

# Flexible funding for women's organisations

Fiji Economic Empowerment Enhancing Agency

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Project name: Fiji Women's Fund

Project partners: Fijian women's groups, networks and organisations

Total funding: \$10,500,000

Funding timeframe: 2017–2022

There is growing evidence that supporting women's groups, networks, organisations and the women's movement is an effective way to bring about gender equality. Pacific Women has established the Fiji Women's Fund (the Fund) to provide \$10.5 million of flexible funding over five years to women's groups, networks and women-focused civil society organisations, with a particular focus on reaching women in remote, rural areas and other marginalised women. The aim of the Fund, the first in the Pacific region, is to become an independently funded and managed women's fund by the end of 2022.

The Fund uses two mechanisms to reach women. The first is through partnerships with organisations that work in rural and remote areas or support networks of otherwise hard to reach women. The second is direct financial and non-financial assistance to women's groups, organisations and networks in Fiji to expand and enhance their work on women's empowerment and gender equality.

In its first year, the Fund advertised extensively to reach a broad range of women's groups across Fiji. Information sessions were held in nine locations to complement community radio announcements, newspaper articles and social media promotions. The campaign attracted 226 expressions of interest,

some submitted in local languages. A grants committee assessed applications and successful applicants were requested to submit detailed proposals using simple application forms that enabled them to use their organisations' own planning and budgeting systems. Many women's groups worked collectively on their proposals, which encouraged knowledge and skills sharing.

'We place a lot of emphasis on learning and adapting,' said Michelle Reddy, the Fiji Women's Fund Manager. 'We design our fund application and reporting procedures to be accessible both linguistically and technically and ensure that we help emerging groups access our grants.'

The Fund's Steering Committee recognised the lack of expressions of interest from organisations working in disability inclusion. In response, the Fund reached out to two disabled persons' organisations, which both now receive funding.

'We intentionally make time to listen to rural, remote women's groups, networks and organisations and marginalised groups to get their perspectives on our grant process, strategies and other elements of the Fund,' said Ms Reddy. 'We have learned to adapt as we listen so that our processes and strategies are continuously and consistently tailored to respond to the changing local contexts and the needs of diverse women and communities.'

The Fund provided grants to 18 women's groups, networks and organisations in the first round of funding in areas of sexual and reproductive health services, ending violence against women and girls, improving women's economic opportunities and enhancing leadership of women in their communities. By June 2018, the Fund had distributed \$600,949 for grants and grantee activities. These activities reached 2,857 women and girls and 1,524 men and boys.

The Fund is forming strong partnerships with its grantees by supporting their activities and providing organisational strengthening assistance. One such grantee is the Naitasiri Women in Dairy Group which received \$9,600 for a one-year project to support its 33 members.



A member of the Women in Dairy group with the recently purchased milk can stands. Photo credit: Fiji Women's Fund.

The group was created by women dairy owners and managers in the Naitasiri region to help women working on farms become fully-fledged dairy farmers. The women meet every Monday to work collectively on a different member's farm. They weed paddocks, plant grass for cows and undertake other farming work.

The Fund supported the group to purchase equipment, tools and protective clothing. Milk can stands have been constructed at each member's farm. Farmers place milk cans in these small structures for collection by Fiji Dairy Limited, which produces Rewa brand products for sale in Fiji.

'Before, we would put [milk cans] by the side of the road, where the quality of the milk is affected by the heat of the sun or it can be knocked over by animals or people and our effort is wasted and money is lost,' said group member Emali Radiniyacata.

While the Naitasiri Women in Dairy Group is primarily working under the Fund's focus area of women's economic empowerment, during project implementation women have also shown improvements in other outcome areas, including leadership and decision making.

‘We feel more confident to lead other women and also speak out. We are doing work that men do, running dairy farms,’ said Susan Pocock, the group’s President. ‘I think there is about two per cent of women who are in the dairy industry throughout Fiji and we are happy that the Fiji Women’s Fund has come to help our group.’

Lessons learned from Fund projects are being shared and applied in the broader community. For example, the Fund hosted a panel session on transformative financing of women’s human rights in the Pacific at the 13th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women and 6th Meeting of the Pacific Ministers for Women in October 2017. By engaging with the broader women’s movement in Fiji, as well as global women’s funds, the Fund has increasing local ownership and legitimacy.