

# Safe. Respected. Included. Connected. Skilled.

A Pacific Young Women's  
Leadership Strategy

2011-2014



**PACIFICLEADERSHIP**  
PROGRAM  
An initiative of the Australian aid program



# Thanks!

Vinaka. Tanggio. Tenkiu. Shukriya.  
Fa'afetai. Kia Ora. Malo.

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# Foreword

It is with great excitement that we present to you the very first Pacific Young Women's Leadership Strategy. In the development of this Strategy we asked hundreds of young women across Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand how we could help them rise up as leaders in their communities. Their message was clear: To become leaders they needed to be Safe, Respected, Included, Connected and Skilled.

This document is the first of its kind and marks a new way of collaborating and connecting at regional level to reach our objective of developing young women's leadership. Now, more than ever, the need to grow and nurture young women leaders in the Pacific region is clear. At least half of the region's population is under 25 years of age<sup>1</sup>. This demographic wave of young people will soon be decision-makers, community leaders and active citizens, with the potential to shape their own lives and the future of their nations and region.

While young people in the Pacific have inherited a region that is rich in culture and natural resources, it is one that is facing multiple and complex challenges, including high population growth, urban drift, inadequate education and employment opportunities, political instability, and the adverse effects of climate change. Interwoven into all these challenges is the pervasive discrimination and inequality experienced by women and girls.

High rates of teenage pregnancies, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and increasing rates of HIV infection amongst young women are underpinned by rates of Violence Against Women (VAW) that are amongst the highest in the world. The developmental implications of these issues for young women are vast and highlight the need for coordinated efforts to ensure responsible leadership that advocates a woman's right to dignity, development and safety. However, progress on these issues is slow and continues to be restricted by the underrepresentation of women at all levels of decision-making and public life.

We offer this Strategy as a comprehensive agenda for any organisation wanting to engage young women and girls in their work and hope that YWCAs and stakeholders across the Pacific region will embrace the Strategy's priorities and objectives. We acknowledge the reference group members, young women, non-government organisations, UN agencies, AusAID and the Pacific Leadership Program for believing and advocating that young women's voices, leadership and human rights must be realised.



**Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda**  
World YWCA General Secretary



**Susan Brennan**  
World YWCA President

# As young women, we have the potential to lead change in our region...

## Leadership begins in the community...

Conversations about leadership are often limited to women and men who hold positions of power and authority at a national, regional and global level. While this sphere of leadership is important, we must also acknowledge a different definition of leadership that is relevant to the lives of the majority of young Pacific women. Making a commitment to young women's leadership is not only about seeing more of us in positions of power and authority across our region. We believe that building our leadership begins in communities, schools, villages and homes across the Pacific and has vast social, economic and political benefits for individuals, communities and entire nations. Whether it's contributing to discussions during a village meeting, joining a local youth group or speaking out on an issue affecting our community – our leadership must be encouraged and nurtured.

## What makes young women thrive?

Every day we hear stories of women and young women who have overcome the most impossible odds, including violence, poverty and discrimination, to become leaders. This demonstrates that successfully building our leadership involves not only dismantling the barriers that we face, but also creating and supporting the behaviours and environments that enable and empower us to reach our full potential. When we asked young women leaders across the Pacific, "*What makes you thrive?*" There was one thing that was mentioned over and over again. Whether it was a teacher, boss, family member, friend or mentor, they all had someone who believed in them and their potential. As champions of young women's leadership we all have the power to enable and empower young women.

“As young women, we have rights.

Significant progress in the area of young women's leadership will not be achieved while we continue to face widespread inequality and abuses of these rights.”

## A rights-based approach...

As young women, we have rights. Significant progress in the area of young women's leadership will not be achieved while we continue to face widespread inequality and abuses of these rights. Communities, institutions and governments have a responsibility to facilitate and uphold our human rights. We must also become human rights defenders in our own communities. However we cannot stand up and defend our rights unless we fully understand them. To effectively engage young women in human rights education we must become experts in designing and delivering creative and participatory programs that are relevant to our daily lives. To do this, our approach to building young women's leadership must be grounded in the UN mechanisms devoted to improving the status of women and girls, most notably the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).



# Safe

## Safe

**Across the region, high rates of violence against women and children, unstable political environments and ethnic conflict continue to undermine peace and security – compromising the safety of individuals, families and entire populations.**

Physical and sexual violence has serious and ongoing impacts on young women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health. It prevents young women from contributing to public life, making decisions about their future (including how many children they have), earning an income and fulfilling their potential as leaders. Eliminating violence against women and young women requires a fundamental shift in

the attitudes and behaviour of women and men. This includes challenging and redefining narrow gender roles and stereotypes that condone and perpetuate violence against women.

To ensure the right of young women to be safe is upheld, we will invest in young women's leadership in advancing the following:

### 1. Eliminate violence against women

Recent studies have found rates of intimate partner violence against women in the Pacific Islands to be among the highest in the world. A multi-country study on the prevalence of VAW using the World Health Organisation approved methodology found global VAW rates between 15%-70%<sup>2</sup>. In the Pacific region, studies using this same methodology have found rates as high as 68% in Kiribati<sup>3</sup>, 63% in the Solomon Islands<sup>4</sup> and 46% in Samoa<sup>5</sup>.

In Australia, research has shown that rates of VAW increase dramatically among certain marginalised groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disabilities and refugee women<sup>6</sup>.

Common triggers for intimate partner violence include during pregnancy and soon after marriage. This places young women at risk, especially in communities and cultures where women are likely to marry and begin childbearing at a young age. Sexual violence against young Pacific women is also a serious concern, with research in some countries showing that girls who begin having sex younger are more likely to report being raped or coerced into their first sexual experience<sup>7</sup>.

The best way to eliminate violence against women is to prevent it before it occurs. Education initiatives that allow young people to develop respectful relationships and give them the practical communication skills to avoid and mitigate potentially violent situations have shown promising results in the prevention of violence<sup>8</sup>.



## Action Areas

Speak out and demand an end to violence against women and young women at all levels, from our home and communities to our regional, national and global platforms.

Support the implementation of national and regional plans and strategies to end violence against women and ensure that they include the specific needs of young women.

Advocate for long term, adequately funded violence prevention initiatives that give young women and men the skills to develop safe and respectful relationships with their parents, peers and partners.



## 2. Secure women's equal participation in achieving peace and security

The Pacific region is all too familiar with the effects of civil and armed conflict and insecurity, with recent ethnic tensions in the Solomon Islands and Bougainville, ongoing tribal violence in Papua New Guinea and political instability in Fiji. Women and girls account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflicts and political insecurity around the world. For example, research in the Solomon Islands<sup>9</sup> and Bougainville<sup>10</sup> has shown that physical and sexual violence against women, especially young women, increases sharply in times of conflict and emergency.

Despite often being considered the 'peacemakers' in the home and community, women are regularly excluded from high level decision making on peace and security issues. In 2000 the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) acknowledged this fact when it passed Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security, which promotes the participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peace and democracy processes. In 2009 the UNSC passed Resolution 1888, which specifically mandates peacekeeping missions to protect women and children from sexual violence during conflict.

### Action Areas

Support programs that educate young women and men about the role of women in achieving peace and security and where possible, integrate education on these issues into our existing programs.

Acknowledge the vital role of women and young women in defining and achieving peace and security and actively advocate for the implementation of UNSC Resolutions 1325 and 1888 in our region.

Advocate for women and young women's equal participation in democratic processes, including the monitoring of elections.



### 3. Create safe spaces for young women

A safe space is a place where young women can exist without fear of violence, stigma, shame and discrimination. It is a place where young women feel encouraged, included and supported to contribute to discussions, influence decisions and fulfil their potential. Creating a safe space could be making sure that young women are represented in decision-making roles, ensuring that their opinions and ideas are considered equally and that organisational policies and processes encourage young women's participation. In some instances, providing a safe space means giving young women an opportunity to talk, interact, and learn separately from men, boys and adult women.

#### Action Areas

Publically declare our homes, schools, workplaces and communities as 'safe spaces' for young women.

Advocate for physically safe spaces for young women, including safe housing for young women experiencing violence.

Establish and support 'young people friendly' services, especially those that work specifically with young women.

#### Case Study: Straight Talking Radio

**Country:** Papua New Guinea

**Program:** 'Tok Stret' (Talk Straight) Radio and Television Program

**Organisation:** YWCA of Papua New Guinea supported by UNFPA

The YWCA of Papua New Guinea is well known for its popular weekly Radio program *Tok Stret*, which has been running continuously for almost 15 years. Tok Stret broadcasts vital educational messages on issues such as HIV and AIDS, human rights, violence, child abuse and sexual and reproductive health. For many people in PNG, particularly those in rural and remote areas, programs like Tok Stret are the only way they can access reliable and accurate information on such sensitive issues.

Tok Stret Radio Project first started in 1997 as a pilot radio program on the National Broadcasting Corporation of Papua New Guinea (NBCPNG). The program is unique because guest presenters, such as government officials and NGO workers, are regularly invited to feature on the program. Members of the public are also able to call in to the program live and exchange information. This format has proved very popular and has generated much interactivity among the youth and general public, which has contributed to increased knowledge and awareness about sexual and reproductive health issues. The program has proven so popular that it has recently expanded into a weekly television show.

When Tok Stret was first established, its open discussion of issues considered 'private' and 'taboo' brought criticism from those who felt that these issues should not be discussed publicly. Despite negative feedback, the program has contributed to breaking down barriers and harmful attitudes to sexual and reproductive health. It has also provided a forum for people to discuss their medical situations and brought empowerment by providing free medical advice directly to people's homes.

# Respected

Relationships are the glue that bind Pacific Island cultures together. It is these strong family and community bonds that preserve people's culture, religion and identity, and can provide a vital safety net during difficult times.

Yet high rates of violence and poor sexual health outcomes across the Pacific demonstrate a need to challenge unhealthy relationships that cause harm and promote relationships that are characterised by love, respect, safety and equality.

Young women who are respected will be more confident in speaking up for themselves and their families, they will have more control over their sexual, reproductive and physical health, will be more likely to continue their education and will have more opportunities to fulfil their potential. During consultations in Pacific Island countries, young women also reported that the culture of respect towards their elders was fundamental to their passage into adulthood and needed to be preserved in a way that didn't limit their opportunities and potential.

To ensure the right of young women to be respected is upheld, we will invest in young women's leadership in advancing the following:

## 1. Build young women's self respect, esteem and confidence

Respect is about valuing and celebrating the diversity and contribution of all people, regardless of their gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, physical appearance, ability or ethnic origin. Discrimination and inequality have lasting impacts on people's confidence and self-esteem and are direct barriers to young women fulfilling their potential as leaders.

The mental health of young people has become a specialised field in Australia and New Zealand, where rates of mental health issues among young people are high and increasing<sup>11 12</sup>. For example, in Australia, a recent survey of 48,000 young Australians found that body image was the single biggest concern of young women<sup>13</sup>. While mental health is still an emerging field of practice and social policy issue in most Pacific Island Countries, research has found that the Pacific region has a higher rate of mental and neurological disorders compared with other parts of the world<sup>14</sup>. Despite this, mental health services in the Pacific Islands are often scarce and poorly resourced<sup>15</sup>.



“Discrimination and inequality have lasting impacts on people's confidence and self-esteem and are direct barriers to young women fulfilling their potential as leaders.”

## Action Areas

Develop and deliver programs that nurture positive and healthy body image among young women.

Speak out against harmful gender stereotypes that damage young women's self esteem and confidence.

Celebrate the diversity of young women in our organisations' marketing and communications materials.



## 2. Promote young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights

Pacific Island women are at high risk of poor sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) outcomes, including high rates of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), maternal and infant mortality and teenage pregnancies<sup>16</sup>. At the root of these poor outcomes are gender stereotypes and inequalities that prevent women, especially young women, from being able to negotiate safe sex. In many cases, attempts to address the sexual health of Pacific Islanders are hampered by social, cultural and religious taboos that prevent comprehensive education and restrict the dissemination of information<sup>17</sup>.

The numbers of young Pacific Island young women contracting STIs are among the highest in the world<sup>18</sup>. For example, in Samoa, 40.7% of young pregnant women tested positive for chlamydia, with high rates also reported in Fiji (34%) and Tonga (27.5%)<sup>19</sup>.

PNG is currently experiencing a generalised HIV and AIDS epidemic that is fuelled by widespread gender inequality and violence against women.

While HIV rates are low across the rest of the region, they are increasing, and young women are among the groups most at risk of contracting the virus<sup>20</sup>.

While starting large families at a young age is common in many Pacific Island cultures, there are growing concerns about teenage pregnancy. In the Marshall Islands, which has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in the Pacific, 138 out of 1000 babies are born to young women between the ages of 15 and 19<sup>21</sup>. By comparison, in New Zealand, which has the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the developed world, the rate of children born to teenage mothers is 33 in every 1000<sup>22</sup>.

### Action Areas

Develop a comprehensive and culturally appropriate 'respectful relationships' education program to be delivered to young women and men across the Pacific.

Advocate for increased budgets for family planning services across the region, including safe and accessible sexual and reproductive health services specifically for young women.

Find effective ways of delivering comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education to young people by working in partnership with governments, schools, churches and other stakeholders.

### 3. Respect and celebrate the diversity of our cultures and beliefs

The Pacific region is home to some of the oldest and most diverse cultures and oldest civilisations in the world. Since colonisation, traditional cultures have become blended with modern cultures and religion. In more recent years, immigration to the many parts of the region has introduced new cultures that have redefined our national identities and shaped the way we live. This melting pot of cultures and religions has confronted the Pacific with many challenges in maintaining peaceful and thriving societies where everyone can contribute to public life and exist free from discrimination and harm.

There is no doubt that certain aspects of both traditional and modern cultures across the Pacific act as barriers to the leadership of young women. Throughout consultations in the Pacific Islands, *culture* was identified as one of the main barriers to young women's leadership. Of paramount concern was the 'death of culture'. For example, in consultations across Melanesian countries, young women reported that cultural practices such as *bride price* and *compensation* were being misused by a generation who grew up disconnected from their culture and traditions. Educating children about respecting the strengths of culture was considered to be both very important and lacking in many locations.

Promote reconciliation, inclusion, respect and harmony between people from all faiths and cultures in our organisations and communities.

Support cultural practices and institutions that genuinely empower and provide guidance to young women.

Challenge and advocate for change to cultural practices and institutions that have been misused, misinterpreted or that cause harm to women and young women.

## Action Areas

### Case Study: Talking About Relationship Things

**Country:** Australia

**Initiative:** Relationship Things Resource Kit

**Organisation:** YWCA of Canberra

The YWCA of Canberra began developing the Relationship Things community resources in 2007 following research, which revealed that in Australia, young women aged 18-24 are at highest risk of being sexually assaulted. The Relationship Things resources aim to prevent gender-based violence and promote good sexual health by supporting young people to develop safe, respectful and consensual relationships. The Resources are based on the key concepts of respect, communication and choice as the fundamental aspects of positive relationships.

The Relationship Things resources include an information booklet, posters and male and female condoms, which have been designed to be attractive, informative and fun in order to engage young people. A Relationship Things Resource Kit has also been developed to help youth workers, community workers and teachers to work with young people to develop safe and respectful relationships.

The Relationship Things resources are based on a gender analysis, which acknowledges that violence against women and poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes are caused by gender inequalities. The resources seek to challenge young people's assumptions and beliefs about gender and relationships, which can result in violence and discrimination towards women.

Relationship Things resources are provided free of charge to the community. They have been widely shared across the YWCA movement globally and are continually being adapted for use with a range of different audiences.



## Included

Across the Pacific Islands, women are vastly underrepresented in all areas of public life. Our region has the lowest number of female parliamentarians anywhere in the world.

Of the nine countries globally that currently have no women in their National Parliament, five are in the Pacific<sup>23</sup>. Women's participation in political decision-making is vital to achieving peaceful, stable and democratic states. While progress in women's participation has been made in Australia and New Zealand, there is still a long way to go before gender parity is reached, especially at the most senior levels of decision-making. Research has found that not only are women not progressing in some of these areas, but their representation is decreasing<sup>24</sup>.

Recent progress has been made in creating leadership opportunities for young people across the Pacific Islands, particularly with the recent revival of several National Youth Councils and the Pacific Youth Council secretariat. However opportunities for young people in the Pacific are still dominated by young men while young women continue to face considerable barriers to inclusion in activities aimed at young people.

To ensure the right of young women to be included is upheld, we will invest in young women's leadership in advancing the following:

### 1. Put issues affecting young women on the agenda.

Young women often 'fall through the cracks' because they are not covered by children's legislation and policy, are outnumbered by boys in young people's programs and are often unable to speak out in women's forums. Some young women, such as those with disabilities, those who are HIV positive, lesbian women or those living in rural and remote areas, experience a double or triple burden of disadvantage and exclusion.

Every area of social and public policy affects young women's lives in some way. Despite this, the issues affecting young women are rarely considered in these decision-making processes. In an environment where decision-making power is determined by gender, age, wealth and status, young women and the issues affecting them are often invisible.

## Action Areas

Insist on improved gender and age disaggregated data that allows us to form an accurate understanding of the status and progress of young women in our region.

Organise and support young women's pre-meetings and dedicated sessions on young women at key national, regional and global forums.

Train young women in human rights and advocacy techniques and strategies to affect social change.



## 2. Include young women in the conversations that matter

Young women need to be at the centre of the decisions that affect their lives. This means being included in important conversations, not only in the narrowly defined 'youth' or 'women's' spheres, but in conversations regarding the distribution of income, resources and services. Ensuring that young women are represented in decision-making processes is essential, however we must also acknowledge and dismantle the barriers that prevent young women from being included in decision-making roles

in the first place. These barriers can be physical (e.g. holding meetings during school hours or late at night) as well as mental (e.g. not asking young women their opinion or reacting negatively to their ideas). We must also be proactive in reaching out to excluded and isolated groups of young women, including young women with disabilities, young HIV positive women, Indigenous young women and young women from diverse ethnic groups.

### Action Areas

Ensure that our conversations are accessible to young women and that we provide them with structured opportunities to participate.

Commit to setting and meeting quotas for young women's representation on our boards, committees, delegations, and in other decision-making roles within our organisations.

Consult thoroughly and meaningfully with young women in the development of our organisational policies, programs and strategies.

### 3. Encourage intergenerational dialogue and mentoring

In all cultures, young women rely on older women for their wisdom, support and guidance. After all, older women were once younger women who faced the same challenges that many young women face today. Promoting young women's leadership does not mean excluding or isolating older women, rather, finding ways that women of all ages can lead together. In many cases, building young women's leadership is about knowing when to 'step in' and offer young women support and when to 'step back' and let young women take the lead.

Formal mentoring programs are popular in Australia and New Zealand and research has proven that it is a valuable methodology for building young women's leadership capacity in these countries<sup>25</sup>. While there are only a small number of organisations delivering structured mentoring programs in the Pacific Islands, other informal opportunities exist that allow young women and older women to learn from each other. Many of these opportunities occur within family groups or are embedded in cultural institutions and practices. When it comes to mentoring, it is unlikely that one model will be appropriate for our diverse region, rather, our goal should be exploring different types of mentoring that meet the needs of young women in their unique context.

Foster intergenerational dialogue in our programs, organisations, workplaces and communities by offering informal and structured opportunities for women of all ages to share and learn from each other.

Conduct more research and evaluation into the models of mentoring that are most effective in building young women's leadership in the Pacific Islands.

Develop and support mentoring programs that work best for young women in their cultural context, including peer mentoring and group mentoring between women of all ages.

#### Action Areas

### Case Study: Developing Emerging Leaders

**Country:** Fiji  
**Program:** Emerging Leaders Forum  
**Organisation:** Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) supported by Oxfam New Zealand

When Anna Padarath, the FWRM Young Women's Officer attended the Leadership Fiji program in 2003, she soon realised that she was the only young woman among the group. Inspired by the program and determined to create more leadership opportunities for young women in Fiji, Anna returned to FWRM and with the help of other staff, designed the Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF).

The Emerging Leaders' Forum (ELF) is a year-long leadership program that focuses on developing leadership skills among young women aged 18-25. One of the key visions of the program is the empowerment of participants with information. The topics covered in ELF range from leadership and public speaking to the environment, human rights, feminism, violence against women, trade, the media and many others. The ELF graduates then use the knowledge and skills to undertake community projects. Through participating in ELF, young women gain confidence in expressing themselves and participating in decision-making processes in their communities.

After running successfully for the past six years, the focus of the ELF program will soon shift to rural areas of Fiji, where young women face even greater barriers in becoming leaders. Future ELF intakes will also include a more diverse range of participants, including young women with disabilities, trans gender women, lesbian women and young women experiencing mental health issues.

# Disconnected

## Connected

**Achieving progress on young women's leadership in the Pacific will require an active network of young women and other stakeholders committed to a common goal.**

There are already a growing number of agencies across the Pacific delivering promising programs and initiatives for young women. Some of these are well established, while others are new and emerging. By sharing knowledge, information and resources with each other we can ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of our efforts to build young women's leadership. There are many challenges in achieving this connectedness, including lack of access to

information and communications technology and infrastructure. These limitations can keep us apart and limit the opportunity to learn from each other. We must be more proactive in finding creative and accessible ways for young women to connect.

To ensure the right of young women to be connected is upheld, we will invest in young women's leadership in advancing the following:

### 1. Provide opportunities for young women to connect and learn from each other

Providing opportunities for peer-to-peer learning is important for the personal development of young women. During consultations young women consistently reported that the most valuable and engaging learning experiences were those where young

women were able to meet and learn from the experiences of their peers. Building an active and committed membership of young women across the Pacific region is vital in ensuring the relevance and sustainability of the women's movement.



“ Building an active and committed membership of young women across the Pacific region is vital in ensuring the relevance and sustainability of the women's movement ”

## Action Areas

Collaborate in the organisation and delivery of young women's meetings, trainings and events at the national and regional level.

Develop and support programs and initiatives that are peer-led (i.e. 'by young women, for young women') and commit to integrating the peer learning approach into our existing programs and initiatives.

Take advantage of emerging and existing technologies and social media (including training in these mediums) to provide virtual platforms where young women can connect, share and learn.



“ To create a skilled network of partner organisations building young women's leadership throughout the Pacific we need to be proactive in sharing knowledge, skills and resources with each other. ”

## 2. Share knowledge, resources and successful models of working with young women

During consultations, smaller and less established organisations reported that one of the biggest barriers they faced in designing and delivering programs for young women was a lack of knowledge of program design, including monitoring and evaluation techniques and knowing which models are most effective in different contexts. This can be even more difficult in rural and isolated areas with limited

access to information technology and established networks. To create a skilled network of partner organisations building young women's leadership throughout the Pacific we need to be proactive in sharing knowledge, skills and resources with each other. All organisations, regardless of their size or budget, have something that they can share to benefit each other.

### Action Areas

Commit to sharing knowledge about successful program and advocacy initiatives at trainings, conferences and other events.

Investigate opportunities to establish bi-lateral and multi-lateral capacity building relationships between Pacific young women's organisations

Identify existing resources and programs in the region that may be suitably adapted and expanded to other areas.

### 3. Establish a Pacific young women's leadership alliance

Our partners acknowledge that the ongoing implementation and evaluation of this Strategy will be most effective if it is driven by an alliance of agencies across the Pacific who are working towards a common goal of building young women's leadership. It is envisaged that such an alliance would provide a network to share information, best practice and resources, and provide a united voice to ensure that governments, donors and other stakeholders are accountable to the needs of young Pacific women. The YWCA is committed to investigating the feasibility and most appropriate operating model of such an alliance during the timeframe of this Strategy. In the meantime the World YWCA, in collaboration with regional networks and YWCAs in the Pacific, will provide leadership on the implementation and evaluation of the Strategy.

#### Action Areas

Establish the feasibility of a Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance and identify an operating model for the alliance that is effective and equitable and that adds value to existing work being undertaken in the region.

### Case Study: Empowering Generation Next

**Country:** Fiji, Bougainville, Solomon Islands, Tonga

**Program:** Generation Next

**Organisation:** FemLINK Pacific supported by International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and AusAID

The Generation Next Project recognises that young women are the future of the Pacific women's movement. During the program, young women are trained to become producers of media content for FemLINK Pacific's community radio programs. This deepens their understanding of key policy issues relating to women, peace and security and human rights and helps them develop the confidence and skills to take action. This builds on Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action, which affirms that access to media and ICTs can empower women to be part of decision-making.

In 2010, Generation Next expanded to include membership of young women from the organisation's rural women's media network. Young women from Labasa and Nadi are now also producing community media content and staging rural broadcasts. Since 2007, the program has expanded to Bougainville, Solomon Islands and Tonga through the Regional Women's Media and Policy Network on UNSCR 1325. The Generation Next program also provides a platform for young women to connect and learn from each other and pairs young women with "wo'mentors" from the rural and regional areas of the Pacific to support them through their learning journey.

Generation Next aims to ensure that there are spaces in the broadcasting sector and media more broadly to encourage greater public participation of women and girls on important national issues. Through the use of community media, Generation Next provides an alternative social and economic model that can broaden women's access to information and to freedom of expression.

For more information on Generation Next and other FemLINK Pacific initiatives for young women go to [www.femlinkpacific.org.fj](http://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj) or look for FEMlink Pacific on Facebook.

## Skilled

As half of the population, women deserve equality, opportunities and rights in all aspects of education, training and work. Ensuring that young women have access to quality formal education and meaningful work is essential if they are to become leaders.

Young women face multiple and complex barriers to education, including the burden of domestic work from an early age, security issues, poor sanitation, early marriage and pregnancy<sup>25</sup>. This has led to their underrepresentation in secondary school education in many Pacific Island countries.

The economic benefits of women's contribution to the workforce should not be underestimated. For example, in the Solomon Islands, the annual turnover at the Honiara Central

Market is between US\$10-16 million, with women responsible for about 90 percent of this marketing activity<sup>27</sup>. In PNG, annual food production, largely the responsibility of women, has been valued at US\$55 million a year<sup>28</sup>. In Australia, the 18% pay gap between men and women costs the national economy around \$93 billion dollars per year<sup>29</sup>.

To ensure the right of young women to be skilled is upheld, we will invest in young women's leadership in advancing the following:

### 1. Advocate for gender equality in all areas of education and training.

Many young people across the Pacific do not enjoy universal access to formal education. In most parts of the region, a booming population of young people combined with a lack of infrastructure, resources and qualified teachers have resulted in limited school places. Consequently, young people in the Pacific are gradually 'pushed out' of school with only a minority completing their secondary schooling. While recent initiatives have resulted in increases in school enrolment across the Pacific (particularly in primary school), there are still a significant proportion of young Pacific Islanders who do not attend school<sup>30</sup>.

It is at secondary school level that gender disparity in the Pacific is most apparent. Boys continue to outnumber girls in secondary schools in many Pacific Island Countries (including Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Niue, Tokelau and Vanuatu)<sup>31</sup>. This is supported by anecdotal evidence provided by young women during consultations, which suggested that many families, particularly those in rural areas and those who could not afford school fees, prioritised their sons' education over their daughters'.

## Action Areas

Advocate for measures to achieve gender parity at all levels of formal education, including the right of young pregnant women to continue with their schooling.

Conduct and support further research into the barriers that young women face in accessing education and training.

Support the implementation of existing mechanisms and frameworks that address young women's access to education, including the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF), the Pacific Youth Strategy 2015 and individual national plans and frameworks.

### Case Study: Strength, Ability, Potential

Country: Solomon Islands  
Program: Sistas Savve  
Organisation: Solomon Islands Planned Parenthood Association (SIPPA) and YWCA  
Solomon Islands supported by Family Planning International New Zealand (FPINZ).

The name 'Sistas Savve' was chosen by young women because it translates as both 'girls know' and 'girls can', which acknowledges young women's innate resilience, abilities and potential.

Sistas Savve is a 10-week program that works with young, single mothers in identified communities around Honiara. Every week the young women learn a theory based topic focusing on sexual and reproductive health and human rights as well as a practical livelihood skill that they can use to earn an income. The livelihood skills included in the program focus on reusing and recycling waste materials into marketable products such as baskets, bags and toys. The young woman also learn budgeting and marketing skills to successfully sell their items.

Sistas Savve is unique because applications for the program come from entire communities rather than individual women. The Sistas Savve staff spend time before the program begins building a good relationship with the chosen community, including key decision-makers such as chiefs and church leaders. Plans are in place to expand the Sistas Savve program to rural and isolated areas of the Solomon Islands where young women face additional barriers to access programs, services and information.



## 2. Improve access to accredited training for young women

When formal education is no longer an option, young women must have legitimate pathways to accredited pre-vocational and vocational training that prepares them for meaningful work both inside and outside the home. Young women who are not engaged in some form of education, training or employment are under-utilised economic and social resources.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that most of the vocational training available to young Pacific Island women is unaccredited and prepares them mostly for low or unpaid work in the domestic sphere (for example, floristry, sewing, childcare etc.). While equipping young women with the skills they will need as wives and mothers is important, we must ensure that there are options available for those young women who also aspire to positions in the paid workforce.

Ensure that existing training institutions provide young women with access to a diverse range of accredited training options, including those areas traditionally dominated by men.

Advocate for improved and equal access to scholarships and financial support for young women seeking further education and training.

Deliver and support training programs that provide young women with tangible skills and/or legitimate pathways to work or further training. Where possible, work in partnership with accredited learning institutions.

### Action Areas

### 3. Promote young women's economic empowerment

The need for economic empowerment was one of the primary concerns expressed by young women during consultations. They reported that families often saw young women as 'economic burdens' because they had little or no ability to generate an income. This in turn affected the decisions that families made about their daughter's education and relationships. For example, a large family struggling to pay school fees might prioritise their son's education because they are more likely to be able to secure paid employment, while young women are of more use assisting with housework and childcare. In some communities, young women may even be pressured to marry young to ease the economic pressure on their family.

While the vast majority of formal businesses in the Pacific Islands are owned and controlled by men, Pacific Island countries rely on women and their labor to drive the informal sector, including subsistence agriculture, marketing of agricultural products and petty trade. This sector offers young women an unattractive package of long hours, hard labor, seasonal instability and little or no pay. Young women face even greater challenges in the formal labour market, as far fewer women are likely to be working or looking for work. Such gaps result from cultural traditions, difficulty faced by young women in combining work and household duties, and a tendency of labour markets to shed young women more rapidly than men when fewer job opportunities are available.

Promoting women's economic empowerment is increasingly seen as one of the most important driving forces behind economic growth and the fight against poverty. When the inequality gap between men and women narrows, economies tend to grow faster, experience less poverty and the well being of men, women, and children is enhanced.

#### Action Areas

Support measures that aim to narrow gender pay gaps between women and men in the formal sector and that acknowledge the economic and social value of women's unpaid work.

Deliver and support livelihood skills and small business development programs that enable young women to earn an income.

Advocate for young women's rights at work, including the right to a decent wage, safe working conditions and benefits such as maternity and sick leave

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# Leadership is...

Knowing your rights. Being determined.  
Having the will to succeed. Being humble.  
Caring for others. Having a positive effect on other people. Showing support. Being a mentor.  
Honesty. Being tolerant and open minded.  
Standing up for what is right. Being patient.  
Having confidence in who you are, where you have come from and where you are going.  
Listening. Helping those in need. Having faith.  
Asking why. Being responsible. Giving feedback.  
Receiving feedback. Respecting others.  
Being resilient. Setting an example. Respecting your elders. Thinking ahead. Challenging negative attitudes. Speaking up. Valuing culture.  
Sharing with others. Always trying to improve.  
Not being afraid to ask for help. Never giving up.

If you want to find out more about the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Strategy, or you or your organisation are interested in working with us to develop young women's leadership in the Pacific, we'd love to hear from you.

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