

# State of the Art **4**

Women's leadership  
in the Pacific

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June 2015



The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) is an international research initiative based at the University of Birmingham, and working in partnership with University College London (UCL) and La Trobe University in Melbourne.

DLP aims to increase understanding of the political processes that drive or constrain development. Its work focuses on the crucial role of home-grown leaderships and coalitions in forging legitimate institutions that promote developmental outcomes.

DLP's independent program of research is supported by the Australian aid program.

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# The 'State of the Art Paper' series

Our SOTA series aims to lay the groundwork for future DLP research by setting out what existing research evidence and development practice tells us about the politics of development in key areas.

These papers survey the literature, with three aims:

- to clarify what is already known about an issue and the policy implications of that research evidence;
- to suggest areas for further investigation by identifying knowledge gaps;
- to guide future DLP research, ensuring that it is problem-focused, useful and innovative.

To ensure the rigour, validity and utility of these papers, they are peer reviewed internally and externally by both academic and policy or programming experts.

We hope that the SOTA papers will also be useful to other researchers and commissioners of research, and to policymakers and practitioners.

## About the author

**Dr Abby McLeod** is an applied anthropologist with a particular interest in the Pacific Islands, especially Papua New Guinea. She works for the Australian Federal Police (AFP), having joined in 2007 as an adviser on Pacific Islands affairs to the International Deployment Group. She has a keen interest in improving links between rigorous academic research and the policy making process. Before joining the AFP, she worked on the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program at the Australian National University. There she taught and undertook research on issues relating to violence, gender and social order in the region.

# Executive summary

This paper summarises the state of knowledge on women's leadership in the Pacific. It concentrates on three spheres: 1) formal politics, the main focus of the literature on women's empowerment; 2) the bureaucracy, an important employer of women; and 3) civil society, where Pacific women are particularly active. It highlights that Pacific women's prominent informal peacebuilding role has not always led to their participation in formal peacebuilding processes: opportunities to facilitate equitable social and political change have been missed. In relation to the limited evidence base, it notes that women's impact on governance and policy-making in the region has received little scrutiny. Further, although gender analyses carried out as part of donor-funded capacity development programmes contain much information on women's participation in Pacific bureaucracies, this material is rarely made public.

Within the spheres of politics, the bureaucracy, and civil society, the paper examines the literature in relation to: obstacles to women's participation, success factors, outcomes, and policy and donor approaches to supporting women's participation. The paper also highlights research gaps, and compares the Pacific experience with broader findings on women's participation in decision making.

Key search terms were: 'women'; 'leadership'; 'Pacific'; 'gender'; 'development'; 'political participation'; 'civil society'; 'public administration'; 'public service/public sector'; and, 'peacebuilding'. The literature survey focused on publications of the last five years, seminal works, articles in esteemed journals and policy literature from reputable institutions.

## Evidence gaps

The comparative literature on women's parliamentary participation in the Pacific is quite substantial, enabled by the existence of national-level data. But women's impact on governance and policy-making in the region has received little scrutiny.

There is limited evidence about the factors underpinning women's successful entry into parliament. We do not know if Pacific women legislate differently to men, nor how (or whether) they mobilise support for attention to issues of specific concern to women while in parliament.

Little published or comparative analysis considers women's participation in public administration in the Pacific, and there are few cross-country examinations of women's involvement in peacebuilding. This is probably because of a lack of reliable data on women's participation in public administration, and because of the strong tradition of anthropological and area studies work in the Pacific, which tends to privilege in-depth analysis of single cultural groupings over comparative research.

Scholarship on women's leadership in the Pacific focuses on Melanesia; little research has been done in Polynesia or Micronesia. A further gap is the lack of empirical evidence on the efficacy of the many existing efforts to support women's leadership.

## Key findings

Social organisation and gendered cultural beliefs and practices are significant hindrances to women's participation in all spheres. Donors wishing to support women's empowerment, often through travel to training and networking events, face challenges in minimising the potential harm that may arise from such support. When initiatives to empower individual women move at a faster pace than institutional and cultural change, enthusiastic women may return to their work places or communities to face increased discrimination and, sometimes, physical violence. This suggests a need to listen to local women's views about how empowerment can be achieved – views that often differ from those of donors.

## Women in formal politics

The Pacific has the world's lowest regional average of women in unicameral parliaments or the lower house of parliament. Across the region, parliament has been a male domain.

The 'double burden' of family and work, while significant, appears to be less of a hindrance to Pacific women seeking to enter formal politics than for women in other regions. This may reflect the extensive social support provided by kin networks – albeit counteracted by social obligations. Obstacles to women entering parliament also include male-female economic and educational disparities.

The greater attention paid to Pacific women's involvement in parliament than in public administration reflects global trends: there is more data available on women in parliaments.

Given the limited number of Pacific women in parliament, little research exists on the factors underpinning their success and the outcomes of their representation. The only exception is Corbett and Liki's examination of the experiences of women parliamentarians (2015). This suggests that many of these women are from political families or are the wives or daughters of prominent male chiefs, foreign nationals or businessmen. Such connections may influence women's success for two main reasons: access to wealth (and associated benefits like education), and access to the powerful networks required to mobilise support. Corbett and Liki (2015) also find that, consistent with global trends, women tend to enter politics at an older age than men, and typically have a civil service background.

## Women in public administration

Pacific women, like those elsewhere, are well represented in public service, yet under-represented in management roles. Most work in feminised sectors such as health and education.

In Melanesia in particular, long traditions of sex segregation still seem to have a major impact on women's experiences of working outside the home. Women experience not only family violence motivated by jealousy, but also suspicion and hostility from the wives and girlfriends of male colleagues.

The limited available evidence suggests that higher education, typically obtained through overseas scholarships, is the factor with the most influence on the career trajectories of female public servants in the region (Liki 2010; Zubrinich and Haley 2009).

## Women in civil society

A vibrant, largely indigenous literature shows the depth of women's participation in civil society, and the relative ease with which they can gain prominence as leaders within the less male dominated non-state realm. Yet the claim that participation in civil society provides women with a stepping stone to participation in state institutions is under-explored.

In civil society organisations, most evidently church organisations, women have challenged the status quo in quiet rather than overt ways to avoid alienating those resistant to change (Monson 2013; Paina 2000). They have also linked their concerns to global discourses to justify their right to draw attention to specific issues, while broadening the range of issues under consideration (George 2014; Monson 2013).

Women's prominent informal peacebuilding role in the region's most significant violent conflicts (Bougainville and the Solomon Islands) has achieved significant short-term dividends, including the cessation of violence. In these conflicts, women successfully used metaphors of themselves as mothers of land and nation, drawing on matrilineal traditions to assert their involvement in formal peacebuilding processes (Monson 2013). Yet women's involvement in informal peacebuilding has not always led to their participation in *formal* peacebuilding processes. 'Tradition' supports an informal peacebuilding role for Pacific women, but not a formal one.

## Avenues for research

Promising avenues for research to help address evidence gaps include the following:

- A comparative analysis of agency and sector gender analyses (held largely by donors) to increase understanding of women in Pacific bureaucracies
- Examination of indigenous women's biographical accounts of leadership to extract information on the purported impacts of their participation in various spheres
- A review of global evaluations of donor-funded programmes with explicit gender empowerment objectives to extract lessons on promoting women's leadership
- Research into the factors underpinning the gap between Pacific women's high participation in informal peacebuilding and low participation in formal peacebuilding processes.

Given the limited information available on the impacts of women's participation, donor-funded programmes in the region could clearly state expected outcomes of women's increased participation in various spheres, and establish accompanying monitoring and evaluation systems.

# 1.0

## Introduction

This paper summarises the state of knowledge on women's leadership in the Pacific, with a particular focus on three spheres: politics, the bureaucracy and civil society. The first is the primary focus of existing literature on women's empowerment; the second is a burgeoning employer of women, with the capacity to shape development outcomes; and the third is a sphere in which Pacific women are particularly active.

Within each of these spheres, existing literature will be analysed with a view to answering four key questions: 1) What are the key obstacles to women's participation? 2) What are the factors underpinning women's successful participation? 3) What tangible outcomes have resulted from women's participation? 4) What policy and donor approaches have been used to foster women's participation?

Before exploring each of these spheres, a brief overview of the legal, development policy and Pacific contexts will be provided. Exploration of the four key questions in each sphere will be preceded by an overview of the global context in relation to that sphere and an exploration of the Pacific state of play. Having examined Pacific women's leadership in the spheres of politics, the bureaucracy and civil society, the paper will highlight gaps in existing research and explore the extent to which the Pacific experience resonates with broader assertions about women's participation in decision making. In conclusion, it will outline promising areas for future research and make practical recommendations for policy makers and practitioners.

If one accepts Sen's (1999) premise that human freedom is both the primary objective and principal means of development, it is axiomatic that women's participation in decision making is integral to development. Moreover, it is a basic human right. For those more convinced by economics, the argument is similarly compelling, with strong evidence demonstrating that significant macro-economic gains occur when women (who constitute little under half of the world's population) are able to develop their full labour market potential. This impacts not only on GDP per capita but also on patterns of household expenditure, resulting for example in increased expenditure on children's education (IMF 2013; World Bank 2012).

But participation alone is not enough. Socially and politically, there is strong evidence that when women are able to make decisions and shape policies – that is, when women are able to exercise leadership – they are able to influence the responsiveness of institutions to men and women alike, thereby impacting positively on development (World Bank 2012, 14). The presence of women in leadership roles also sends a powerful message to girls, influencing not only the aspirations of individuals but limiting the reproduction of gender inequality by challenging societal views about gender roles (de Silva de Alwis 2014, 102-3).

The Pacific Islands region provides fertile ground for explorations of women's leadership. In common with most recently decolonised countries, Pacific Island countries share a range of development challenges; their development indicators are comparable to those of sub-Saharan Africa. Notably, with only 13.4% of parliamentarians in the Pacific being women, the region's levels of women's political participation are among the lowest in the world – the global average is 21.8% – and three Pacific countries have no women at all in parliament (PACWIP 2014).

In undertaking this review, relevant literature was identified through searches online, in libraries and databases (for articles in well-regarded social science journals). Various combinations of the following key search terms were used: 'women'; 'leadership'; 'Pacific'; 'gender'; 'development'; 'political participation'; 'civil society'; 'public administration'; 'public service/public sector'; and 'peacebuilding'. Usual standards of academic rigour were initially applied, including a focus on publications within the last five years, seminal works, articles in esteemed journals and policy literature gleaned from reputable institutions such as the United Nations, World Bank, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia) and the Department for International Development (UK). Given the dearth of information on women's leadership in the Pacific, older scholarship was also considered, as was research in regional journals which may have relatively low impact but remain important sources of indigenous scholarship and policy relevant analysis. Multi-media sources such as blogs and websites were also canvassed, with a view to obtaining an understanding of contemporary donor and local approaches to the promotion of women's leadership in the Pacific.

Due to limitations on accessibility, large volumes such as published books were not consulted unless available electronically. Similarly, although significant commentary on the success or otherwise of policy efforts to promote women's leadership in the region is embedded in project evaluations, such analysis has not been thoroughly canvassed due to accessibility limitations (particularly that critical evaluations are often not released) and the uneven methodological rigour of such evaluations.

# 2.0

## The context

### The legal and policy context

A strong international legal and policy framework affirms the centrality of gender equality to social stability, democracy and development, and acknowledges that much work remains to be done before women are able to fully participate in social, economic and political life. Beginning with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the equal rights of men and women have been enshrined in multiple international commitments. These range from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976) through to commitments relating specifically to the rights of women such as the widely ratified Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000).

Emphasising the need to translate such commitments into action, the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference for Women. It asserts that 'women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participating in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace' (UN 1995). In 2000, following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, all UN member states (189 at that time) committed to help achieve eight international development goals, one of which was to promote gender equality and empower women (Goal 3), with the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments being one of three progress indicators. Noting unequal progress in 2011, UN General Assembly resolution 66/130 on women and political participation recalled the commitments made in Beijing to establish the goal of gender balance and recognised the need to accelerate the achievement of equality between men and women in political participation.

The Pacific boasts a similarly rich legal and policy framework dedicated to the promotion of gender equality. In 2012, the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality declaration re-committed to implementing the gender equality strategies contained in a range of documents. These include: CEDAW; the MDGs; the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (2005 to 2015); the Pacific Plan; the 42nd Pacific Islands Forum commitment to increase the representation of women in legislatures and decision making; and the 40th Pacific Islands Forum commitment to eradicate sexual and gender based violence (PIFS 2012).

The Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration expressed deep concern that overall progress in the region towards gender equality had been slow. Particular concern was expressed that women's representation in Pacific legislatures remains the lowest in the world, with leaders committing to implement specific national policy actions to progress gender equality in decision making and a range of other areas that impact their ability to participate in decision making (such as violence against women, education, economic empowerment). Specific commitments made to increase women's participation in decision making included commitments to: adopt measures, including temporary special measures (such as legislation to establish reserved seats for women and political party reforms); to accelerate women's full and equal participation in governance reform at all levels and women's leadership in all decision making; and to advocate for increased representation of women in private sector and local level governance boards and committees (such as school boards and produce market committees) (PIFS 2012).

### The Pacific context

The 25 Pacific Island Countries (commonly known as PICs) are made up of more than 25,000 islands spread across the western and central Pacific Ocean. They include both independent nations and territories, collectively constituting the most linguistically diverse region in the world. Frequently divided into three primary geographic and socio-cultural groups – namely Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia – the region is characterised by significant variety. The largest state is Papua New Guinea with a population of over seven million people and the smallest is the 21-square-kilometre state of Nauru, with a population of just over 10,000 people.

As a region, the Pacific is highly dependent on development assistance, with Australia being the largest bilateral donor, most notably to the proximate and fragile Melanesian states. Living standards vary significantly throughout the region, for example while Fiji and Tonga enjoy high human development, Samoa, Micronesia, Vanuatu and Kiribati enjoy medium human development, and Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands experience low human development (UNDP 2014a).

## The Pacific Islands



[Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.](#)

The Melanesian nations of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu have long histories of fragility. They have been characterised as Australia's 'arc of instability' on account of the high levels of violence that have occurred in their histories (Ayson 2007).

The Pacific Islands are among the youngest states in the world, with Samoa being the first Pacific Island nation to gain political independence in 1962, followed shortly by Fiji in 1970, Papua New Guinea in 1975 and Vanuatu in 1980. Like most post-colonial states, the Pacific Islands have grappled with the challenges associated with new nationhood, including but not limited to their ill-preparedness for independence, the misfit between local and introduced modes of governance and the ever increasing pressures wrought by globalisation. A narrative of declining leadership has been a key feature of discussions about governance in the region, yet in the messy post-colonial contexts of the Pacific there is little agreement on what locally sustainable governance and leadership might look like (Corbett 2013; McLeod 2008).

Throughout the region, 'traditional' modes of governance impact heavily on the ways in which formal institutions operate, and in countries where the majority of people live in rural areas, state institutions have minimal impact upon people's lives. Consequently, a basic understanding of 'traditional' social organisation and leadership models is integral to our understanding of contemporary women's leadership throughout the region, noting that 'tradition' is fluid and contested (Jolly 2002; Keesing 1989; Lindstrom & White 1997).

While acknowledging the diversity that exists within the Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian groupings, in broad terms power and authority are exercised quite differently within each group. A clear distinction is starkly drawn between the 'big man' states of Melanesia and the chiefly states of Polynesia by anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1963) in his influential essay *Poor man, rich man, big man, chief: Political types in Melanesia and Polynesia*. Although the crass alignment of the big man and chief typologies with specific geographical areas in the Pacific has been contested (see for example Douglas 1979 and Lindstrom 1981), the terms enjoy significant local currency and help us to understand some of the basic variations in leadership patterns throughout the Pacific.

Sahlins characterised the big man and chiefs as 'distinct sociological types', with different powers, privileges, rights, duties and obligations (1963, 288). In summarising the characteristics of these different sociological types, Sahlins (1963, 290-396) outlined the big man/chief distinction as follows: big men exercise personal power and exercise influence over fluctuating factions, with status being gained through the demonstration of skills (such as oratory or bravery), and the accumulation and distribution of wealth; chiefs, whose status is inherited and not achieved, exercise authority over permanent groups and have the authority to call upon the support of others without inducement, with power residing in the position or title, rather than in the person.

Throughout the Pacific, as elsewhere in the world, leadership – particularly political leadership – rests predominantly in the hands of men. Women's participation in decision-making, however, varies widely, being largely dependent upon social organisation. Women

in some matrilineal societies appear to have a greater hand in decision making than do women in most patrilineal societies. The status of women in 'traditional' contexts has a direct correlation with the status of women in institutionalised leadership roles. For example, in Fiji and Samoa, where women are able to hold chiefly title, women's participation in both politics and government significantly outstrips the participation of Melanesian women in public life, where status is primarily achieved via the accumulation and distribution of resources to which women have limited access (McLeod 2008, 11).

That women's participation in decision making is directly related to the general status of women in society is unquestionable (de Silva de Alwis 2013, 113). To this end, Pacific women face significant hurdles. Violence against women is alarmingly high across the region (UN Women 2011), with Papua New Guinea having attracted significant long-term international attention on account of its pervasiveness (Amnesty International 2006; Human Rights Watch 2015). As elsewhere, the magnitude of violence against women reflects broader power inequalities. In some contexts, inequality is entrenched by practices such as brideprice (the exchange of money and goods upon marriage) which many argue has been distorted over time, resulting in the commoditisation of women and men's increased tendency to treat them as property (Macintyre 2011).

Highlighting their continued primary association with the domestic realm, economic opportunities for Pacific women are among the worst in the world, with the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea being rated by the Economist Intelligence Unit as 124th and 125th respectively in the world for economic opportunities available to women (Economist Intelligence Unit 2012). Although women and girl's educational outcomes across the region are improving, Oceania ranks third worst behind Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia for maternal health (UN 2012).

The derivations of women's contemporary status in the region have been hotly debated and, for the purposes of devising policy approaches to the promotion of gender equality, bear acknowledgment. Customary property rights clearly impact upon women's status and range from their limited rights to land through to their own status as property. Yet the language of 'tradition' and 'custom' is employed by those wishing to maintain the status quo (primarily men) to exclude women from a vast range of opportunities, with little acknowledgement of the fluidity of custom. Consequently, both women advocates and scholars of the region contest the subordination of women on the basis of custom alone, noting that Pacific cultures typically value the complementary roles of men and women (Huffer 2006) and suggesting that external influences (such as the church and colonial powers), not tradition, are responsible for relegating women to domestic roles and alienating them from political participation (Douglas 2002; Jolly & Macintyre 2009; True et al. 2014, 38).

# 3.0

## Women and politics

### Global findings

With women constituting just under 50% of the global population, their under-representation in parliaments around the world is of enduring concern to developed and developing nations alike. In 2014, the average global percentage of women in parliament (for lower and upper houses combined) was 21.9%, with only 10 of 152 heads of State (i.e. Presidents) and 15 of 193 heads of Government (i.e. Prime Minister) being women (UN 2015b). Rwanda, which has a constitution mandating 30% of legislative seats be reserved for women, has the highest representation of women in parliament (64%), while in Sweden nearly 45% of parliamentary seats are occupied by women despite the absence of reserved seats or quotas (IPU 2014).

Research demonstrates that women legislate differently to men, being more inclined to enact policies and measures that advance not only the concerns of women, but also of families and communities. These include, for example, laws to combat family violence and measures relating to land access, healthcare and education (de Silva de Alwis 2013, 97; WEF 2014, v). At the local level, research into Indian women's impact on policy found that female-led local councils had approved 62% more drinking water projects than male-led councils during the study period, while in Norway a causal relationship between women's participation in municipal councils and childcare coverage has been established (UN 2015b). Claims have also been made (most notably by Dollar et al. 2001) that greater numbers of women in parliament result in lower levels of corruption, and while this is highly contested (see for example Alhassan Alolo 2007; Frank, Lambsdorff and Boehm 2011; Goetz 2007; UN2015b), the argument continues to have significant valence in policy circles.

Whether or not one accepts the biological explanations that are frequently offered as rationalisations for gendered differences in men's and women's political behaviour (see for example Fukuyama 1998), there is ample evidence that having women in parliament matters. Yet there is also evidence that the number of women matters. Acknowledging the need for 'critical mass', in 1990, the UN Economic and Social Council recommended a target of 30% women in leadership posts by 1995 and 50% by 2000. Governments and non-government bodies alike were called to take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, including through a specific government commitment to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, as well as in public administration entities, and in the judiciary. Specific actions to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership were also called for, including leadership and self-esteem training, transparent criteria for decision-making positions, mentoring, and mechanisms to encourage women to participate in the electoral process, political activities and other leadership arenas (UN 1995).

While women's representation has slowly increased from 11.3% in 1995 to the current 21.9%, only 39 single or lower houses comprise more than 30% women and there are 37 states in which women account for less than 10% of parliament (IPU 2014).

### Pacific state of play

Despite the fact that nearly all Pacific Island Constitutions prohibit discrimination, including on the basis of sex (Huffer 2006, 3), in his 2006 review of women's representation in Pacific parliaments, Fraenkel (2006, 61) noted that the 'independent Pacific Islands have the lowest levels of female representation in the world, below even the Arab countries.' Alarming, nearly a decade later, the Pacific Islands region continues to have the lowest regional average of women in unicameral parliaments or the lower house of parliament, with only 13.4% of seats being held by women, behind the Arab States' average of 17.8% (IPU 2014). There is, however, considerable variation across the region, ranging from countries such as the Federated States of Micronesia, Tokelau and Vanuatu, which currently have no women in parliament, through to Fiji, which has 14% women (7 of 50) and Cook Islands, which has 12.5% women (3 of 24) (IPU 2014). These differences, as outlined below, may be attributed to a multitude of factors, including but not limited to gendered cultural practices and beliefs, electoral systems and living standards (Fraenkel 2006, 62).

Consistent with the broader international literature on women's participation in decision-making, Pacific women's representation in national parliaments has received greater attention (from both academics and policy makers) than their participation in other decision-making realms, such as public administration and civil society. The availability of comparatively reliable data on women's participation in national parliaments has enabled multi-country comparisons. Key contributions are: Fraenkel's review of the impact of

electoral systems on women's representation in Pacific parliaments (2006); Huffer's review of the factors which enable and constrain the advancement of women's political representation in Forum Island Countries (2006); True et al.'s comparative analysis of women's parliamentary participation in Asia and the Pacific (2014); and Corbett and Liki's interview-based analysis of women's views on the ways in which their gender impacts their role as parliamentarians (2015). Multiple studies of women's parliamentary participation in specific country settings (particularly in Melanesia) have been undertaken, many by both successful and unsuccessful parliamentary candidates, including studies of: Papua New Guinea (Kidu and Setae 2002; Korare 2002; McLeod 2002; Sepoe 2002); the Solomon Islands (Billy 2002; Wood 2014); and Vanuatu (Donald, Strachan and Taleo 2002).

## Key obstacles

A number of obstacles confront Pacific Islands' women as both parliamentary candidates and representatives. Throughout the region, political leadership (within the parliamentary realm) has historically been a male domain, with women's formal right to political participation – as enshrined in the region's constitutions and international commitments – being at odds with their actual levels of participation in the political process. While social organisation and gendered cultural beliefs and practices are frequently referenced as significant challenges to women aspiring to and in parliament, so too, as outlined below, a range of practical obstacles such as the economic and educational disparities between men and women impact upon them.

## Social organisation and 'culture'

Despite large variation in social organisation across the region, patriarchal norms are among the most widely cited impediments to women's participation in national parliaments (Corbett 2015, 321; Huffer 2006, 3; PIFS 2013). Whether or not such norms preceded missionisation, colonisation and globalisation, or are in part a product of these processes – as they undoubtedly are – gender stereotypes influence all aspects of parliamentary participation. For those (usually male) critics of women's efforts to engage in political life, 'custom' provides a convenient rhetorical weapon against such involvement, which while easy to contest from the outside as fluid and changing (True et al. 2014; Huffer 2006) is presumably more difficult to counter as a local woman operating within a conservative patriarchal context.

Socio-cultural beliefs about women's roles and the behaviours expected of them influence women's choice to run for office, their experience of campaigning and if successful, their experience in office. Interestingly, while political leadership has historically been a male preserve, the interview based studies of both Wood (2014, 15) and McLeod (2002, 34) in the Solomon Islands and the PNG Highlands respectively found that both male and female voters perceived women as capable of parliamentary representation and expressed a general willingness to vote for them. Yet despite acknowledging women as capable, influential local figures such as big-men and chiefs rarely back women as candidates (Fraenkel 2006, 101; Wood 2014, 1) and women often lack speaking rights in the local assemblies where support is mobilised, making it difficult for women to even commence political candidacy. These local obstacles are mirrored in the formal realm, with political parties (which are weak throughout the region) being reluctant to name women candidates, forcing women to stand as independents or even form their own parties (Huffer 2006, 42-43).

Women candidacies are low when compared to men both at the national and local levels (Huffer 2006, 42). Given the range of obstacles confronting them, women are generally reluctant to run for office (Huffer 2006, 3) and often lack the confidence and practice in the public speaking needed for political campaigns in highly competitive environments (McLeod 2002, 34). In countries where all or some parliamentary seats are reserved for those with chiefly titles, women are further disadvantaged; such titles are more difficult for women to obtain than men (Huffer 2006, 69).

In Melanesia particularly, the campaign environment is overwhelmingly hostile to women, and domestic and sexual violence and the sexual commoditisation of women – both of which are strongly underpinned by patriarchal views of women as property – provide a strong deterrent to prospective candidates and a dire component of the campaign experience for those who choose to pursue it (Huffer 2006; McLeod 2002; PIFS 2013; Zubrinich 2014). True et al. (2014, 41) identify violence as a threat not only during campaigning but also within office, with women MPs in Fiji detained for days and subjected to threats of violence when civilian rebel forces invaded the country's parliament in 2000.

Both during campaigning and within office, women are held to different standards of behaviour and heavily scrutinised on the basis of those standards, which are highly conservative and moralistic. For example, during her campaign in the 2001 Solomon Islands elections, Afu Billy (2002), a single mother, reported facing a level of scrutiny of her marital status not experienced by her male competitors. More broadly, across the region, when in office women are frequently criticised for working against one another (a criticism that is rarely made of the many men who engage in fierce competition) and report having to work far harder than men to gain status (Corbett and Liki 2015, 336).

As elsewhere (de Silva de Alwis 2013), and as in other realms of public life, female members of parliament in the Pacific struggle with the double burden of managing their professional and private lives (Corbett and Liki 2015, 335). While working men also experience this tension, Pacific women are strongly associated with the domestic realm, with significant housekeeping, hosting and child raising responsibilities, regardless of their external obligations. Despite these tensions, however, which are experienced widely throughout the world (de Silva de Alwis 2013), former PNG Cabinet Minister Nahau Rooney (cited in Corbett and Liki 2015, 335) argues that the traditional family structures of the Pacific actually make it easier for female politicians to navigate their double burden because strong extended family networks can help them with their domestic and maternal duties. While Corbett and Liki (2015, 321) argue that some of the women they interviewed viewed the impact of factors such as family, religion and social status on their political careers as greater than the impact of gender, it is difficult to understand how these factors are not inherently gendered in and of themselves.

## Institutional and other factors

A number of other institutional and practical obstacles make it difficult for women to obtain and hold down political office. Throughout the region, campaigning is a financially intensive exercise, particularly in the 'big man' cultures of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands where political prominence is culturally gained through personal achievement, clan-based exchange and material wealth accumulation. Not only are the logistics of moving around geographically extensive electorates to garner support significant, but the distribution of cash and other forms of wealth is widespread. Cash donation to potential voters is commonplace, as is the distribution of food and other enticements (including women) and the bribing of prominent critics to silence opposition (Fraenkel 2006, 97). Put simply, money is integral to electoral success and women simply have less of it (McLeod 2002, 34; PIFS 2013; Wood 2014, 1; Zubrinich 2014).

Women's lesser access to wealth can be attributed to a number of factors, most notably their limited ownership of land, their lower degrees of literacy and their ghettoisation in low-income employment (Corbett and Liki 2015, 321; Huffer 2006, 3; True et al. 2014, 3). Although land is transferred through women in some areas, throughout the region land ownership is primarily patrilineal, which limits women's capacity to obtain land for the purposes of capital development and similarly, to sell it. As in other developing country contexts, women's work throughout the region is largely unpaid, and those who do paid work tend to work largely in unskilled and poorly paid occupations. In PNG, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, which still have low rates of literacy and unequal access to education for girls and women, education deficits not only limit women's economic potential, but also marginalise them from the political process more broadly.

## Factors underpinning success and tangible outcomes

Despite the overwhelming obstacles faced by women aspiring to political office in the Pacific, in most Pacific countries a handful of women have successfully entered the realm of formal national politics. Given the limited number of women in parliament, however, little research on the factors underpinning their success and the tangible outcomes of their representation has been undertaken, the sole exception being Corbett and Liki's examination of the experiences of women parliamentarians (2015). Of the limited analysis available, it appears that many successful women hail from political families (Corbett 2015, 328), and/or are the wives or daughters of prominent male chiefs, foreign nationals or businessmen (Fraenkel 2006, 7). For example, the Pacific's longest serving female MP, Samoa's Fiamē Naomi Mataa'fa, is the daughter of that country's first Prime Minister (Corbett and Liki 2015, 328), and former PNG MP Lady Carol Kidu (a foreigner by birth) was married to the Chief Justice. Such connections may impact on women's success for two primary reasons: access to wealth (and associated benefits such as education) and access to the powerful networks required to mobilise support.

In examining personal histories, Corbett and Liki (2015, 326) also found that, consistent with global trends, women entering politics tended to be older than men and typically hailed from a civil service background (Corbett and Liki 2015, 329). Korare (2002, 41) notes that in addition to having pursued higher education, some women parliamentarians in Papua New Guinea believe that their participation in women's fellowship had been central to their advancement as leaders within their communities. It had provided them not only with personal confidence but also with status in their communities.

Due to their limited numbers, it is unsurprising that there is almost no comparative research available on the actual impacts of women's participation in parliamentary decision-making in the Pacific. In New Caledonia, women's increased political participation has enabled them to mobilise resources to fund agencies specifically devoted to women's well-being (True et al. 2014). In Papua New Guinea, former member of parliament Dame Carol Kidu achieved an amendment to the Village Court Act, making it mandatory for each village court to include at least one female village magistrate. She was also instrumental in amending legislation on child sexual abuse and rape (Kidu 2000). Further information on individual women's impacts is available in personal narratives, such as that written by Dame Carol Kidu (2002). While these publications are considered beyond the scope of this study, they may provide fruitful sources for future research on the impacts of women's participation in parliament.

## Donor and policy approaches

Against the backdrop of Pacific Islands commitments to CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, as recently reinvigorated through the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (2012), a wide array of both locally and donor-driven initiatives has been implemented over the years in an effort to increase women's representation in Pacific Islands' parliaments. Of these initiatives, positive discrimination measures such as quotas and reserved seats have received the most scholarly attention (Fraenkel 2006; True et al. 2014; PIFS 2013; Wood 2014); there has been limited analysis of candidate training (Wood 2014) and networking initiatives (although in keeping with donor requirements, evaluations of such support have inevitably been undertaken and are collecting dust on bureaucrats' shelves). Proactively, in 2006 the Pacific Islands Forum commissioned research into the impact of electoral reform on women's representation in Pacific parliaments (Fraenkel 2006), although no specific action has been taken in response to the report's findings.

## Positive discrimination

Re-emphasising the Beijing Platform for Action's call for the use of special temporary measures to increase women's parliamentary representation, the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (2012) specifically committed to political party reforms and the establishment of reserved seats for women. Despite widespread critiques of temporary measures (see for example Krook 2008), there is solid evidence that quotas and reserved seats successfully enable the development of critical mass. Globally, 32 of the 39 single or lower house chambers with more than 30% women in parliament have set some form of temporary special measure or quota. Conversely, in most of the 38 single or lower houses with less than 10% women, no quota or target has been established (UN 2015a).

Where a strong tradition of party politics is in place, quotas are a particularly useful means of establishing critical mass. Within the Pacific, in 2001 the region's Francophone territories (New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna) adopted parity provisions requiring political parties to include 50% women on their candidate lists (Fraenkel 2006, 83). In New Caledonia, the application of these provisions has resulted in women's political representation rising from 17% to 42% in the national congress, while in French Polynesia women's representation has risen from 12% to 48% (True et al. 2014, 33).

Yet in the absence of a strong party tradition – as is the case throughout most of the Pacific – reserved seats are more likely than party quotas to generate substantial increases in women's representation (Fraenkel 2006, 88). Papua New Guinea's Autonomous Region of Bougainville, which is predominantly matrilineal, was the first territory in the Pacific to establish reserved seats for women, demonstrating the opportunities for social change presented during post-conflict reconstruction. Three seats, one for each of the island's regions, are allocated to women. However, the International Election Observer team that visited Bougainville in 2005 critically noted that no women contested Bougainville's open seats (Fraenkel 2006, 91). Following Bougainville's lead, in 2013 a bill was passed in Samoa reserving five floating seats for women which will be put to test during the next election, scheduled for 2016 (Baker 2014).

Unfortunately the efforts of other Pacific Islands to introduce reserved seats for women have been less successful. In Papua New Guinea, a campaign led by then MP Dame Carol Kidu to establish 22 reserved seats for women in Papua New Guinea's 111 member assembly failed in parliament in 2012. Interestingly, later that year, the highest ever number of female MPs was elected to parliament, yet all three women stated that they wouldn't renew the call for reserved seats for women, arguing that women and men should compete alongside one another (Baker 2014). Although not driven from within parliament, repeated efforts by the Solomon Islands' Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs to develop a bill establishing 10 seats for women in Solomon Islands' 50 seat assembly have also failed (Wood 2014).

### **Candidate training, advocacy and networking**

To complement efforts to facilitate women's entry to politics through special temporary measures, international donors and NGOs have supported the efforts of local women to advocate for change and promote networks. So too, significant investment has been made in the training of women candidates. While analyses of such training no doubt exist, the training of female candidates in the Pacific has not received scholarly attention beyond Wood's (2014) comment that 'training, such as that provided by the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) is not in and of itself likely to improve the number or quality of women in politics'. Broader comments about the role of training in capacity development, however, no doubt apply to the training of political candidates. McLeod (2009) observes that training alone is unlikely to affect change, that it must be tailored to the local context, and that training is only useful if coordinated with a broader suite of initiatives aimed at facilitating individual, institutional and social change.

In keeping with de Silva de Alwis' (2013, 117) assertion that 'one of the critical reasons for the rise in women's parliamentary representation is the impact of women networking both inside and outside political parties', knowledge sharing and networking have been among the key activities supported by donors in the region. These include, for example, the UNDP sponsored Pacific Women in Politics virtual network ([www.pacwip.org](http://www.pacwip.org)) and country specific Women in Politics groups. So too, National Councils of Women throughout the region have been key advocates for women's involvement in politics.

As the primary bilateral donor in the region, the Australian Government has recently increased its commitment to the promotion of gender equality in the region. It established the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative in 2012, at that time allocating \$320 million over ten years (2012-2022) to the program. At the time of writing, the Australian government remains committed to the program and to providing close to this level of funding. One of the initiative's many objectives is increasing the number and effectiveness of women in decision-making roles (at both the national and local levels) across the Pacific. A core activity in support of this objective is the Australia-Pacific Women Parliamentarians Partnership Program, involving activities such as parliamentary exchanges, mentoring, parliamentary skills scholarships and workshops to build the capacity of parliamentary staff. At the country level, activities delivered through the CDI in PNG have included a handbook for intending candidates and phone-based advisory support for candidates (Australian Government 2015).

# 4.0

## Women and public administration

### Global findings

Despite the fact that the State is the largest or the single most important employer in almost all countries (ILO 2014), women's participation in public administration is less well understood internationally than their participation in national politics and remains significantly under-researched (Dasandi 2014). Like political participation, however, women's equal participation in public administration and decision-making is a basic human right. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that:

- everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives; and
- everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

In addition to women's right to equal participation in public service, development policy makers argue that women's equal participation in public service is both a means of promoting responsive and effective governance and of promoting public policy attention to the gender-specific needs of women and girls (UNDP 2014b, 8). Whether or not women's participation in public service actually achieves these objectives, however, remains poorly understood (Dasandi 2014, 19).

Due to the absence of regular and systematic global data collection on women's involvement in public administration, there is limited comparative scholarship upon which to draw, the most notable exception being the UNDP's Global Initiative on Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA) which commissioned the 2014 Global Report on Gender Equality in Public Administration. Although the report includes no Pacific Islands countries among the 13 in-depth case studies upon which it is based, its findings provide an international comparative framework within which our understanding of Pacific women's participation in public administration can be situated.

Unsurprisingly, the report concluded that in both developed and developing country contexts, women remain under-represented in the top levels of public administration despite the encouraging absolute numbers of women in public service (UNDP 2014b, 12). For example, Ernst and Young's Worldwide Index of Women as Public Sector Leaders found that while women account for around 48% of the overall public sector workforce in major G20 economies, they occupy less than 20% of public sector leadership roles. Moreover, in both developed and developing country contexts, women's involvement in public service tends to be occupationally segregated. Women work primarily in feminised sectors such as health, education and social services, and little (if at all) in realms such as security, finance and planning (UNDP 2014b, 12-14).

GEPA identified a number of barriers to women's equal participation in public administration. These include, most notably:

- gaps in adoption and implementation of enabling legal and policy frameworks; discriminatory and unsupportive organisational cultures within public administration;
- gaps in data and analysis; and
- weak gender mainstreaming in public administration reform (UNDP 2014b, 18-25).

Interestingly, the report found that lack of education was not an obvious explanation for the relative absence of women in senior roles, although women's responsibilities as primary carers clearly impacted upon their career choices and hence promotion (UNDP 2014b, 17). Disappointingly, despite significant donor engagement in post-conflict reconstruction, women continue to face significant barriers to participation in post-conflict bureaucracies (UNDP 2014b, 25-27).

Promising policy and programming approaches identified by the report included:

- legislative and policy frameworks that ensure women's equal participation (including Constitutions, national laws and policies, laws and policies providing for temporary special measures and laws and policies to combat sexual harassment);
- enabling environments for institutional and cultural change (including research, data and gender analysis to allow for evidence-based analysis, gender-sensitive recruitment, retention and promotion practices, work-life and parental leave policies);
- capacity building and professional development (including access to training and affirmative action measures to fast-track women into decision-making positions, incentives for institutional change and accountability mechanisms, networking and mentoring) (UNDP 2014b, 29-48).

On the basis of these findings, GEPA recommends that efforts to promote women's participation in public service best include a combination of strategies. They should support constitutional, legislative and policy frameworks; include concrete measures to create enabling and supportive institutional and organisational cultures within public administration; and enhance synergies between broader efforts to advance gender equality (UNDP 2014b, 49).

## Pacific state of play

Consistent with the global emphasis on women's participation in politics, analysis of women's participation in realms other than politics – such as the public service – in the Pacific has been minimal to date. Only two key published studies are available, namely Liki's (2010) study of women in the Solomon Islands' public service and Zubrinich and Haley's (2009) multi-country research examining the experiences of women in the public sector across the Pacific. Both studies used survey and interview methodologies, with comparable samples of between 30 and 50 women. Analyses of women's participation in specific public sectors have been undertaken within the context of several aid programs. However, these are considered beyond the scope of this paper.

In keeping with Huffer's (2006, 25) general observation that increasing numbers of women are entering the legal profession in the region, and gradually holding positions as magistrates and judges, Liki (2010, 7) notes that in the Solomon Islands there has been a sharp increase in the number of women appointed to mid-level positions within the public service, although men continue to dominate both middle and senior management. Similar increases are known to have occurred elsewhere, for example in Papua New Guinea, where women's participation in the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary has increased from 5% in 2005 to nearly 13% in 2015 and there have been significant increases in the numbers of women Village Court Magistrates. Notable improvements to women's representation in senior ranks have also occurred, including for example the long-term acting appointment of a woman at the rank of Assistant Commissioner.

## Key obstacles

Broadly speaking, women seeking to enter and progress through the public service face a number of similar challenges to those attempting to gain and maintain political office. Regardless of the realm in which they work, professional women throughout the Pacific struggle with the 'double burden' of balancing work and family, with many of the women interviewed by Zubrinich and Haley (2009, 21) stating that they felt like they needed to overcompensate for working outside of the home. Like their counterparts attempting to enter parliament, women in the public service fear for their physical safety, both in public when travelling to and from work, and in their homes, where they are required to manage the scrutiny of husbands and boyfriends who are uncomfortable with them working with other men (Ibid. 15, 20). Similarly, women report frustration with constant harassment by the wives and girlfriends of male colleagues, who question their relationships and persistently imply the existence of sexual relations, particularly in Melanesia (Ibid. 15). Sexual harassment is commonplace, with internal mechanisms intended to deal with such matters being widely viewed as inadequate (Ibid. 16).

Education is a continuing obstacle to women's general participation in the public service, with barriers limiting women's access to higher education posing a particular challenge to those wishing to progress to middle and senior management roles. Across the region, women claim that despite stringent donor controls on the distribution of scholarships, at the local level male superiors thwart women's access to such opportunities by failing to provide them with information and not approving their release to undertake further study (Zubrinich and Haley 2009, 9). For women in hierarchical societies, such as those in Polynesia, status and class are enduring barriers, particularly for low status women attempting to obtain promotion (Ibid. 9).

## Factors underpinning success and tangible outcomes

The limited scholarship available on women's participation in Pacific Island public administration (Liki 2010; Zubrinich and Haley 2009) suggests that formal higher education, typically obtained through overseas scholarships, is the factor exerting most influence on the career trajectories of female public servants in the region. Of the 40 women surveyed by Zubrinich and Haley (2009, 10-11), 34 had university degrees and 20 had post graduate qualifications; 36 had held overseas scholarships and/or had been sponsored to attend international workshops and courses.

In the Solomon Islands, Liki (2010, 1, 15) credits affirmative action campaigns with shifting attitudes within the public service towards women, noting that she found significant male acceptance of and support for women in the public service and public awareness of the importance of women's leadership in all realms of public life. The senior women with whom Zubrinich and Haley (2009) spoke attributed their success to education and the support of bosses, but also to hard work, perseverance, supportive families and their Christian faith, consistent with the high value placed by Melanesians on both kinship and the church.

## Donor and policy approaches

Published literature does little to shed light on the vast range of donor activities and policy approaches intended to promote the participation of women in Pacific Island public administration. As highlighted in the work of Zubrinich and Haley (2009), higher education scholarships have had a positive impact on the career trajectories of Pacific Island women working in the public service, and extensive efforts have been made to support women's networks, particularly sectoral networks, and mentoring programs. Specific examples highlighted in published works include the Solomon Islands' Professional Women in Uniform (PWU) network and the Solomon Islands' Women in Shared Decision Making group, which consulted MPs and others to raise the issue of women's representation in parliament (Liki 2010).

Against this backdrop, however, virtually all institutional strengthening exercises (such as capacity development programs) undertaken by Australia within the region involve specific efforts to promote the role of women in Pacific Island government agencies. Often with the support of dedicated gender advisers, such programs typically seek to promote the role of women through a combination of activities including policy reform to create enabling institutional environments (such as family friendly HR policies, merit based recruitment and promotion policies), training to upskill and empower women and networking programs aimed at facilitating information exchange and the creation of critical mass.

As noted in the introduction, gender analyses of specific donor-funded programs have not been systematically canvassed in this review, largely on account of their varied quality, but also due to their limited accessibility. It is worth noting, however, a number of observations that are commonly contained in such analyses. Program designs are not uniformly informed by gender analyses; despite the widespread move towards gender mainstreaming, gender is treated as a stand-alone issue; increased participation of women is treated as the ultimate goal, resulting in an absence of data on the impacts of such increases; gender is inadequately captured within monitoring and evaluation frameworks; and program designs fail to adequately consider the 'do no harm' ramifications of promoting women's increased participation in state institutions, often within highly patriarchal societies.

A primary criticism of such analyses is that even when attempts are made to demonstrate the tangible impacts of initiatives such as 'increasing women's participation' in a specific government agency, the evidence proffered is typically anecdotal and unsubstantiated. A thorough reading of this 'grey literature', however, may provide a useful stimulus for the more systematic testing of assumptions underpinning program objectives. For example, anecdotal evidence that more women in police family and sexual violence units results in increased reporting and better outcomes for women could be systematically scrutinised to examine whether this is true. This may lead to improvements to donor practice over time.

# 5.0

## Women and civil society

### Global findings

Women's participation and leadership in civil society contexts constitutes valid political action in itself and is valuable preparation for participation in formal political institutions, including parliament. Many notable men, such as United States President Barack Obama (2004), honed their political skills as community organisers. For women in particular, the civil society space is one in which their participation is far less contested than their participation in the masculine realm of formal institutional politics. For women in developing countries, such as those of the Pacific, where formal institutions are weak and the state has limited legitimacy, civil society organisations provide women with real opportunities to influence the delivery of services and advocate for government attention to issues of concern to them. In conflict and post-conflict settings, women have played prominent roles as brokers of peace, proactively forming coalitions that transcend ethnic and linguistic boundaries to bring an end to hostilities and contribute to lasting peace and rebuilding (see for example Rehn and Sirleaf 2002).

The role of women in peace processes has received significant international attention in recent decades. It gained particular prominence in 2000 upon the passing of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security, which affirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and in post-conflict reconstruction (UN 2000). Subsequent resolutions on women peace and security (1820 of 2008; 1888 of 2009; 1889 of 2009; 1960 of 2010; 2106 of 2013; and, 2122 of 2013) further recognise the specific impacts of conflict on women and reiterate the need for women's equal participation in all phases of the peacebuilding process.

While UNSCR 1325 has undoubtedly galvanised global attention towards women's involvement in peacebuilding, Charlesworth (2008) posits that it is underpinned by the assumption that women are inherently more 'peaceful' than men, in keeping with those who argue a biological basis for sex differences in political behaviour (see for example Fukuyama 1998 and Ruddick 1989). This, she and others argue, frames women's involvement in peace processes on the basis of affinity rather than equality, limiting their roles to 'women's work' and undermining their desire to be taken seriously as political players (Bates 2000; Charlesworth 2008; Corrin 2008). This is reflected in their limited involvement in formal peace processes (Charlesworth et al. 2000). For example, while noting their significant involvement in informal peace protests and inter-group dialogue, Porter (2003, 248-9) laments women's overwhelming absence from formal peace processes, highlighting their total exclusion from peace negotiations in Bosnia and Sierra Leone, and very limited participation in the formal processes following conflicts in Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Tajikistan and Burundi. Yet Bates (2000) cautions against viewing women's peace activism through 'bottom-up' community processes solely as the result of obstacles to their access to formal political processes and official peace negotiations, noting that brokering peace requires action at all levels of society.

Arguments about the importance of women's involvement in formal peace negotiations mirror those about their involvement in parliament: it is integral for the purposes of representative democracy; crucial for inclusive social justice; and, makes a difference to the sorts of issues raised, with women being more inclined to prioritise health, education and other human welfare considerations (Porter 2003, 249; de Silva de Alwis 2013, 101). Yet, women's efforts to participate in formal peace processes, like their efforts to enter parliament, are stymied by a range of obstacles including but not limited to stereotypical attitudes about men's and women's roles, men's reluctance to share power, inadequate education and training, competing work and family responsibilities, and a lack of personal confidence in leadership (Porter 2003, 248, 251). To this end, while women's involvement in civil society organisations may cultivate transferable political and leadership skills, in addition to confidence and strong networks, women are rarely afforded the opportunity to utilise these experiences within formal peacebuilding processes.

### Pacific state of play

Although women are actively engaged in church groups throughout the Pacific, non-religious civil society organisations are unevenly distributed across the region, being rich and vibrant in Fiji and yet less prevalent in most other Pacific Island countries. Reflecting their important role as public actors within the civil society sphere, women's involvement in non-government organisations and informal peacebuilding initiatives has been given comparatively significant academic consideration (in relation to their involvement in parliament and the bureaucracy), including by Pacific Islanders. Most notably, a 2003 edition of the journal *Oceania* features a collection of articles exploring women's organisations in the Pacific, and a 2000 edition of the *Development Studies Bulletin* includes multiple articles on

women's involvement in peacebuilding by indigenous scholars (see for example Hakena 2000; Paina 2000; Pollard 2000; Saovana-Spriggs 2000). More recently, both Charlesworth (2008) and George (2011; 2014) have undertaken article-length cross-country analyses of women's involvement in peacebuilding and there are also a number of country specific analyses of women's peacebuilding activities (Corrin 2008; Hermkens 2011; Monson 2013).

Women's collective action in the Pacific is widely historicised as an artefact of women's church groups (Dickson-Waiko 2003; Douglas 2003; Jolly 2003; McDougall 2003; Pollard 2003; Scheyvens 2003), which were systematically established throughout the region from World War II onwards (Douglas 2003). Despite their early focus upon spiritual growth and domestic skills (such as sewing and cooking), external (Corrin 2008, 174; Douglas 2002, 10) and internal (Pollard 2003) observers alike opine that throughout the Pacific, women's church groups provided women with new opportunities for social cooperation, status advancement and the exercise of influence, as well with transferable skills such as budgeting, agenda-setting, minute-taking and constituent engagement (McDougall 2003, 69, 73). Put simply, women's church groups have provided a safe 'leadership training ground' for women throughout the region (Douglas 2002; Huffer 2006, 25; Pollard 2003; Strachan and Dalesa 2003). Women's church groups have increasingly performed both consciousness-raising and activist roles, discussing and drawing community and state attention to a number of issues affecting them such as domestic violence, reproductive health and literacy (Dickson-Waiko 2003).

Today, women's church groups form the cornerstone of women's civil society participation, with vast networks connecting regional, national, provincial (or island) and local groups, often with reference to broader global agendas. Literally thousands of women's church groups operate within each Pacific Island country, many in association with the national councils of women, which were established throughout the region to enable women to provide governments with a consolidated view of issues affecting women. Women also participate in a range of interest groups, ranging from community organisations dedicated to addressing family and sexual violence, through to occupationally specific women's groups that promote the progression of women in particular professions.

As highlighted by George (2014, 2011), women have used women's organisations as a powerful avenue for pursuing social and political change across the region. Women's groups played an instrumental role in defending the 1997 constitution and democracy in Fiji (Jalal 2002, 16), and in many states such as Fiji, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea they have successfully lobbied for changes to legislation on family and sexual violence (Kidu 2002). Women have also played integral roles in bringing about peace during times of conflict, most notably in Bougainville (Charlesworth 2008; George 2014; Hakena 2000; Hermkens 2011; Saovana-Spriggs 2003) and the Solomon Islands (Charlesworth 2008; Corrin 2008; George 2014; McDougall 2003; Monson 2003; Pollard 2000), but also on an ongoing basis in the conflict-riddled highlands of Papua New Guinea (Garap 2004; Rumsey 2000).

Women's role in quelling conflict in Bougainville and the Solomon Islands has received significant attention. In the case of Bougainville, nearly ten years of bloody conflict (1989-1998) between Papua New Guinea and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) resulted in thousands of deaths (estimated between 15,000 and 20,000) and mass internal displacement (Dinnen, Porter and Sage 2011). Throughout the conflict, women, who formally organised themselves into an island-wide organisation known as Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom, frequently drew upon their 'traditional position of power' to resolve conflict, using techniques ranging from simply standing between warring parties through to facilitating negotiations between groups of armed men (Saovana-Spriggs, 2003, 206-7). So too, in the neighbouring Solomon Islands, where a civil war waged primarily between the people of Guadalcanal (the island on which the capital is situated) and Malaitan settlers continued from 1998 to 2003, women drew upon cultural images of their role as peacekeepers to stop conflict (Corrin 2008; Paina 2000; Pollard and Liloqula 2000; Monson 2013). Beginning with ad hoc interventions such as offering shell money to militants, in 2000 a group of women in Honiara issued a Women's Communique on Peace, soon after which organised groups evolved, most notably Women for Peace. Pleading for an end to the fighting on radio and in the newspaper, Women for Peace held prayer meetings with militants and made representations to a number of Government officials including the Prime Minister, the Governor General and police (Corrin 2008, 170; McDougall 2003, 62; Monson 2013).

Yet, while women's conflict resolution role in Bougainville translated into involvement in formal peace negotiations and discussions about the future of the island, in the Solomon Islands women were conspicuously absent from the formal peace negotiations that brought an end to conflict in their country (Charlesworth 2008, 357; Peters 2011). Charlesworth (2008, 353-4) notes that 'despite the hope that the active roles played by women during the conflict on Bougainville might change ideas about women's role in public life, Bougainville women have not attained the public power that they would like'. Their involvement in formal processes, however, laid the foundations for their participation in the formal political realm, with the Constitution of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville providing for three reserved seats for women in Bougainville's parliament (Dinnen, Porter and Sage 2011). Next door in the Solomon Islands, while women's role in peace-making gave them unprecedented access to involvement in public life, with the cessation of conflict came a return to the status quo. Limited inroads had been made into 'embedded culture[s] of patriarchy' (Corrin 2008, 191).

## Key obstacles

Given their vibrant role in civil society, limited analysis of barriers to women's participation in this realm has been undertaken. Their involvement in civil society organisations is less openly contested than their involvement in political institutions, despite the existence of cultural norms in some countries which limit women's rights to speak in public (Fraenkel 2006). Needless to say, however, the more contentious the issues raised by women in such forums, the greater the resistance by others – typically men – often on the grounds of 'custom' and 'tradition' (Paina 2000, 47). So too, in considering women's involvement in church organisations, McDougall (2003, 68-9) notes that men contest women's participation on the basis that it diverts their attention from family duties such as cooking and child minding. While not explicitly considered in existing literature, one might assume that the obstacles to women's participation in formal peace processes are similar to those faced by women seeking to enter parliament, given that formal peace processes are indeed politicised (and hence masculinised) institutional processes. This is an important gap in the literature.

## Factors underpinning success and tangible outcomes

Women's successful participation in both civil society organisations and informal peace negotiations can be attributed to a number of factors. Tangible outcomes such as legislative change and the cessation of violence have been outlined in previous sections. Within the context of civil society organisations, most evidently church organisations, women have quietly pursued what might be considered feminist agendas by challenging the status quo in quiet rather than overt ways so as not to alienate those resisting change (Monson 2013; Paina 2000). They have also pragmatically linked their concerns to global discourses, legitimating their right to draw attention to specific issues, while simultaneously broadening the range of issues under consideration (George 2014; Monson 2013).

Of all arenas in which they participate, peace-making and peace-building is perhaps that in which direct appeals to 'custom' and 'tradition', intertwined with Christianity, have most clearly underpinned their success. In Bougainville and the Solomon Islands, both of which have matrilineal traditions pertaining to the control of land and other resources, the role of women – not only as peace-builders – in public life is firmly entrenched in cultural practice (Hakena 2000, 18; Monson 2013; Saovana-Spriggs 2003, 204). More specifically, women have long played important roles in conflict resolution, ranging from simply standing between warring parties to quell fighting (the power residing within women's sacred and 'polluting' bodies), through to facilitating elaborate food and gift exchanges to bring about peace (Paina 2000).

While acknowledging the potential of maternal imagery to perpetuate inequality (see for example Charlesworth 2008) in both the Bougainville and Solomon Islands conflicts, women used metaphors of themselves as mothers of land and nation to great effect. As argued by Monson (2013): 'Far from confining themselves to the 'private' or 'domestic' sphere, Women for Peace espoused the idea that their cultural and moral authority as 'mothers' not only allowed but required their involvement in highly public, formal peace-building activities.' That is, it expanded rather than restricted their public roles.

## Donor and policy approaches

Given the strength of civil society in some places and the weakness of many states in the Pacific, donors have invested heavily in non-government organisations throughout the region, providing both core funding (for ongoing operations) and funding for specific initiatives and programs. As significant participants in civil society, women have been major beneficiaries of this support, which has been in large part focused on key issues for women such as family and sexual violence, HIV education and prevention, and maternal health. The focus of donors has been on the outputs of non-government organisations rather than on women's participation in them. However, the provision of funding to keep such organisations viable and active has strengthened the existence of a realm in which women are able to participate and make valuable contributions to social, political and economic life.

In keeping with their obligations under UNSCR 1325, donors have played an active role in supporting Pacific Islands' efforts to promote the role of women in peacebuilding. In 2004, the UN (then UNIFEM) supported significant research into the ways in which UNSCR 1325 could be implemented in Vanuatu (McLeod 2004) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat has subsequently supported the development of a regional action plan addressing the requirements of the resolution.

Australia, the primary bilateral donor in the region, developed a UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan in 2012. Australian Government agencies such as the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Defence Force have subsequently developed internal policies articulating the ways in which their activities will support the role of women in peacekeeping in all operations. Moreover, unlike the Pacific Islands regional action plan (George 2014), Australia's national action plan extends to cover situations other than violent conflict, providing impetus and legitimacy for all initiatives aimed at promoting the safety and security of women. This includes post-conflict capacity development initiatives, many of which are in the Pacific.

# 6.0

## Evidence gaps and conclusion

The absence of seminal book-length treatments of women's leadership in the Pacific highlights the need for further research, particularly comparative. Although there is a reasonable body of comparative work on Pacific women's parliamentary participation (enabled by the existence of national-level data), there is a dearth of comparative analysis of Pacific women's participation in public administration and a limited number of cross-country examinations of women's involvement in peacebuilding. This is probably underpinned by a number of factors, most notably the absence of reliable data on women's participation in public administration and the strong tradition of anthropological and area studies work in the Pacific, which tends to privilege in-depth analysis of single cultural groupings over comparative work. Of those cultural groupings, particular attention has been paid to women's leadership in Melanesia, against the limited attention paid to Polynesia and Micronesia. Although much work on women's leadership in the three realms examined in this paper (parliament, public administration, civil society) specifically intends to inform policy and practice, there is a notable absence of empirical evidence on the efficacy of the many existing efforts to support women's leadership.

In reviewing the literature, further specific evidence gaps were identified in each realm.

### Women and Pacific parliaments

Despite significant donor efforts to support women's political participation, including initiatives to support women's political campaigns and to support them when in office, there is limited evidence about the factors underpinning women's successful entry into parliament. That which exists (such as studies that show successful women are typically related or married to prominent persons) is of little utility to policy makers. For those wishing to support women's increased involvement in Pacific parliaments, there is an absence of guidance on what to do and how to do it well.

Given their limited representation, it is unsurprising that the impacts of women's political participation are not well documented. Although True et al. (2014) have commented on the different impacts that the introduction of parity laws has had in two of the Pacific's French territories, there is an overall lack of attention to the outcomes of women's parliamentary representation. We therefore do not know if Pacific women, in practice, legislate differently to men, nor do we know how (or whether) they mobilise support for attention to issues of specific concern to women while in parliament.

### Women and public administration in the Pacific

The field of women in Pacific public administration is ripe for further investigation and analysis, particularly of a comparative nature. The two small article-length studies (Haley and Zubrinich 2009; Liki 2010) of women and public administration in the region provide useful insights into the obstacles women face when working within the system and of relevance to donors, into the utility of different approaches to supporting them. This research suggests that scholarships have proven useful. It is also suggested that mentoring is of value, but for those wishing to support women civil servants through mentoring and networking initiatives there is no guidance on what makes such programs useful. Should they be regional or national? Are the experiences of people from beyond the Pacific relevant enough to be meaningful? Should mentoring be provided to women only by women?

There is little doubt that the knowledge base on women in public administration in the Pacific is far deeper than that evidenced by the published literature. Donors, and particularly the Australian Government, have long supported both agency specific and sectoral institutional strengthening programs throughout the region. Since the late 1990s these have typically included efforts to 'mainstream' gender and so, within the context of those programs, gender analyses have been undertaken. They provide substantial insights into the issues affecting women in specific government agencies, and varied programming choices have been made to address identified issues. However, there remains an absence of publicly available comparisons of efforts to support women in government across the region and a disconnect between the scholarly literature and practitioner knowledge base.

## Women and civil society in the Pacific

There is a vibrant, largely indigenous, literature on women's involvement in civil society in the Pacific, including on their involvement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This literature demonstrates the depth of women's participation in civil society and the comparative ease with which they are able to gain prominence as leaders within the less male dominated non-state realm. However, despite claims that civil society provides a useful stepping stone for women who wish to participate in other realms, links between women's involvement in civil society and state institutions remain under-explored, including with reference to peacebuilding.

Although the different levels of women's participation in formal peacebuilding processes in Bougainville and the Solomon Islands has been noted, there has been limited scrutiny of the reasons underpinning their different levels of involvement in the two processes, both of which featured significant Australian assistance, occurring within a short time-frame. Such insights would be of use to those interested in ensuring the involvement of Pacific women in future peacebuilding processes.

## Conclusion

In considering the published literature on Pacific women's leadership within three distinct contexts, namely parliament, public administration and civil society (with a particular emphasis on peacebuilding), significant consistencies between the Pacific experience and those of other developing nations have been revealed.

First, the greater attention paid to women's involvement in Pacific national parliaments, as opposed to public administration, is in keeping with global trends. It largely reflects the comparatively greater amount of data available on women's parliamentary participation (see also Dasandi 2014: 18-19). The nature of obstacles facing Pacific women seeking to enter the realm of formal politics is similar to that experienced by women elsewhere, although we should note that gender relations are always culturally contingent and thus expressed differently in different country contexts. While further analysis would be required to substantiate posited differences between the experiences of Pacific women and women in comparable contexts, the impact of the 'double burden' of family and work appears less prevalent in the literature on Pacific women's political participation than it does elsewhere. This perhaps reflects the extensive social support women receive from extended kin (albeit counteracted by extensive social obligations).

Second, despite the dearth of literature on women's participation in public administration in the Pacific, like women elsewhere, Pacific women are well represented overall in public service. They work particularly in feminised sectors such as health and education, but are under-represented in middle to senior management roles. Little more can be said of their experiences in comparison to women elsewhere (due to the absence of analysis). However, in Melanesia in particular, it appears that long traditions of sex segregation still have a major impact on women's experiences of working outside the home, resulting not only in jealousy-motivated family violence but also in difficulties dealing with the wives and girlfriends of male colleagues. For the donor wishing to support women's advancement and empowerment, often through travel to training and networking events, this poses real challenges in terms of minimising the potential harm that may arise from such support.

Third, Pacific women's involvement in informal peacebuilding activities has achieved significant short term dividends, including the cessation of violence. However, it has not uniformly resulted in their subsequent participation in formal peacebuilding processes. While their informal initiative has been widely legitimated on the basis of 'tradition', so too it can be assumed that their exclusion from formal processes is similarly grounded in tradition (albeit contemporary), with the state political realm being deemed to belong to men. Whether or not the conscious yoking of women to their role as mothers has limited women's involvement to 'feminised' processes, as posited by some (For instance Charlesworth 2008; Corrin 2008), remains untested. What is known, however, is that such rhetoric holds significant cultural credence throughout the Pacific and has enabled women to play a key role in putting an end to both temporary and ongoing disputes, undoubtedly saving many lives in the process.

It is of grave concern that Pacific Island countries continue to have the lowest levels of women's representation in national parliaments in the world. In considering Pacific women's vibrant participation in civil society, including informal peacebuilding, one might ask whether or not their successes in this realm could be replicated in the more formal realms of parliament and the bureaucracy. Over time, many have suggested that the transferable skills developed by women in civil society would facilitate their entry into these realms. Some argue that this has not yet been the case (Charlesworth 2008), but the limited available data on women parliamentarians suggests that civil society experience was indeed an important precursor of success. This is in large part due to the extensive networks cultivated through civil society involvement, and indeed the majority of women in parliament previously worked in public administration.

These findings suggest a number of ways forward, including that:

- a comparative analysis of agency and sector gender analyses across the region (held largely by donors) be undertaken to increase understanding of women in Pacific public administration;
- indigenous women's biographical accounts of leadership be examined to extract information on the purported impacts of their participation in various realms;
- despite great variation in quality, a review of global evaluations of donor funded programs with explicit gender empowerment objectives be undertaken in order to extract lessons learned about best practice in promoting women's leadership; and
- research be undertaken into the factors underpinning the significant disjunction between women's high participation in informal peacebuilding and low participation in formal peacebuilding processes.

For policy makers and practitioners, promoting women's leadership in the Pacific is bound to be a long-term journey, with short-term gains being made primarily at the individual rather than the institutional level. Challenges of both structure and agency abound. Both are deeply embedded in local cultural contexts, many of which are patriarchal. When initiatives to empower individual women (such as training and tertiary education) move at a faster pace than institutional and cultural change, questions about minimising the unintended harms of donor-funded programs come to the fore: enthusiastic women may return to their work places or communities only to face increased discrimination and, in the worst cases, physical violence. We therefore need to listen to local women. While they largely embrace the global agenda of women's empowerment, their views about how empowerment can be achieved often differ greatly to those of donors.

Finally, while women's increased participation in parliament, the bureaucracy and civil society is a right in itself, neither aid recipients nor donors promote women's empowerment without expectation of positive change (beyond mere increases in numbers). Yet the limited information on the actual impacts of women's participation in various realms is stark. All relevant donor-funded programs in the region could clearly state the expected outcomes of women's increased participation in various realms, even if the outcomes are not achievable within limited timeframes. The programs could establish monitoring and evaluation systems capable of assessing the degree to which such outcomes are achieved. This would help us to understand the true impact of Pacific women's leadership and to refine how the donor community supports their leadership journeys.

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