest at 5.7.

Table 5: Total Fertility Rate (births per woman)

	1990	2001
Cook Islands	4.2	3.7
Fiji	3.1	3
Kiribati	4	3.8
Marshall Islands	5.6	5.7
FSM	4.8	4.9
Nauru	4.3	4.4
PNG	5.6	4.4
Samoa	4.8	4.3
Solomon Islands	5.9	5.4
Tonga	4.2	3.6
Tuvalu	3.5	3.4
Vanuatu	5.5	4.4

Source: ADB, 2003

5. Women in public leadership

Women occupy positions of leadership in a variety of areas in the Pacific: in NGOs, unions, sporting bodies, chiefly institutions, local government, business, in some churches, in the judiciary and so on. Women are very present throughout the region in NGOs (many existing NGOs were established by women to promote the advancement of women and to deal with issues the state was neglecting). As a result many NGO leaders are women. In Kiribati, the Vice-President of the National Committee for the Kiribati Association of NGOs is a woman, as is the Director.

There are also women union and professional association leaders: this is the case currently in Samoa where the Public Service Association is led by a woman as is the Samoa Medical Association. Fiji has also had a woman as the head of a prominent trade union.

In sports, women occupy executive positions in national and local sporting bodies, particularly in netball. The Cook Islands Chef de Mission to the Sydney 2000 Olympics was a woman, who also held the position of Vice-President of the Cook Islands National Olympic Committee for 10 years (File, 2004).

5.1 Chiefly Institutions

National chiefly institutions in the region have also had women members. This is the case notably of the House of Ariki in the Cook Islands where four women have held the post of President since its establishment (compared to two men). The Great Council of Chiefs and Provincial Councils in Fiji have consistently had women chiefs. In the Republic of Marshall Islands, four women chiefs (Leroij) sit on the Council of Iroij. Vanuatu's Malvatumauri has yet to have any women's representatives, even though there are women chiefs in different parts of Vanuatu.

5.2 Local Government

Women have been also represented in local governments (but always in much lower proportions than men). Two out of the three mayors of the Vaka Councils in Rarotonga (local councils in Cook Islands) are women. Papua New Guinea has 1046 nominated women in the Provincial and Local governments. Fiji has had three women mayors and four deputy-mayors and 20 women councillors. In the 2002 local government elections, women, who constituted a total of 10.8 per cent of the candidates, won 7.5 per cent of the seats. In Lautoka, 22 per cent of candidates were women and 20 per cent were elected (Siwatibau et al, 2005: 18). Vanuatu has had a woman mayor and women deputy mayors.

In Palau, there are currently two women Governors of States.

The RMI has had women mayors and councillors but always in much smaller numbers than their male counterparts.

In 2005, three women were elected as Kaupule Members, i.e., 1 at Niutao and 2 at Nukufetau. This was the first time that a number of women were elected at the helm of local government, a positive movement toward the increasing of women's participation in Tuvalu local government. The Falekaupule Act of 1999 provided new opportunities for women to participate in the quarterly Falekaupule meetings which are assemblies responsible for local government. There is an increasing trend in women's participation not only in local government elections but also in the various development committees in the Kaupule (formerly known as Council).³⁶ Even though the momentum for this positive trend began in 1999 it was not until

2001 that there was a significant increase in women being elected to various development committees. In 2001 five of the eight islands elected an average of 2 women to partake in decision making at the Kaupule committee level, (the remaining three islands -Funafuti, Nanumaga and Nui- have not elected any women to the committees). In 2003, seven of the eight islands had women participating in the various committees, except for Nui Island which still had none (Buchan and Cosslet, 2003: 28).

In Samoa, there are now women representatives in each village who are the counterparts of the village mayors (only less than a handful of village mayors out of 333 are women) or *pulenu'u*. This allows women's groups in villages to have a direct link with the central government. This initiative was launched in 2004 through the efforts of the Ministry of Women and was part of the draft National Women's Policy.

An all-women's council

In North Ambrym, Vanuatu, a local council which has been in existence for 12 years and always run by men was handed over to women on March 6 2006. The all-women Lolihor Development Council will be "responsible for managing community issues, such as health, water, education, transport, tourism and governance". This is the first case of its kind where an all-male council has been transformed into an all-female council but it may not be the last. Two other North Ambrym Councils are planning to follow suit in the near future: the Lonali and Wawan Fonhal Development Councils. The Lolihor initiative was supported by Chief Tokon who told the women "to stand as solid as a rock despite the currents of winds and waves". The new chair of the council, Roe Jacob acknowledges the challenges and stated that women needed to take a lead in trying to achieve the Millenium Development Goals. She felt that it was important "to work in partnership with the men".

Source: Evelyn Toa, "Vanuatu Women Take Control of Local Council" in *The Independent*, March 14, 2006.

5.3 The Church

Although there is a long way still to go, women are beginning to 'break through' into church hierarchy and be ordained and allowed to preach. The Cook Islands has one woman pastor in the Assemblies of God Church (File, 2004a: 26). There are ordained women in the Anglican Church in Fiji. In Kiribati, even though in 2003 there were still only 37 women pastors versus a total of 168 men, the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC) organised its operations so that female pastors can have influence in local communities:

"In villages, the female pastor can have access to speaking in the church village *maeanaba* as well as delivering a sermon to a village audience in the church building. The KPC has a rotational visit roster to villages allowing church women leaders to play a prominent leading role in other parts of the village that do not have a female pastor. In this way, the outer island people get exposed to influence of women leadership in male domain spheres, a norm that is strong and very uncommon on the outer islands" (Teakene: 2004: 15-16).

As Teakene (2004: 15-16) also points out, there is a correlation between the representation of women in the Island Councils and in Parliament with the presence of the KPC: “the predominant church in the three islands where women are well represented is the Kiribati Protestant Church”.

In addition, women have made use of church women’s groups as a leadership training ground. This quote, which refers to Vanuatu, is no doubt applicable to other countries: “it is in these church groups that women often get the opportunity to exercise leadership and participate in decision-making roles” (Strachan and Dalesa, 2003: 15).

5.4 The Judiciary

There are increasing numbers of women in the legal profession throughout the region, and they are gradually holding magistrates’ and judges’ positions.

In Tuvalu there are currently six women magistrates in the Island Courts. In Palau three out of the six justices of the Supreme Court are women. In addition women play important roles in professional organizations such as the Palau Bar Association.

In Vanuatu there are 12 women lawyers working in government services, more than double the number a decade earlier (they are still nonetheless outnumbered almost two to one by men).

Table 6: Title needed for this table

Government Services	1990 ⁽¹⁾		1995 ⁽¹⁾		2004 ⁽²⁾	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Judicial Services Commission	5	2	5	1	8	3
Public Prosecutor	1	0	3	1	4	2
Public Solicitor	1	0	3	1	3	0
Attorney-General	5	2	6	1	6	4
Ombudsman	-	-	1	1	0	2
Financial Services Commission	-	-	1	1	1	2
Total	12	4	17	6	22	13

Source: (1) Department of Culture, Religion, Women’s Affairs & Archives, 1995; (2) Data collected for the CEDAW Report – Vanuatu CEDAW Report, 2004: 117.

In Vanuatu, In 2003, there were three women sitting as Justices on Island Courts (and seven more had been trained). There are also two women magistrates, Nesbeth Wilson and Lines Moli. The current Registrar of the Supreme Court is also a woman: Rita Bill Naviti.

In Fjii there are two women judges including the first Judge of the Family Law Court, Justice Mere Pulea (three years), and Justice Nazhat Shameem (who has been serving for about 5-6 years). There are also a Chief Magistrate Naomi Lomaiviti and another Magistrate Vani Rovono both of whom are long serving as magistrates.³⁷

5.5 Other

Women throughout the region are gradually breaking into jobs previously dominated by men. Their numbers are still lower than men in most high-status and high-paid positions but they are nonetheless improving.

In Papua New Guinea there are large numbers of women in top managerial positions as well as working as professionals. In the Cook Islands many of the new small businesses created after the public service reform were established and are operated by women. In addition, as of 1999 43 per cent of the Public Service in Cook Islands was made up of women – up from 27 per cent prior to the reform. This is an important change but women are still occupying the lower-paying jobs (File, 2004a:17).

In Nauru, according to the National Sustainable Development Strategy, half of the heads of Department are women (Nauru, 2005).

In Niue more women than men are represented on government committees (UNIFEM 2003: 37). There are also women heads in the Public Service, including the Directors of Education, Administration Services and Tourism. The Niue High Commissioner to New Zealand is a woman as are the School Principals of the Primary and Secondary schools.³⁸

The Palau Conservation Society has a woman Executive Director and the Palau Chamber of Commerce has a woman Vice-President. Palau also has several women's organisations which are headed by women. In Palau, most boards have at least one woman and the Palau Visitors Authority has a majority of women board members.³⁹

According to the 2005 WEDO report, the Cook Islands and Nauru have made progress with achieving gender equity on board membership of state-owned enterprises.

In Vanuatu half the senior positions in the Prime Ministers' Office (three out of six) were held by women in 2003. In addition, 40 per cent of the senior positions in the Finance and Economic Management and Health Departments were held by women.

These examples of leadership across various countries of the Pacific point to the fact that women may well be prepared to run and participate fully in elections if conditions were enhanced for them to do so. Even though women have faced considerable hostility when running in elections (see below) many have nonetheless taken the risk. Their willingness to run is demonstrated by the increase in numbers of candidates when they are provided with support. Women's strong leadership and participation in many areas of public life, including service within political parties and communities, point to the fact that they are able and willing to take on responsibility for public affairs. Many women do want to be part of national and local politics, as attested by the views of a candidate in Vanuatu: "A lot of times, it is only the fathers who make the decisions inside the Parliament, but the voice of us mothers are absent in Parliament, so I strongly feel that we should have women in Parliament" (cited in Strachan and Dalesa, 2003:16).

Another reason for women wishing to be part of political life is to simply to reform the political system which, throughout the region, is currently plagued by poor governance, corruption, a lack of adequate social and public services and insufficient care for children and disadvantaged people. The latter are some of the issues that are of particular interest to women candidates in the region, if only because women are often the ones most entrusted with looking after the family and community.

Women in Leadership in Samoa

In Samoa, the Government has published a directory of women heads and deputy heads of government departments and corporations and women assistant secretaries, directors commissioners and managers of government departments and corporations (2002, 2nd issue) to promote women in the public sector. One of the objectives of O le Inailau is also to improve women's representation on boards. It is lobbying for 30 percent representation on all boards by 2010 (O le Inailau, 2003:32). At present there are no regulations regarding women's membership on boards. The women who sit on boards do so in their capacity as CEOs of their respective ministries.

As of 2004 there were three women CEOs. They headed the Ministry of Women and Social and Community Development, the Public Service Commission and the Ministry of Finance. The Attorney-General and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly are also women.

Women are increasingly reaching the level of assistant CEOs, the second rung in the public service. As of 2004 they constituted 39 of the 107 ACEOs, i.e. slightly over one third. It is likely that this trend will continue with more women obtaining tertiary and post-graduate qualifications. In 2004 all three ACEOs of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology were women. Three out of four ACEOs in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour as well as in the Public Service Commission are women.

In 2002 there were two women heads of government corporations: the Samoa Visitors Bureau and Televis Samoa Corporation.

There are more women than men in the public service: 58 percent versus 42 percent. A proportion of them, however, are casual workers and more women than men are low-paid workers.

Many teachers are women and most head teachers or principals are now women. This has brought changes in organisations such as the Public Service Association where members have become increasingly aware of gender issues, such as equality of salaries and working conditions. The PSA also receives funding for gender sensitization from its international parent body.

Contributing factors for women achieving higher positions in the civil service are not only raised awareness among women but also increasing quality of life and opportunities for many. Greater access to education (as well perhaps as strong economic growth) in Samoa has also enabled women to pursue professional objectives. Although there are remaining elements of discrimination within the public service, the focus is increasingly on performance and efficiency, thus giving equal chances to women as to men.

Source: Huffer, Elise, 2004.

PART 2

Obstacles

It is difficult to assert categorically that all the obstacles listed below directly prevent women from participating more fully in public life. But it can be stated that they contribute to a socio-political context which discourages the advancement of women in decision-making in the political arena, local or national. As a result women's rights to equal political representation and participation in the region remain formal rather than actual or applied. Not all FICs pose the same kinds of constraints and some have sought to overturn certain barriers. Many of the barriers which do continue to exist have been inherited from colonial times. But they also reflect a contemporary complacency toward improving the status of women in many FICs, which contributes in turn to the lack of advancement of women in the political arena.

1. Institutional

1.1. Constitutional

While most FICs have constitutional provisions against sexual discrimination, three countries do not: Kiribati, Tonga and Tuvalu. Jalal (1998: 30) states that as a result of this omission, discrimination against women can be considered to be "lawful" simply on the basis of women being women.⁴⁰

It can also be said that many FIC constitutions are not proactive when it comes to defining what is considered discrimination on the basis of gender or sex. For instance the authors of the NGO Shadow Report on the Status of Women in Samoa have proposed that the Samoan constitution be amended specifically to strengthen protection against discrimination by: "expand[ing] the definition of discrimination in the Samoan Constitution and domestic legislation in accordance with the definition of discrimination in CEDAW i.e. any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or mollifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field".

Even though most FICs accord formal rights to women in the sense that most do not tolerate discrimination constitutionally on the basis of sex (or gender), this *de jure* equality often does not result in *de facto* equality for women in many spheres of life, including in political decision-making. In addition, only four countries have provisions specifically designed to promote affirmative action or positive discrimination.

1.2 Legal, formal and informal

Institutional barriers to women's political representation in the region are informal as well as formal and legal.

Land and titles

One such common obstacle is women's (difficulty of) access to titles and land⁴¹ which in turn affects access, directly or indirectly, to positions of political decision-making. Informal and formal rules vary from country to country and within countries. For instance in Tonga women cannot be nobles by law, whereas in Samoa women find it more difficult than men to become *matai* even though formally they are entitled to hold titles. In matrilineal areas in Vanuatu women may obtain ranks but rarely become (ruling) chiefs (an informal rule); whereas in Kiribati women are never chiefs and their access to land varies according to the law.

To take the case of Samoa, it has been argued that because election to Parliament in Samoa is restricted to *matai* candidates only and the percentage of female *matai* is estimated to be as low as 10 per cent, institutionally women are *de facto* discriminated against. It is in fact more difficult for women to become *matai*, a role often left to the men of families even if sisters play an important role in determining who is awarded the title. As there are more men *matai*, more men are eligible to become candidates and women are left out of the political arena. Currently, few efforts are being made at the governmental level to address this. If authorities decided to implement measures to improve the representation of women in the political arena, the number of women *matai* would no doubt increase as a result.⁴² Currently the fact remains that attaining a *matai* title (a Samoan institution) is more difficult for women than men, and the linkage with electoral politics likely affect women's participation as candidates.

In Kiribati, women's access to land depends on differing rules in different islands but the Lands Code prescribes inferior land rights for women in two sections both of which relate to an estate's distribution in the absence of a will:

Section 11 (ii)

"In the distribution of an estate between the sons and daughters of an owner, the shares of the eldest son shall exceed that of his brothers, and the shares of sons shall exceed the shares of daughters..."

But Makin and Butaritari in Northern Gilbert group don't apply this rule as all children receive equal shares.

Section 11 (iii)

"A daughter will receive fishponds or fish traps if there are no sons of the owner, or if the parent or her brother so decide..." However there are five islands that do provide for equal share of fishponds and fishtraps for sisters. They are Makin, Butaritari, Nikunau, Tamana, Arorae (Tekanene, 2004a: 10).

In Vanuatu, although the law treats men and women equally, when it comes to land, particularly in rural areas, women often have little say. Most property is understood as belonging to men "just as women and children are considered to be men's property" (CEDAW 2004: 114). In addition, land and usage of land are usually decided by men, even though this may be in consultation with women and the community.⁴³

Women's generalised difficulty in accessing land equally (whether through formal or informal barriers) directly affects their role in decision-making. Land in the Pacific is very much a public issue and a subject of political decision-making at all levels. Women's frequent exclusion from land matters therefore also excludes and (worse) de-legitimises them from public decision-making. This is an increasing problem in countries where matrilineal traditions are being eroded or ignored, and where new laws concerning land (including land registration) are being contemplated or implemented.⁴⁴

Other legal barriers

Legal barriers which should also be considered because they reduce the autonomy and financial security of women, and therefore their ability (and probably willingness) to participate actively in public decision-making, exist particularly in areas such as family law and employment laws.

Many FICs operate with outdated laws which discriminate against women implicitly if not explicitly. This is the case for employment as noted in a report by Jivan and Forster (2005) who found the treatment of employment related issues in the six countries they examined (Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu), displays marked and discriminatory similarities throughout the region. Five of the six countries studied restrict women's employment choices, banning them from night work. Apart from Fiji, employment legislation in PNG (Employment Act 1978), Solomon Islands (Labour Act 1960), Tuvalu (Employment Ordinance 1966), Vanuatu (*Employment Act 1983*) and Samoa restrict women's employment choices, banning them from night work and manual work. Samoa and PNG also ban their women from working in mines. In Samoa, women are prohibited from night work or undertaking manual work "unsuited to [their] physical capacity" (as stated under Samoa's Labour and Employment Act 1972). In addition:

- No country has introduced any specific health protection for pregnant workers.
- None of the six countries meet the standard of 14 weeks paid maternity leave recommended by CEDAW.⁴⁵
- There is an absence of any state or employer funded childcare facilities, which accentuates the difficulties nursing mothers face in the workplace.
- As domestic workers, women are often underpaid and are not entitled to employment benefits since they are not covered under the various employment laws.
- Legislation for equal pay for equal work varies in the six countries:
 - Samoa has equal pay legislation (under Labour and Employment Act 1972) but no pay equity legislation
 - Tuvalu has no equal pay legislation and no pay equity legislation
 - Vanuatu has equal pay legislation and pay equity legislation provided under Employment Act 1983
 - Fiji has no equal pay legislation and no pay equity legislation
 - PNG has equal pay but not pay equity
 - Solomon Islands has equal pay legislation but no pay equity legislation

Citizenship is another area which discriminates against women. Although PNG, Samoa and Fiji provide women with equal rights in all areas of citizenship and nationality, discriminatory provisions are still in

operation in Tuvalu, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. For instance, in Vanuatu, a woman who renounces her citizenship after marriage to a non-national can only regain her citizenship upon evidence of the breakdown of her marriage. Therefore, the woman's return is contingent on her marriage rather than her own autonomy and choice. The provision does not apply to men, on the stereotypical assumption that men will not join their non-national wives in another country (Forster and Jivan, 2005).

In Solomon Islands, there are discriminatory provisions under the Citizenship Act 1978, which differentiate between the rights of a non-national woman who marries a Solomon Islander and a non-national man who marries a Solomon Islander. The non-national woman is given the right to obtain citizenship while the non-national man is not. Implicit in this is the idea that the woman will follow her husband and be dependent upon him. Additionally, under the Passports Act 1978, there is also a two-year waiting period and a requirement for her husbands' consent before citizenship can be granted. The woman cannot during this time obtain a passport and cannot leave the country without her husband (unless she still retains the passport and citizenship of another country).

Under the Solomon Islands' Islanders Divorce Act 1960, a husband can sue a third party for an adulterous relationship with his wife but this action is not available to the wife of an adulterous husband.

Discriminatory laws and regulations in the region also include the lack of women's rights to dispose of their bodies as they wish (abortion is illegal in all FICs except where it is practised on the grounds of preserving a woman's physical and mental health in Nauru, Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and Fiji) (WEDO, 2005: 129). In Vanuatu as in Fiji, for instance, a woman wishing to have a tubal ligation must have the written authorisation (signature) of her husband even though this does not apply to a husband wishing to undergo a vasectomy (Rarua, 2001: 15).

Although many countries in the region have legislated against sexual assault, the laws don't provide adequate protection for the range of sexual violations towards against girls and women. For instance, sexual offences require penile penetration, which excludes many of the ways in which women are sexually violated, and penalties decrease with the increasing age of the victim (Foster and Jivan, 2005).

1.3 Government machinery

All countries of the region have some sort of governmental institutions in place to promote the advancement of women. However, only three countries have ministries of women. Four countries have actually had their women's departments downgraded from their initial establishment, mainly as a result of public sector reform (Samoa, RMI, Tuvalu and PNG). In Papua New Guinea, for example, the office responsible for women's affairs has not only been shifted between different sections of the bureaucracy but it has also been upgraded and then downgraded through the years. The Women's Unit became a full Division of the Department of Home Affairs in 1983, only to be downgraded to an Office of Family and Church Affairs in the Department of Provincial Affairs in 1999. It then reverted to a Department (under the Department of Social Welfare and Development) and was under the responsibility of a woman MP who became Minister in 2002. In 2003-2004 it was downgraded to a desk within the Department of Community Development.⁴⁶ Such instability obviously makes it difficult for implementation of policy and, indeed, PNG has been unable to carry out its National Platform for Action on Women. As Dickson-Waiko comments, "attempts at implementation [of both the Women's Policy and the PNG Platform for Action] have gone from *ad hoc* to nil..." (2004: 13).

At present most countries operate with small women's divisions or departments as part of the ministries of internal affairs and/or social/community development.⁴⁷ Palau, for instance, only has a Women's Resource Centre with a single coordinator (and one administrative assistant) under the Bureau of Community Services, within the Ministry of Community Services. Most, if not all, women's offices are generally vastly under-resourced and under-financed. For instance, in the Cook Islands, in 2004 the budget for the Gender and Development Division (GADD) was less than NZ\$50,000.⁴⁸ Countries surveyed in 2004 indicated that while governments pay for the staff and overheads of the women's governmental machinery, they do not pay for their operations or programs. The departments are thereby forced to rely on donor funding for their activities and are unable to achieve the objectives they set in their policies and plans, and to fulfil their mandate.

Although some countries had planned to establish ministries (e.g. Cook Islands, Republic of Marshall Islands), as stated, only three have done so: Fiji, Vanuatu and Samoa.⁴⁹ These ministries are also under-financed and inadequately staffed, and share other portfolios. The women's departments thus find themselves competing for attention and resources with other sections of the ministry.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Fiji and Vanuatu are two of the countries that have gone the furthest in setting policy and addressing the problem of women's political representation, and Samoa has been successful in other areas of promotion of gender equality.

In most countries of the region, governments rely heavily on non-governmental machinery such as national councils of women to advance the promotion of women. This poses various problems. The first is that it weakens the watchdog role of NGOs: if they depend on government for funding, they may be unwilling to be proactive in defending women's issues. The second is that the government thereby divests itself of its responsibility towards advancing women's interests, and often expects donors to fund 'women's programs'. The third reason is that NGOs are not designed to set policy which is, by definition, a government role. A result of the current weaknesses of women's machinery in the Pacific is that some countries have adopted women's policies but not implemented them (e.g. RMI⁵¹) while others (e.g. Samoa,⁵² Nauru, FSM and Palau) have no cabinet-approved policies. In the case of FSM, the 3rd National Economic Summit of 2004 endorsed a Gender Matrix, but this hasn't been implemented.

Some countries have adopted Plans of Action for women, but in many cases they are outdated and need reviewing. This is the case, for instance, for Kiribati, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.⁵³ This detracts considerably from articulating solutions to the issue of the lack of women's political advancement. It is not surprising therefore to read, as an example, that two of the main challenges for women in Kiribati are the "inconsistency in women's representation in the island councils" and the lack of "affirmative action for women's membership on statutory boards" (Teakene, 2004).

Nauru, in its National Sustainable Development Strategy, 2005-2025, under the section on Gender Equality (under Policies for Social Inclusion/Equity) only mentions that the constitution gives equal rights to women and men and that there are equal opportunities for employment in the public service. It adds that it has yet to sign up to CEDAW (Nauru, 2005: 10) but makes no further comment.

2. Cultural factors

The status of women varies across countries and islands in the region. In certain areas, particularly patrilineal (but also matrilineal), women have been confined to domestic duties (such as looking after the home, children and gardens). Many women throughout the region have also been burdened with carrying a heavy workload in addition to their home 'duties', be this farming or paid employment

It is not easy to fully assess accurately to what extent women held leadership positions traditionally (and this differs across the region) but it is generally agreed that the impact of the missionaries and colonial administrations has been instrumental in confining women to the private sphere and to carrying out the bulk of domestic tasks which removes them from public decision-making. In its Gender Policy, the Department of Women of Vanuatu, writes that: "Missionaries through their evangelizing missions abolished most of the customary practices that were inhumane. [But] they also abolished and changed many customs that were positive and beneficial and in some instances dramatically worsened gender relations to the disadvantage of women, for example by instilling the idea that women belonged at home doing domestic tasks while men did the gardening".⁵⁴ The author adds: "Indigenous beneficial customs need reviving as part of the ongoing process of decolonisation" (Rarua, 2001: 8).

Geoffrey White, discussing Isabel Province in Solomon Islands, writes that even though there were women "chiefs" in the past, "the relative absence of women called "chiefs" today (and now listed as members of the Council of Chiefs of the district Houses of Chiefs) reflects the general expectation that it is men who act as political leaders in the most public political institutions. There are signs that this is slowly changing for modern government leaders, but the association of traditional leadership with men may have become even more rigid in recent times" (2004: 22, n.1).

Some areas which were traditionally matrilineal have gradually become patrilineal under colonial influence. This is particularly thought to be the case in parts of Vanuatu⁵⁵ and in some areas in Fiji.⁵⁶ Colonial administrators (all of whom were men) favoured a patriarchal, hierarchical and hereditary chiefly administration for indirect rule. Patrilinearity and patrilocality became the order of the day. It is difficult to picture a colonial administrator consulting a woman on any matters of land and decision-making even though this would have been a common procedure for indigenous men in many parts of the Pacific in the past.

As a result patriarchy has become entrenched today and affects even matrilineal areas where women have in the past had influence on public decision-making. In traditionally patrilineal areas it has reinforced discrimination against women and in some considerably affects their ability to participate in public life.

In Solomon Islands, Wale (2004a: vi) writes that "women's traditional land rights are being eroded. In matrilineal and ambilineal systems of kinship women have had significant status and rights to land. Decisions regarding land use undertaken by clan members and government most often fail to include the voices of women". This is important because as Wale points out further, land "is a source of political and economic power". She adds that "Politically land is important because it binds people together... Land is fundamental for Solomon Islands identity" (Wale, 2004: 11).

Misinterpretation of certain cultural values and practices has also been detrimental to women generally. For instance the wide usage of the term bride-price has reduced the woman to being thought of as property. Zorn (2003), referring to the Solomon Islands writes: "Bride-price has evolved from a mutual exchange of gifts and promises into a one-way transaction centring on the payment of cash. Bride-price has become a contract between two parties, with terms negotiated essentially at arms' length, instead of the start of a lifelong relationship which begins in mutual feasting and celebration. The focus on money has transformed the role of women, significantly lowering their status. Instead of being the key to the relationship between two families, women now are viewed as servants whose work and childbearing capacities have been purchased" (2003: 107).

This point is also highlighted by Wale who adds that changes in values in contemporary society and the emphasis on formal structures and processes have further contributed to the marginalisation of women's roles. Women's subsistence work and their role in the family gave "women status and power in their socie-

ties”. Nowadays, that work is “systematically devalued as cash generation has become more important” (12). She further reports that women (surveyed by UNICEF in Southwest Malaita) concluded that “they are paying a high price for change”. That price includes having to “earn money to pay for school fees; the activities they carry out to keep their families as well as their reproductive responsibilities”. Wale concludes that this makes women “a vulnerable group to major health, social and economic problems” (12).

Another factor raised by Wale is the shift from the extended family to the nuclear family which has increased the men’s power and control over family and undermined that of the women. This in addition to the emphasis on the cash economy has led to “women’s activities...[being] increasingly associated with child bearing and child rearing and their knowledge and work as producers and resource managers devalued”. This has created a situation where “Decisions regarding labour allocation, fertility, access to resources and indeed the decision making process itself at both household and national levels [being] enmeshed in complex gender relations” (13).

Contemporary cultural readings of women’s roles as subservient have significant effect on political representation as women are not viewed as leaders or as decision-makers. As Scales and Teakeni (2006: 7) write (also in the Solomon Islands context): “In local public affairs, it is a matter of social categories that men are looked to as the leaders, whether or not this is a reflection of authentic pre-colonial culture or more a practice that came in with the categorically male colonial “headman” system”.

At election time it means that women are pressured into voting for the candidate supported by their husband, clan or village chief or other influential males. Afu Billy reports that, as a candidate, she found that “many women who wanted to support me didn’t because they were threatened with removal of access to their gardens, which is the source of their livelihoods”. (Billy, 2004: 6).

As stated, most if not all countries of the region are now patriarchal. In Kiribati, for instance, it is held that “the *maneaba* system dictates that a woman’s place is behind/after her man, never in front/before...and husband is regarded as the head of the family, [even if] the wife is the most important figure in the family, because she is responsible for their daily concerns.” (Teakene, 2004: 10). This has had direct implications at the political level: no woman was represented in the Island Councils in Kiribati between 1993 and 1997. Between 1998 and 2001, the representation of women was estimated at only six per cent and half of this number of women was nominated as representatives of women’s organisations on the island.⁵⁷

Even in the Polynesian countries which have traditionally boasted strong women leaders such as Tonga, Samoa and the Cook Islands, women are experiencing difficulty in asserting themselves in the political arena.

Resistance to women participating in politics is pervasive. According to women candidates the resistance comes from men (as well as from women who support men), families, chiefs, church and community leaders.⁵⁸ In answers to a questionnaire about barriers to women entering politics, a Palau respondent listed lack of family support and understanding as one of the top five obstacles preventing women gaining greater political representation. The respondent added that husbands often do not see the potential in their wives nor do they understand why they wish to become involved in politics. Another barrier listed was the lack of support from other women including women’s groups. This is in large part due to the fact that the absence of women in politics has become a norm throughout the region. It also means women candidates must expect to be ‘attacked’ merely on the basis of their being women rather than on substantive issues. It obliges women to make extra efforts to appear non-threatening and to accommodate the patriarchal context. A woman candidate in Vanuatu in 2002 reported that in her campaign: “...when we approached the commu-

nities we sat with the other women on the mats and left the seats to the men. I thought this was important because I felt that through this way the people could see we did not want to over-ride the men who were mostly community leaders” (Strachan and Dalesa, 2003: 23).

3. The Church

Following a world wide trend, few churches in the Pacific have been willing to accept women in leadership positions (although, as stated, some are gradually opening doors). Women are often confined to background roles in administration and assisting with preparing food and hosting meetings. In Vanuatu, according to Tor and Toka (2004: 38) “there are no women bishops or priests, [only] 4 women pastors, some elders and a number of deaconesses. More women are appointed into the deaconess post because it involves a lot of manual work with the churches”.

Rongo File (2004: 23) writes that in the Cook Islands, “the situation for women in the Church is one area where discrimination is still a problem. The recent graduation of 11 couples from the Takamoa Theological College saw all 11 men, and four of the women receive the Diploma in Theology. A special award to the five top students saw one of the women presented with the highest award for the whole student group. In spite of this remarkable achievement, the men will go on to preach from the pulpit, while the women are restricted to preaching to small groups”. The author adds that gradual change is however taking place and that “whereas five years ago there were no women on the Church Council, there are now two women in charge of the Division for Women, and Social Welfare within the church structure” (File, 2004: 23).

The established churches in the Pacific tend to be very conservative and unfavourable to changes in the status quo by which they are, generally, well served. Their hierarchy is dominated by men, few of whom are willing to promote greater political advancement of women.⁵⁹ Even though the Catholic Church has taken progressive stances in the countries where it is the second or third church, its doctrine is not conducive to increased women’s representation.

This has ramifications in FICs as the church is highly influential across the Pacific. To give a precise example of the lack of will in the church to assist in the promotion of women in society, when the DWA of Vanuatu sought to consult with the churches about its Women in Government policy, no representatives turned up.

In addition, Christian customs have in various ways contributed to reducing the status of women. Tor and Toka (2004: 37) write that in Vanuatu, “prior to the introduction to Christianity, a woman had her own name and identity which she kept all her life. On having children, she may [have] been known or called ‘mother of’ by close male agnates. She may receive an additional name in a grading ceremony. Christianity (and Westernization) took away that right. Currently, all females have to add the name of their father or husband to their name to complete it, known as ‘surname’, retaining this as the accepted norm without question. Not only do women lose their identity, but they also lose their traditional rights to rank, authority and autonomy”.

This identity loss described by Tor and Toka is significant and found in other parts of the Pacific. Women have traditionally had their own names and losing these has accrued dependency of wives on their husband. The relationship between husband and wife is now often represented as one of dependency rather than partnership and this flows over into the political arena and attitudes towards women’s representation in politics. This is seen in practices such as ‘block voting’ where wives and kin groups or associations

follow instructions from the male 'head' of household and/or of the community/village, a frequent practice throughout the region.

4. Socio-economic factors

There are a variety of socio-economic factors which continue to hold women back and prevent them from fully participating in political-decision making, in spite of the advances described in Section 1 of the report. The three discussed here are education (with reference to the Melanesian countries), employment and health.

4.1 Education

Access to education for women remains a concern in countries such as Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu which still have low rates of literacy and unequal access to education for girls and women.

In Papua New Guinea, enrolment and retention rates for girls are low and have continued to decline despite the Educational Reforms introduced in the mid 1990s, particularly in the patrilineal areas (in the matrilineal areas, there is a "high educational" performance rate, notably for girls). In the patrilineal Highlands Region, girls get married at a very young age, which has a negative effect on their retention rates after grade six. The ineffectiveness of the reforms is also largely the result of a lack of implementation resources such as lack of funds to build new schools and train new teachers. The monitoring is also made extremely difficult by the lack of data. Acknowledging that achieving universal primary education and gender equality in all levels by 2015 is unrealistic, the focus of the PNG government's policy of "Acceleration of Girls' Education", aims to eliminate gender disparity at the primary and lower secondary levels by 2015 and at the upper secondary level and above by 2030. The amended target now for universal primary education is to achieve a Gross Enrolment Rate of 85 per cent at the primary level by 2015 and a retention rate at this level of 70 per cent by that year (GoPNG, 2004:14-16).

In Vanuatu UNICEF (1998) estimated that for every 100 boys there are 89 girls in primary school. The ratio drops further at the secondary and tertiary levels to 75:100 and 29:100 respectively. Vanuatu also has a very low health and education budget (two per cent and five per cent of GDP respectively) (Rarua 2001: 12).

In Solomon Islands, where education is neither free nor compulsory, only 56 per cent of children aged 5 to 19 attend school, and the proportion of girls is estimated to be lower. Women constitute only 20 per cent of those enrolled in tertiary education (Wale, 2004: 8). This "illiteracy and sense of inferiority engendered by it, discourages women from entering into politics. It also perpetuates the ignorance of most women of their rights" (UNIFEM 2003: 40).⁶⁰

4.2 Employment and access to wealth

On average, across the region women earn the equivalent of 88 per cent of male wages which makes them more vulnerable to poverty and lack of access to financial resources:⁶¹ "The gender gap is everywhere large in terms of differences in income and in women's access to productive resources, credit and business or livelihood opportunities. Given the economic and social trends prevalent in the Pacific region, this inequity contributes to the feminization of poverty and detracts from the advancement of women

in other respects” (YWCA, 2000: 5). A major contributing factor is that more women than men work in manufacturing and processing industries (in the countries where the latter exist) that are renowned for their low wage rates, poor and insecure working conditions. As domestic workers, women are not entitled to employment benefits. Pay discrimination is also prevalent because there are no laws in the Pacific that mandate equal pay for equal work. In addition, men hold the vast majority of higher positions in the civil service, raising their income levels far beyond that of women. As Rarua (2001:1) states in the Vanuatu context, “Because there are more men in senior positions and more men employed in the formal sector, men earn more than women do and this reduces women’s economic power”.

In terms of purchasing power parity, as indicated by the following table, women in the Pacific are far behind men.

Table 7: Title needed for this table

Country	Estimated earned income (PPP \$US) ⁶² 2002	
	Female	Male
Cook Islands	2,660,121	7,190,675
Palau	2,628,899	8,850,984
Niue	1,306,482	4,609,887
Samoa	502,578	2,436,920
Tonga	600,891	2,272,938
Marshall Islands	625,594	3,209,294
Fiji Islands	521,990	2,791,823
Federated States of Micronesia	503,415	3,406,568
Tokelau	195,410	1,021,936
Tuvalu	464,337	1,488,804
Nauru	1,401,565	2,388,273
Kiribati	240,479	636,014
Vanuatu	325,481	942,188
Solomon Islands	27,941	186,571
Papua New Guinea	48,049	875,717

Source: Pacific Human Development Report, 2006.

While there has been some increase over the last decade of women’s share in paid employment in the non-agricultural sector in most countries, labour markets remain strongly segregated. Population growth, lack of educational opportunities, low levels of job creation and discrimination are some factors hindering women’s share of wage employment and career advancement in Fiji (SPC, 2004a; GoF, 2004).

In PNG, the issue is magnified by the fact that approximately 2.2 million PNG women live in rural areas (compared to just over 300,000 who live in urban areas) resulting in the great disparity in the figures presented and compared below. While the labour force participation and employment rates for PNG

females in the rural sector may be high, most women (as well as men) in this sector are engaged in subsistence agriculture and/or fishing and not in the cash economy. Unemployment in the urban areas is also high, especially for the young and vulnerable age group (15-24 year olds). Compounded with gender discrimination in hiring procedures, only 5 per cent of all PNG women in 2000 had a wage job compared to 15.2 per cent of men.⁶³ High population growth (at a rate of 2.3 per cent per year) also increases competition over already scarce jobs (GoPNG, 2004).

Table 8: Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector

	1990	2000
Cook Islands	38	45
Fiji	45	38
FSM	34	34
Kiribati	34	38
Marshall Islands	34	36
Niue	43	43
Palau	39	40
PNG	6	5
Samoa	31	43
Solomon Islands	23	30
Tokelau	45	33
Tonga		36
Tuvalu	38	44
Vanuatu	38	44

Source: Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2004

Another element affecting women in some countries of the region are migratory work patterns. Even though migrant workers contribute to the socio-economic development of their families as of their country, through remittances and improved standard of living, Rokoduru's (2004) research on Fiji's women migrant workers highlights that in addition to increased migration of legal migrant women workers, there is evidence of large numbers of undocumented or illegal women workers in many PICs. Illegal migrant workers have few legal rights and this increases their vulnerability to exploitation and violence in their working community. According to Rokoduru, even a good number of those who were working legally did not know of their contractual or human rights as migrant women workers. Their predicament reflects the lack of labour migration information made available in areas such as migrants' rights, employment contracts for migrants and avenues for addressing migrant women worker's grievances and abuses of their human rights.

Another factor which indirectly contributes to marginalising women in public decision-making is the lack of access to financial resources. Whether in Kiribati, Solomon Islands or Fiji, women's access to credit in the formal banking sector is limited. In some countries (e.g. Fiji) micro-credit schemes are beginning to address this issue but women still experience real difficulty in accessing sufficient funds to establish

small businesses, let alone run for office. This problem is confirmed repeatedly by women candidates across the region. For instance, Afu Billy who ran in the Solomon Islands 2002 election (with party support) writes, “Another disadvantage was that I did not have enough finances to access promotion means such as radio”.⁶⁴

In most countries of the region, maternity (and paternity) leave are not well established beyond the public sector. For instance, in the Cook Islands, “there is no requirement at law that a woman’s employment be preserved during her pregnancy and childbirth, and there is no provision requiring an employer in the private sector to pay maternity or paternity leave” (File 2004: 25).

In addition, women’s roles in agriculture and fisheries as well as other primary industries are not as well recognised as that of men. In Solomon Islands, Wale writes: “There is anecdotal evidence that women are rarely consulted in large scale fishery and forestry and mining projects. Increasingly, male relatives are claiming full rights to negotiate and they are not sharing the profits with women and the extended family members. Yet, the aftermath of logging vast tracts of land undermines land for food gardens – women’s key resource”. She concludes that: “Women need to know their legal and *Kastom* rights and to participate in decision which so deeply affect them, their families and communities” (Wale, 2004: iv).

4.3 Health

Women’s low contemporary social status in certain countries has had serious repercussions on health, (as well as education) and thus, indirectly, on their ability to contribute to public life. In a report on Kiribati, Namoori-Sinclair (2001a: 5) wrote that the “gender role of women, enforced by cultural factors, contributes to the poor health status of women. For example: women eating after men, traditional vaginal cleaning, lack of vegetables in the diet, domestic violence, and the lack of male support and understanding of the value of women’s role”. She adds that in Kiribati, “males...are accorded more social esteem than females. The dominant patriarchal structure, whether in the home, villages, government and society at large, affects every aspect of women’s lives”. A manifestation of the lack of attention paid to women’s health in Kiribati (where there was a budget cut of 40 per cent for the Ministry of Health in the early 2000s) is that the infant mortality rate is triple the level for other Micronesian countries. Namoori-Sinclair concludes that “primary health care concerns...still remain a challenge for the present government” in a country where women have disproportionate levels of cervical cancer and suffer from anaemia.⁶⁵

In Vanuatu, the CEDAW report describes the many tasks women are expected to take on: their work in the gardens which is time-consuming and physically hard (they carry out all tasks from ground preparation all the way to harvesting); the production of specialised exchange goods and/or handicrafts; the feeding of animals as well as looking after the children. The report concludes that “some of the medical, social, political and economic issues which affect ni-Vanuatu women are a consequence of their dependency status as well as the workload women carry” (2004: 108). It is difficult for women in these circumstances to turn their attention to participating more actively in politics.

In Papua New Guinea the proportion of the population which has access to clean potable water and to proper sanitation is very low, at 28 per cent for men and 22 per cent for women respectively. This no doubt contributed in part to the lower level of life expectancy for women than men recorded in the late 1990s.

The growing incidence of HIV/AIDS cases is also threatening to explode into a regional crisis in the future due to the vulnerability of small island states and the lack of resources to deal with the issue. In 2002, PNG became the fourth country in the Asia-Pacific Region to have a generalized HIV epidemic. By 2003,

the number of recorded cases was 8,918 and rising while the percentage of pregnant women visiting antenatal clinics who were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS had also risen to 3 per cent in some parts of the country. The spread of the virus is a gender issue, as it is increasingly recognised that cultural and gender inequalities including denial and lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS, the prevalence of violence and sexual violence against women, and inequality of social and economic status increase women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (GoPNG, 2004; SPC, 2004; Lakshman, 2004).

4.5 Violence against women

Violence against women remains a serious problem in all countries of the region, even though most governments have been reluctant to carry out statistical analyses of the situation. It has often been left to NGOs on the whole to assess the extent of violence; to assist women and children in difficulty, and to press governments to address this issue. An Amnesty International Report found that in Solomon Islands not only is "violence against women and girls ... disturbingly high" but there "is no real government provision in place for legal or moral support" (2004: 6). This is the case in most countries of the region, even those which have not experienced serious civil conflict. Even though people in various countries, when surveyed, do not consider domestic violence acceptable or part of cultural traditions (see Vanuatu CEDAW report and Wale, 2004:15) its practice is prevalent indicating that women's well being and rights to basic dignity are at best being ignored but worse, frequently violated.⁶⁶

This is compounded by the disappearance of customary values which in the past helped protect women. For instance in the Marshall Islands "protection provided by custom to women and children are unwritten. In the past they were well understood and enforced. As a result of urbanisation and modernisation, however, traditional systems have weakened such that enforcement of customary protection is no longer consistent or dependable" (Leban et al, 2006: 10). This is similar across the region. Women have little access to formal processes to seek redress but yet they are no longer protected by past custom which frowned heavily on violence perpetrated against women.

5. Women in public leadership⁶⁷

Although the situation is slowly improving, in all countries (except Nauru) women are still a minority in the top positions in civil service and on statutory boards. For instance, in Vanuatu, in 2003, there was only one woman Director General (out of nine) which is the most senior civil service position. There were only nine women out of 47 Directors. According to the Vanuatu CEDAW report, "In the Ministry of Education all seven positions at the Director level are held by men, and in almost all committees and statutory bodies, senior positions [are] dominated by men" (Vanuatu CEDAW, 2004: 39). Rarua (2001: 6/10) adds that "Out of 368 senior positions in Public Service (legislatures, senior officials and managers) women only hold 40 positions (that equates to just under 11 per cent) (National Statistics Office 2000).

In Solomon Islands in the public service in 2004 only four women held Permanent Secretary positions out of 21 (less than 15 per cent). There are no women CEOs, or directors (managers) of statutory boards, or of state-owned enterprises. Nor are there any women in prominent positions in major companies in the private sector including commercial banks.

In Kiribati women constitute approximately one-fourth of the total administration and management positions (Namoori-Sinclair, 2001a: 3).

In the Cook Islands, according to File (2004: 29), “at the end of 2002, women occupied two of the fifteen Head of Ministry positions, as well as two of the eleven Crown funded agencies.” Overall the proportion of women in leadership positions in the public service was estimated at 20 per cent of that of men.

Palau has had two women directors of bureaus (the equivalent of Permanent Secretaries) but they have recently retired but remain active in state government. Two women have also been Cabinet Ministers through appointment by the President.⁶⁸

At the local level, women continue to be underrepresented throughout the region. In Vanuatu for example, women have been absent in Provincial and Municipal Councils: “There has only been one female Lord Mayor in Luganville and there have never been any female Presidents or female Councillors in the six Provincial Councils since 1994” (Vanuatu CEDAW, 2004: 58).

6. Political obstacles

In most countries of the region there has been a lack of women candidates. This is due to both supply and demand factors. On the supply side, women do not want to run for a variety of reasons. The authors of the Samoa Shadow report identify the following list of reasons for women’s reluctance to run and their limited participation in political parties. Although these refer to Samoa, the factors listed below (aside from the sixth and last one) are applicable to other countries:

- “Putting welfare of family first
- Lack of independent financial means
- Lack of support from spouse
- Attitude that politics is “dirty” and should be played by men
- Attitude that Parliament and decision making is a ‘man’s domain’
- Not eligible because woman does not hold a ‘*matai*’ chiefly title
- Low self esteem amongst women themselves
- No support from women themselves
- Women *matai* feel inferior when sitting with men *matai* in all levels of decision making” (PPSEAWA et al, 2004: 7).

There are many disincentives for women to run throughout the region. Because politics has been so heavily male dominated, few women wish to enter what are often daunting campaigns without strong effective and financial support, and time. Where they lack family or community support, running for election is undoubtedly a futile and potentially destructive exercise. Women have to work particularly hard to reach their constituents as they frequently have very busy lives juggling many responsibilities (the fulfilment of which they are often judged by). Women seldom have the luxury (or the ‘right’) of ‘talking politics’ around the *kava* bowl or in traditional settings such as the *maneaba*, *fale fonu* etc. Their networks are often different from those of the men they are in political competition with, and accessing these may appear threatening for their competitors (who may try to discourage them from doing so).

Women’s difficulty in entering the ‘world of politics’ is compounded by the nature of politics. Campaigns throughout the region are riddled with unsavoury if not unethical practices, and unequal access to financial resources (due in part to the lack of campaign financing laws). Scales and Teakeni (2006: 10) in their observation of Solomon Islands, offer a picture of why participating in politics there is daunting for women: “In

the current conditions that prevail in rural seats, women, no matter how well trained in electoral candidacy, have a disadvantage next to politicians who use vote buying and block voting tactics. The 'big-men and money' rural campaign process, suffused as it is in assumptions of male-only leadership and prestation politics, tends to exclude women". Scales and Teakeni qualify the current campaign environment as "hostile". This is echoed by observations of elections in Papua New Guinea where it has been stated that: "the current electoral system disadvantages women because the system itself gives rise to corruption and vote buying. Those candidates who have the money make sure that they buy votes to win".⁶⁹

Scales and Teakeni feel that "women need an environment where they are seen to do well in community leadership prior to the elections, and to be able to campaign on those merits". This concurs well with Isabelle Donald's experience in Vanuatu: she benefited from strong local governance conditions in Epi with the chiefs and population backing her for her actions in favour of the community. In the Papua New Guinea case, it has been said that there is a "need to create a political environment that is non-threatening for women" (UNIFEM, 2003: 38).

Recorded experiences of women candidates also point to the 'hostile' environment. Afu Billy talks about her own difficulties in 2002: "The strain of the election campaign was very high on my *de facto* partner and children, especially in terms of having my house constantly open for visitors. I also became physically quite ill immediately after the election". She adds that her children were somewhat relieved when she lost the election (by only two votes).

Women candidacies are low when compared to men both at the national and local levels. In Cook Islands for instance, in 2002 only seven women stood for the Vaka Council on Rarotonga, compared to 43 men. This number was down from 1998 when 10 women stood (compared to 59 men). In the Outer Islands Councils only 6 women stood in 2000 compared to 126 men and six Islands had no women candidates at all.⁷⁰ At the national level, it was mainly through the assistance of UNIFEM that 14 women (out of 79 candidates) stood in 1999. (Even though only two were elected, this was double the number ever elected previously – and "nearly a quarter of all votes went to women candidates") (File, 2004: 34).

On the demand side, political parties across the region have generally been reluctant to name women candidates, even though this is essential to women being considered. In Vanuatu, for example, "in the 1995 and 1998 national elections, the political parties did not field any women candidates. In 1996 there were no women candidates in the provincial elections" (Strachan and Dalesa, 2003: 9).

The situation is similar in Samoa as illustrated by this statement drawn from Samoa's Shadow CEDAW report (PPSEAWA et al, 2004: 7):

"Currently no political party has a gender sensitive manifesto or quota to provide for its support of women candidates to run from "safe" seats. There is little promotion of women as potential candidates for election to parliament and no established programmes or initiatives to assist women in political endeavours."

This state of affairs is repeated elsewhere in the region. In the Cook Islands there has been little support to involve women in the political process even though "women have held administrative positions within the executive of various political parties" with some parties having "designated a special post for a representative of the women" (File, 2004a: 23).

Political parties have been hostile to promoting women candidates although this appears to be beginning to change as pressure on parties has become stronger and governance issues have come to the fore.

Still even when parties have adopted resolutions or policies to nominate women, (e.g. Vanuaku Pati in Vanuatu), the numbers of women candidates put forward are very low. Political parties in many countries are still heavily dominated by men. As a result when women have been selected, it has been for seats that are difficult to win, not infrequently with the party putting them in competition with men candidates from the same party (see box on the nomination of women in Vanuatu). Many within parties are still hostile to the idea of putting up a woman as a candidate from Vanuatu reports: “There was conflict within the party as to why I had to contest the national election. The idea of having a woman contest was still really unacceptable for a few men in the party” (Strachan and Dalesa, 2003: 18).

Even where political parties have supported female candidates, it has not all been smooth sailing. It is not unusual for men to resent their party’s non-selection in favour of a woman. A candidate in the 2002 Vanuatu election reminisces: “The difficulties went as far as the opposing members of my political party holding back the money sent for my campaign by the head office, and my posters were torn as a result of these conflicts. This is a result I received from people after being involved [in the party] for 20 years” (Strachan and Dalesa, 2003: 20). In some cases in the 2002 Vanuatu election, some disgruntled men left the party and stood against the party’s female candidate in the same ward (19).

As a result of the difficulties they experience with political parties, many women end up standing as independents or form their own lists or even parties. For instance, in Vanuatu, in 1998, two parties were formed and headed by women (the Tuvanuatu Community Movement and the Vanuatu Liberal Party).⁷¹ However, as a result of standing outside mainstream parties, women do not receive the training and financial assistance which would be available to them through the party channel. Women who have stood have had to rely on programs carried out by women’s networks or organisations such as WIP and with assistance from agencies such as UNIFEM. Although this training is beneficial if not essential, it is not sufficient. And even though political parties in the Pacific are often less structured and regulated than in other democratic states, they still play a significant role in supporting candidates (financially as well as politically) and ensuring that the latter get elected. This is the experience generally related by women candidates in the region

Another critical constraint is the lack of policy to advance women politically. Only PNG has legislated in favour of women’s representation at the provincial and local political level. Fiji and Vanuatu have adopted policies for the promotion of women in public decision-making positions (particularly for board membership) but these have not been implemented.

That women are nonetheless willing to run is indicated by the elections in which women have benefited from UNIFEM support and training. In those pre-election times where support has been available the number of women running has usually increased. This indicates that if policies were designed to encourage and favour the candidacy of women, more would stand.

Another obstacle is political illiteracy which is high among women, particularly in the countries where women’s educational levels remain low (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu). This allows women to be more easily manipulated and less able to stand their ground to make their own decisions as election time. As Afu Billy points out in Solomon Islands, “[as] voting is not in effect by secret ballot... many women’s votes are dictated by their husbands or other male members in their family” (Billy 2004: 7).

In Papua New Guinea, PNGWIP states that the women running for elections have to overcome the widespread illiteracy⁷² as well as many other inhibiting factors: “At present some 65 per cent of our women are illiterate. To campaign in PNG one must have between K50,000.00 and K300,000.00. The campaign

trails are, literally, very difficult; one has to climb mountains, cross many rivers and/or traverse vast areas of land and sea to reach the (often indifferent or hostile) voter population in any one electorate....These are some of the realities that the women candidates in Papua New Guinea face when they run for public office” (UNIFEM, 2003:39).

Conclusions

The Pacific poses special challenges when it comes to assessing what is preventing women from having a greater political presence (besides the specific issue of electoral systems dealt with in Report 2 of this study). There are four reasons for this:

1. The diversity of the socio-economic and cultural status of women across the region;
2. The difficulties of fully understanding the impact of the rapid transformations which Pacific societies have undergone in the past 150 years on the role of women;
3. The lack of reliable and collated Pacific-wide information on women’s roles in ‘traditional’ and local-level decision-making; and,
4. The apparent contradiction between the strong role women play in society, and the esteem they are generally held in, and their absence in open, public decision-making.

There are nonetheless obvious attitudinal issues which are constraints to the political advancement of women. They have to do with perceptions (which are not only specific to the Pacific but which are prevalent in the region). Three of these are:

1. The treatment of ‘women in society’ versus ‘women in politics’: Difference between men and women is acknowledged if not emphasised in most spheres of life in the Pacific, particularly socially, economically and culturally. It is not considered unusual for women to be paid less than men, for women to be given primary responsibility to look after families and occupy caring roles; for women to produce valuable goods for customary exchanges, for women to work in gardens and contribute in specific ways to the family, village or community, and so on. Yet when it comes to electoral politics, women are suddenly considered to be on an equal level with men and to require no specific treatment which would acknowledge differences with men which are highlighted in all other spheres of life. Objections to reserved seats or quotas for women come mainly from the standpoint that ‘women are equal and that there is nothing preventing them from running on an equal basis’, as though an existing level playing field existed. This is known as the “*gender-blind discourse*” which states that “gender is irrelevant when it comes to political representation, from which follows that no action should be taken” (Dahlerup, 2006: 8). But as we have seen in this report (and all those we have drawn from), women are not treated equally in all other spheres of life. Differences and inequalities are prevalent (even though this differs somewhat from country to country), be it in terms of wages, access to land and titles, access to church hierarchy, access to credit and education, spousal and domestic abuse, and so forth. That differences between men and women currently exist is a fact of life that contemporary

political systems in the Pacific (as elsewhere) have to deal with. It is disingenuous to claim that women are equal nominally in one sphere of life but not in others.

2. Also prevalent in the Pacific is “*the politics-is-a-men’s-business*” discourse. There are many men and women in the region who assume that “women are unfit and unqualified for political positions. [That they] belong in the home, and [that] any involvement of women in electoral politics threatens to undermine their presumed roles as mothers and housewives” (Dahlerup, 2006: 8). This attitude contradicts the many commitments Pacific States have made, be they international, regional or national, as seen in the first section of the report. Combined with the *gender-blind discourse*, this attitude is a recipe for no women’s representation.
3. The lack of solidarity between women voters and candidates. While this is no doubt often true, one should question whether women candidates should have to depend heavily on women voters to get elected. Why is solidarity expected from other women when it is not expected of men with respect to other men? For men it has in fact always been a non-issue since they have only had mainly other men to vote for. But for women who have traditionally had little choice but to vote for men, to expect them to rally to women candidates *en masse* merely on the basis that they are women seems far-fetched. To question women’s support of each other on that basis therefore seems disingenuous.

In view of these attitudinal problems and the lack of success of women in increasing their political representation incrementally (in spite of the multiple commitments made by the region) affirmative action is necessary, just as it has been in other parts of the world. Specific proposals as to which combinations of reforms to electoral systems and quota systems should be proposed in the different countries of the region will need to be considered carefully drawing on both international examples and local context. This will be a long process which will require a new and determined approach to make institutional changes.

PART 3

Recommendations

The lack of representation of women in decision-making at all levels of governance is a common feature of all FICs. The Pacific's ranking against other regions of the world remains very low. It is therefore urgent that the PIFS, the premiere regional intergovernmental organisation, lead the way in redressing this problem, as part of its Plan for the collective future of the Pacific. Other regional and international organisations have a role to play in assisting PIFS, but the latter has the political mandate for moving the region forward for a better future for all the Pacific Islands States and their citizens. The core of the recommendations found below therefore focus on the pro-active role of PIFS in promoting greater political representation of women in FICs.⁷⁴ Additional national level recommendations follow.

I PIFS to establish a monitoring centre for the Advancement of Women in Politics and decision-making in Forum Island Countries. The monitoring centre would:

1. Coordinate, collect, analyse and disseminate data on the political, socio-economic and legal status of women in FICs in partnership with international and regional intergovernmental, national institutions and non-governmental institutions and partners such as UNIFEM, SPC Pacific Women's Bureau, UNDP including the Pacific Sub Regional Centre (PSRC) and Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) and the University of the South Pacific.
2. Maintain a database on the status of women in the region which is accessible to the public, and exchange data on a regular basis with countries, regional and international partners.
3. Establish and maintain an electronic network throughout the region.
4. Provide policy advice to the respective divisions of the Forum Secretariat and the Pacific Plan Office on achieving political and economic equality of women and men, drawing on relevant research, networks and national input.
5. Provide policy advice and work closely with the Forum Member Countries on implementing special measures to increase women's representation in parliaments.

II PIFS to initiate and coordinate sub-regional workshops on special measures and electoral reform to promote the political representation of women with international and regional partners and selected FICs.

The workshops should:

- a) bring together countries which have commonalities
- b) include key decision-makers and stakeholders

- c) be organised with national, regional and international partners with specialisation in these areas
- d) use indigenous researchers; and
- e) where feasible, be extended to include Pacific Forum Observers.

III PIFS to facilitate, in collaboration with regional partners and donors, the continuity of support, including funding and legal advice, to Member Countries, National Women's Machineries and Non Government Organisations to enable special measures to be pursued.

IV PIFS with national and regional partners to initiate and/or support further research on:

- barriers and opportunities for women's representation and participation in decision-making
- local government and traditional leadership including the roles of women;
- voting patterns; and family voting
- linkages between women, politics and media

Research endorsed by PIFS should be tabled with the respective national parliaments.

V Regional agencies and stakeholders including SPC, PIFS, USP, UNIFEM and UNDP (including PSRC and RRRT) and PINA are encouraged to support Pacific media and women in politics initiatives aimed at increasing quality coverage of the current status of women in Pacific politics, and challenging negative stereotypes about women as political leaders.

VII The importance of gender related issues such as increasing the proportion of women in decision-making positions, especially parliament, be included on the Forum Leaders agenda in 2007. PIFS and member countries to follow through on this action.

VIII PIFS in collaboration with IPU, IDEA and CPA to assemble toolkit materials on women's representation and participation which could include:

- summary of electoral systems impact on women's participation
- best practice in pre-election training of candidates
- support network for elected women MPs
- how to use the media as well as support the media in promoting women in politics/decision-making.

IX Countries to consider the role of youth parliaments and other measures in fostering young women leaders and their understanding of the constitutional process in country.

X Countries to consider how they can reinforce national machinery to actively assist in the promotion of women in political decision-making at all levels, national and local.

XI Countries to explore how they can better account for the important contribution and role of women in the formal and informal economy and how they can improve women's access to health.

XII The Melanesian countries to consider how to speed up the access of education to all girls and actively promote their enrolment at the tertiary level.

XIII Countries to review discriminatory laws which affect women.

XIII Political leaders, non-governmental organisations and citizen groups within countries to consider how to mobilize forces, and advocate and lobby for greater political representation for women.

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Notes

1. The Pacific Plan was drafted as an outcome of the recommendations of the EPG review.
2. The Pacific Plan lists four goals: Economic Growth, Sustainable Development, Good Governance and Security. It lists 13 objectives under the four goals. See PIF Secretariat, 2005.
3. Adopted by the 9th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women held in Nadi, Fiji, 16-19 August 2004 and the 2nd Pacific Ministerial Meeting on Women, held in Nadi, Fiji, 19-20 August 2004, as an update to the original 1994 Pacific Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women.
4. See SPC, 2004.
5. In addition to the UN resolutions listed below, the Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) underlines the importance of women's participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and the subsequent consolidation of peace and security, and therefore the need for women to be more present in decision making. The resolution came into effect at the UN system level in October 2005 with the planned application of concrete measures aiming to guarantee the full participation of women in decision-making particularly with respect to conflict prevention and maintenance of peace and post-conflict rebuilding.
6. See Resolution 58/142 of 10 February 2004 adopted by the General Assembly at: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/503/10/PDF/N0350310.pdf/OpenElement>, accessed April 10th 2006.
7. One of the four indicators to measure the progress of women and their equality with men, in relation to MDG 3, is the proportion of women represented in national parliaments. See Report of the Secretary General to the 50th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 19 December 2005.
8. See <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>
9. For a full list of the proposed measures and the Draft Agreed Conclusions, see the Commission on the Status of Women, Fiftieth Session, 27 February- 10 March, 2006, at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw50/offdocs/agreedconclusionsdecisionmakingfeb22.pdf>
10. Only Solomon Islands has ratified the Optional Protocol of its own volition. Cook Islands and Niue have done so through New Zealand.
11. Article 4 of CEDAW provides for affirmative action for the promotion of women. It states that "Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating *de facto* equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved".
12. See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm> - accessed on 6/12/05.
13. The 5WAMMM in 1996 had established a 30 per cent target for 2005 but the Commonwealth has acknowledged that this target has not been reached and that there is a need to "work harder" to achieve it by 2015. See CommSec 2005.
14. The RMI and Fiji forbid discrimination on the basis of "gender". See South Pacific Forum Secretariat, 1998.
15. The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in its Constitution Amendment #21 of 1985 provided for the establishment of a Special Assistant for Women's Affairs, stating that: "It is the policy of the Special Assistant to formulate and implement a policy of affirmative action in the Government and Private Sector to assist women achieve social, economic and political parity" (see South Pacific Forum, 1998:31).
16. Although these provisions may appear potentially offensive in the sense that they group women in a category of disadvantaged peoples or categories, they are useful for the purposes of making legal changes for enhanced political representation of women.
17. Orovu Sepoe (2006:5) states, however, that "many provinces have failed to comply with the legal provisions" to appoint women and that the nominated women have little influence on decision-making. Dickson-Waiko (2004:15) adds that the nomination process itself is unclear leading Provincial Governors to nominate women who should be named by the Provincial Councils of Women.
18. See CRP, 1997.
19. Kiribati Country Report, CEDAW Round Table, Nadi, Fiji, March 2006.
20. See Tonga Report by 'Ofa Guttenbeil.
21. See Tonga Report by 'Ofa Guttenbeil.

22. See http://www.unifempacific.com/wippac_members.html, accessed April 11, 2006 but the page dates from 2000.
23. Many men were recruited as labourers in plantations in the 19th century which led to women taking on multiple tasks in the absence of the men. The time they had dedicated to developing their customary knowledge was consequently limited and when the men returned, they did not relieve the women of the many tasks the latter had gotten used to handling. The men consequently occupied the 'public sphere'.
24. Pers. Comm., Maria Goretti, 20/3/06.
25. Pers. Comm. Maria Goretti, 20/3/06
26. For more details, also see Tonga Report by 'Ofa Guttenbeil.
27. See, for instance, Micheal P.J. Reilly, Women in Manganian Society, *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol.36, N.2, 2001, 149-161; Caroline Ralston, 1993, Maori Women and the Politics of Tradition: What Roles and Power Did, Do and Should Maori Women Exercise? , *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 5, N.1, Spring 1993, 23-44; and the work of Kerry James in Tonga, Margaret Jolly and Lissant Bolton on Vanuatu, Penelope Schoeffel on Samoa, among others.
28. Pers. Comm. Chief Viraleo, Malvatmagemu, Turaga Nation, Jan 2005.
29. Response to questionnaire, Palau Office of Women's Affairs.
30. Pers. Comm. Senator Abacca Madison, March 2005.
31. According to a Baseline Study of Women's Issues in Kiribati, the number of girls able to attend secondary school is restricted by the equity policy in place, but restrictions are also due to lack of schooling facilities. This problem is also present in most other countries of the region. See Namoori-Sinclair, 2001a.
32. See Olsson, 2005.
33. See Tekanene, Maere, 2004. Kiribati's Implementation of Commitments to the Beijing and Pacific Platforms for Action 2002-2003, PACFAW, Suva: Fiji, April 2004.
34. SPC warns that any country comparisons should be made with some caution: Where data source for primary and secondary level enrolment is not available from the Ministry of Education statistics, census data have been used. "Complete data for the ratio of girls to boys in tertiary education are not available for all PICs. Statistics for those pupils attending tertiary education outside the region are not readily available in all countries and in some instances figures are available only for scholarship students" (2004: 48).
35. See 'CEDAW in Papua New Guinea', report presented at the Round Table on Progressing the Implementation of CEDAW in the Pacific, Tanoa International Hotel, Nadi, Fiji, 20-24 March 2006.
36. For full details on the number of women in the Kaupule committees, which implement Falekaupule decisions, see Report 2 by Jon Fraenkel and Report 5 on Tuvalu, by Suzie Kofe and Fakavae Taomia.
37. Information kindly provided by Professor Bob Hugues, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Law, University of the South Pacific..
38. Information kindly supplied by the Hon. Minister Va'aiga Tukuitonga, Minister of Education, Women's Affairs, Taoga Niue and Culture, Justice, and Lands and Survey.
39. According to Sandra Pieratozzi, Pers. Com. March 2006.
40. Jalal points out that in the case of Tuvalu and Kiribati other types of discrimination e.g. on the grounds of race or religion, are forbidden but that sexual discrimination is left out.
41. A notable exception is Palau where women have greater access to men to land. This does not translate into political representation but means that in the traditional context women have final say over who the chiefs are.
42. It can be argued that women's representation in Samoa is no lower than in other countries where suffrage and/or candidacy are not linked to titles, but women's low visibility in Parliament perpetuates an attitude that women are not part of the world of political representation.
43. This however varies according to whether the area is patrilineal or matrilineal and there is a diversity of customary land rights for women. See for instance, Dorosthy Kenneth and Henlyn Silas, 1986, Vanuatu: Traditional diversity and modern uniformity, in *Land Rights of Pacific Women*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
44. This is the case, for instance, in the Republic of the Marshall Islands with the 2003 Land Recording and Registration Act which established a Land Registration Authority with a Board of Directors on which no women were appointed. See Huffer 2004.
45. Kiribati's Telecom Company (a private entity) offers paternity leave.

46. See Dickson-Waiko, 2004: 8 and SPC 2004: 20-24.
47. This is the case of the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Republic of Marshall Islands, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and Papua New Guinea.
48. See File 2004: 40.
49. They are, however, not stand-alone Ministries.
50. For more details specifically on Samoa, RMI and Fiji, see Huffer, 2004.
51. WUTMI and the Women in Development Program are currently revising their National Women's Policy.
52. Samoa is currently in the process of revising its policy with the aim of submitting it to Cabinet later this year.
53. See PACFAW, 2004.
54. Because of blackbirding and other forms of male labour, women in many parts of Melanesia had to also take on garden work. They are today burdened with that legacy, and get little credit or acknowledgement for it.
55. This was indicated to Jeannette Bolenga and Elise Huffer by Jean Tariseisei of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre as well as by Selwyn Garu, consultant to the Malvatumauri (Vanuatu Council of Chiefs) who stated that it was likely that all of Pentecost was formerly matrilineal (now only North Pentecost is considered matrilineal). Pers. Comm.. Jan. 2005.
56. Notably Bua and Cakaudrove.
57. It is worth noting that the 2 of the 3 islands which have had most women's representation at the council level also have 2 women MPs. These islands are also ones where the Kiribati Protestant Church is strong, and both elected MPs are members of this church which has ordained its first female pastor in 1983. See Tekanene, 2004b: 12.
58. In Vanuatu, the head of the Malvatumauri stated that women had no business running for office in the 2002 election (see Strachan and Dalesa, 2003: 25).
59. The difficulty for women to be accepted in the church has been described in a volume entitled, *Weavings: Women's Doing Theology in the Pacific*, edited by Lydia Johnson and Joan Tofaeono, and published in 2003 by Weavers of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools and the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific. In it the authors (from throughout the region) discuss the barriers related to both church doctrine and the interpretation of the gospel.
60. Education is compulsory for primary school aged children, both girls and boys, in Samoa, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Fiji. Examples of laws for four countries are listed below:
 - Samoa - Equal access to education (Education Ordinance 1959); Compulsory education for males and females aged 5-14 years (Western Samoa Compulsory Education Act 1992)
 - Tuvalu - Education is compulsory for males and females only until the age of 15 (Education Act 1978)
 - Vanuatu - Compulsory education has been gradually introduced into Vanuatu for females and males from 6-14yrs. Recent legislation (Education Act 2001) in Vanuatu has explicitly incorporated anti-discrimination provisions and specifically aims to 'eliminate educational disadvantage arising from the gender of a child.'
 - Fiji - Compulsory education for primary and secondary education has been gradually introduced into Fiji for females and males aged from 6-15yrs and legislated under the Compulsory Education Regulation 1997.
61. In Vanuatu women's wages are estimated to be "about 80 per cent of the male average" (Rarua, 2001: 10).
62. PPP refers to purchasing power parity.
63. This is according to the 2000 census. Only 10 per cent of the citizen population of PNG was employed in wage job employment. Sixty seven per cent of the population was involved in subsistence employment with women accounting for 74 per cent of subsistence workers. See Dickson-Waiko, 2004: 5
64. The difficulties faced by Afu Billy were compounded by her having SBD10,000 raised at a fundraiser stolen from her.
65. See Namoori-Sinclair 2001a:3. Anemia among women is widespread in the Pacific.
66. In a survey conducted in Solomon Islands in 1994, 60 per cent of urban women and 51 per cent of rural women were victims of domestic violence (Wale, 2004: 15). That means that over half of the women in Guadalcanal and Honiara are being abused.
67. This section does not discuss elected leadership which is covered in Part 2 of the report.
68. This information was kindly provided by Sandra Pierantozzi, Vice-President of Palau, 2001-2004.

69. Country Report by Papua New Guinea at Training and Congress on Positions Pacific Women for Progress, Tanoa International, Nadi, Fiji Islands, 13-17 October 2003. The violence associated with elections in Papua New Guinea must also be a disincentive not only for women candidates but also for voters themselves.
70. See File 2004a and 2004b, pp. 27 and 25 respectively.
71. See Vanuatu CEDAW report, 2004: 54.
72. The PNG Government is attempting to overcome this problem but acknowledging that achieving universal primary education and gender equality in all levels by 2015 is unrealistic, the focus of the PNG government's policy of "Acceleration of Girls' Education", aims to eliminate gender disparity at the primary and lower secondary levels by 2015 and at the upper secondary level and above by 2030. The amended target now for universal primary education is to achieve a Gross Enrolment Rate of 85 per cent at the primary level by 2015 and a retention rate at this level of 70 per cent by that year (see Government of Papua New Guinea. 2004. *Millennium Development Goals. Progress Report for Papua New Guinea*. Report funded by United Nations Development Programme in PNG, Port Moresby. Internet Download 15/09/05 <www.undp.org/mdgs/country Reports/PNG>).
73. These recommendations are largely based from the final outcomes document adopted by the Pacific Regional Workshop on Advancing Women's Representation in Parliaments, held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands on 19-21 April 2006. The final outcomes document was based in large part on the preliminary recommendations made in this study which were refined and augmented at the workshop. The recommendations in this report deal with the regional level. Report 2 contains the national level recommendations.
74. More specific recommendations on national solutions, particularly with respect to electoral systems and quotas, can be found in Report 2.