Pacific Regional Women in Politics (WIP) Project

Women’s political empowerment and equal access to leadership positions at all levels are fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a fairer world. With limited growth in women’s representation, advancement of gender equality and the success of the SDGs are jeopardized.

Over the last two decades, the rate of women’s representation in national parliaments globally has incrementally increased from 11.8 percent in 1998 to 17.8 percent in 2008 to 23.8 percent in 2018.

However, the Pacific Island countries as a region has the lowest number of female parliamentarians in the world. There are only 42 women MPs (7.5%) out of 559 MPs altogether who are currently sitting in national legislatures.

The Pacific region has found it challenging to reach targets of even 10 per cent women’s representation. Only in January 2016 was the first woman elected President of a Pacific country, Dr Hilda Heine in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). However, where women are elected in the Pacific, they are more likely than men to be appointed to senior political leadership – of the 42 women MPs in the region, 35% are in senior positions in six countries: 1 President, 1 Deputy Prime Minister, 1 Leader of the Opposition, 1 Chief Whip, 12 Ministers and Associate Ministers. In addition, the Fiji and Cook Islands Parliaments have appointed women Speakers.

In increasing women’s political participation, external factors that constrain success include:
- Lack of will among parliamentary/political leadership to adopt measures to accelerate women’s equal participation and decision making;
- Electorates that do not readily accept women roles in public life and leadership;

### Matters of Fact

#### Regional Trends:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pacific Women MPs</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>As at August 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Representation at sub-national decision-making is at similarly low levels. In comparison, the Inter-Parliamentary Union reports that the world average of all elected members (as of 1st January 2018) is 23.4% women and 76.6% men.

#### Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRIES</th>
<th>NUMBER OF MPS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF WOMEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIJI</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIRIBATI</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIUE</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PALAU</td>
<td>29*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COOK ISLANDS</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAMOA</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUVALU</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TONGA</td>
<td>26**</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARSHALL ISLANDS</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOLOMON ISLANDS</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAURU</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOKELAU</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VANUATU</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* this number refers to both Houses of Congress in Palau – the House of Delegates with 16 Members and the Hours of Senate with 13 Members

** this includes the elected representatives of the Nobles (9 Members) and the people (17 Members)

*** this includes the 4 selected women representatives together with the next highest polling woman included as part of Samoa’s ‘special measure’ for 10% of women’s representation in Parliament

Source: [https://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/](https://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/)
• Political party structures that discriminate against the participation of women, and
• Political parties that do not have the capacity to analyse issues from a gender perspective and develop gender sensitive election manifests, to name a few.

However, UNDP continues to work to identify ways that will provide women with opportunities and skills to exercise their political rights, participate in decision making, exercise leadership, and contribute to political processes in the Pacific context.

An encouraging trend is the increased numbers of women standing in elections, though this is not translating into a significant boost to the overall numbers elected – for example, in the June 2018 Cook Islands election, 20.5% of the candidates were female (compared to 13% in 2014). Four women were successful, the same number as before. In the 2016 Tonga election, there were more women candidates and two were elected (up from one in the previous Parliament).

Through the Regional Women in Politics Project, UNDP has promoted discussions around the following:
• Temporary Special Measure (TSMs)
• supported gender sensitive parliaments through gender analysis of proposed laws
• mainstreaming of gender impact reviews in parliamentary committee work
• women’s mentoring programmes
• building women’s skills through practice parliaments
• working with political parties to remove barriers to women’s political participation; and
• supporting women’s coalitions to work more effectively within political parties and representative bodies.

**UNDP’S APPROACH:**

**1. PRACTICE PARLIAMENTS FOR WOMEN**

UNDP and its partners have been running the successful Practice Parliaments for Women programme across the Pacific, with the objective of supporting increased women’s participation in elections and raising awareness of growing women’s political participation in politics and in leadership roles.

A total of 15 Practice Parliaments have been held very well-received by aspiring political women and have been one of the most asked-for activities in recent years. They have now been run in Kiribati (D2011), Palau (2011 and 2013), PNG (2012 and 2017), Tuvalu (2013 and 2016), Solomon Islands (2014), Tonga (2014), Samoa (2015), Cook Islands (2015 and 2017), Nauru (2016) and Fiji (2016). The last Practice Parliament held in the Cook Islands in March 2017 provided the opportunity to also launch the *Practice Parliament for Women: Training Manual*, which was the result of a collaborative effort between UNDP and PIFS, with Australian funding.

The 2016 Fiji, Nauru and Tuvalu Practice Parliaments trained 90 women leaders (Fiji 50, Nauru 23, Tuvalu 17). Dr Hilda Heine, President of RMI was a participant in the 2011 Practice Parliament and was subsequently elected to the Nitijela in the late 2011 election, served as Minister for Education from 2014, and in 2016 was elected president.

**Participants of the Practice of Parliament for Women in the Solomon Islands (Photo: National Parliament of Solomon Islands)**

In 2017, UNDP was instrumental in advancing women’s political
participation. Following a UNDP Practice Parliament for women in Nauru, one participant was subsequently elected in a by-election, raising women's representation in Parliament from 5.5% to 11%.

Prior to the 2016 Tonga election, a UNDP event with the Department of Women’s Affairs trained 18 women, leading to a record percentage of women standing for election and the increase of the number of women MPs from 5% to 11% of those elected by popular vote.

By broadcasting the Practice Parliaments on national radio and television, and extensive media coverage, the Practice Parliament also contributed to the general public awareness of women’s role in politics and the capabilities of women candidates.

2. KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Across the region, a variety of local and regional partners are working hard to ensure that women’s voices are increasingly heard and visible in Pacific decision-making forums.

The Pacific Women in Politics website (www.pacwip.org) was established as a knowledge-sharing portal to collect information on activities, news, research and stakeholders working to promote women in politics in the Pacific and promote awareness about women in politics in the Pacific.

It is as an authoritative source of information and resources for a wide range of users.

3. TEMPORARY SPECIAL MEASURES (TSM)

In most societies, women represent more than 50 percent of the population and yet this has not translated to positions of political leadership. Globally, the goal of ‘gender balance’, as expressed in the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, has not yet been achieved.

In many countries, a successful fast-track measure to improve the number of women elected to parliaments has been the adoption of electoral special measures—namely reserved seats or candidate quotas.

In the Pacific region, Samoa amended the Constitution in 2015 to guarantee a minimum of 5 seats for women in Parliament (10% of the total), with the provision that if fewer than 5 women were elected, the next highest polling female candidates would be deemed elected and the overall number of seats increased accordingly.

This was successfully implemented in the 2016 election, where one extra seat was allocated to a female candidate to make the quota.

The Autonomous Region of Bougainville has three reserved seats for women; Vanuatu has reserved seats at the municipal level, Solomon Islands has a 10% female candidate quota for political parties and is considering reserved seats at the provincial government level.

UNDP is working with Tuvalu Tonga, FSM and Nauru to assist them to develop their thinking about special measures.

Capitalising on the increasing trend of adopting such measures in the Pacific, a regional conference on TSM was organised in late 2015 with participants from 13 Pacific Island countries and territories, including Ministers, Speakers of Parliament, Members of Parliament, as well as representatives of CSOs.

4. MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN LEGISLATURES

Under its Parliamentary development work in the region, UNDP continues to work with Parliaments to mainstream the issue of gender into the work of parliament when undertaking its legislative, oversight and representative role.
In particular, UNDP has been supporting the Fiji Parliament to implement the mandatory gender assessment clause (Standing Order Section 110, Clause 2) which has led to 15 reports being tabled in the Fiji Parliament in 2016 that included a section relating to the impact of the proposed legislation on both men and women. UNDP has also made presentations to Standing Committees on the implementation of the SO.

At the regional level, specific gender sensitization sessions have been organised for MPs and Secretariat staff to strengthen their understanding and to mainstream the issue of gender in their everyday work.

In 2017, UNDP convened the first-ever dialogue for the 8 Pacific Women Clerks and Deputies, recognizing both the challenges that they face in working within the power dynamics of male-dominated Parliaments, and the need to build gender-sensitive Parliaments. This South-South exchange has built an experience-sharing network of women Clerks and Deputies that they highly value.

In 2016, UNDP supported the Samoan women MPs to form the Samoa Women Parliamentarians Association, as a women’s caucus to advance gender equality through their parliamentary work. And in early 2018, UNDP worked with the Cook Islands women MPs and Speaker to assist them to form the Cook Islands Women Parliamentarians Caucus, with objectives of supporting gender equality in their parliamentary work and reaching out to Cook Islands women and girls to support greater political participation.

5. WORK WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

Both Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea have measures requiring political parties to adopt 10% quotas for female candidates.

Empowering Women for Stronger political parties is visible through UNDP’s work with political parties in Solomon Islands through the Political Parties Commission and in Papua New Guinea’s Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates commission.

The mandatory provisions of 10% quota for women candidates to contest elections aims at enabling political parties to self-identify actions to empower women within their party structure and through the three phases of the electoral cycle and in Party organisation affairs.

A key support area is assisting political parties to identify strategies they can implement, such as reviewing their constitutions and policies to design measures to increase women’s inclusion, these 2016 and 2017 workshops used the NDI/UNDP resource “Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Good Practice Guide”.

6. KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

Throughout the course of the project, UNDP has developed several knowledge products to contribute to the regional literature and knowledge in the region regarding women in politics in the Pacific and showcase a range of success stories and lessons learnt from the region.

UNDP has produced this publication to provide guidance to national partners on how to organize and run a Practice Parliament for women.

These activities contributed to increased national discussions and the knowledge products provide important comparative examples on legal mechanisms to provide for increased women's elected representation at national and local levels.

These include:
- Scrutinizing legislation from a gender perspective: a practical toolkit for the Fiji Parliament
8. SUPPORT FOR YOUNG WOMEN IN POLITICS

Through the “Engaging Young Women in Politics and Public Spaces” Programme, UNDP has collaborated with UN Women and other partners to support young women leaders in Vanuatu and Tonga.

In Vanuatu, two workshops were held in 2016 with approximately 30 young women, aged between the ages of 18-35. The program focused on critical issues of gender and politics and exposed them to women political leaders from across the Pacific region.

The workshop report captures key recommendations and outcomes, including the establishment of Vanuatu’s first-ever Young Women’s Network, which will act as the focal point for strengthening dialogue and partnerships between young women, the Department of Women, Vanuatu Women’s Centre and other key stakeholders. In Tonga, a “Talanoa Camp” for young women was held in March 2017.

The Young Women’s Talanoa coincided with an International Women’s Day meeting to develop a “Roadmap to Increasing Women’s Participation in Tonga’s Parliament,” which gave young women an opportunity to engage with regional female MPs who attended the IWD event and exposed them to the TSM advocacy campaign led by Hon Akosita Lavulavu, the only female MP, to create reserved seats for the next elections.

9. PARTNERSHIPS

The implementation of the Women in Politics Project is integrated across the Parliamentary development projects through two Pacific regional projects and one bilateral project under the Effective Governance programme, namely the Strengthening Legislatures in the Pacific Island Countries Project (SLIP) Project funded by the Government of Japan, and the Pacific Parliamentary Effectiveness Initiative (PPEI) funded by the Government of New Zealand and the Fiji Parliament Support Project II, funded by the Governments of Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

Current National Electoral Support Projects also mainstreams the work of the WIP into its activities.

The activities highlighted in this document are implemented with support from a variety of partners. These include PIFS, UNWOMEN, regional partner Parliaments, elections offices, Women’s Groups, CSOs, the Media and political party commissions.

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