

Pacific Women Advisory Board Meeting – November 2015

Regional

SHARE

November 10, 2015

The third meeting of the Advisory Board for Pacific Women was held in Honiara, Solomon Islands on 4 November 2015. The meeting was chaired by Natasha Stott Despoja, Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls. The meeting agenda is at Attachment A.

The objectives of Pacific Women are:

- Women, and women's interests, are increasingly and effectively represented and visible through leadership at all levels of decision-making.
- Women have expanded economic opportunities to earn income and accumulate economic assets.
- Violence against women is reduced and survivors of violence have access to support services and to justice.
- Women in the Pacific will have a stronger sense of their own agency, supported by a changing legal and social environment and through increased access to the services they need.

The Advisory Board's purpose is to provide advice on the strategic direction of Pacific Women. The Advisory Board reflects Australia's commitment to a Pacific-led response to improving the opportunities for political, economic and social advancement of Pacific women. The membership of the Board and attendance at the meeting is at Attachment B.

Review of Implementation

The Board heard an update on the progress of Pacific Women:

- \$55 million spent on over 90 activities with 55 partners;
- \$154 million committed to activities through country plans;
- Country plan finalised for Tuvalu, drafted for Palau and FSM

- Regional policy dialogues: private sector response to violence against women held in Fiji in December 2014;
- Gender training for MPs designed with Pacific parliaments;
- Support Unit established in Fiji and PNG; and
- Monitoring and Evaluation Framework developed.

The Board endorsed the proposed regional priorities for Pacific Women in the next twelve months, including:

- developing ‘roadmaps’ to guide work in: women and leadership, economic empowerment and ending violence against women in the context of the Pacific;
- a review of counselling services for survivors of violence in the region to assess their relevance and quality, in order to inform efforts to increase the effectiveness of these services at country level and regionally;
- mapping research on gender issues in the Pacific to inform regional research priorities;
- exploring different innovative approaches – apps to support women facing gender based violence; crowd-funding for women political candidates; research into women’s access to menstrual hygiene; and extending social protection options for survivors of violence; and
- Review of Pacific Women to establish progress against the Year 3 objectives to take place in mid-2016.

The need to work closely with Pacific island governments and community-based organisations was re-affirmed as a principle of Pacific Women and a way of working that is necessary to ensure sustainability.

Key themes and approaches of *Pacific Women*

The Board heard a presentation on the Government of PNG’s approach to promoting Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) in the Public Sector. Key activities include:

- GESI Focal points created in key central agencies reporting to agency head;
- GESI budgeting and mainstreaming in business processes in central agencies;
- Community of Practice group established;
- Public Sector Women in Leadership research projects, training and mentoring programs;
- Public Male Advocacy, training and advocacy outreach programs;
- GESI Help Desk Hot Line established in Department of Personnel Management and in two pilot provinces; and
- Institutionalisation of Inclusive Leadership programs for leaders and CEOs under a Governance “Precinct”.

The Board also heard a presentation on the model of the Business Coalition for Women in PNG. The Coalition has 60 members and aims to 1) help PNG businesses recruit, retain and promote women as employees, leaders, and business partners and 2) provide relevant and practical tools to help businesses make the most of female talent and promote more opportunities for women’s economic empowerment and career development. The Coalition provides business solutions to:

- Address violence by providing solutions for businesses to address family and sexual violence and support victims, perpetrators and their family and friends;
- Develop gender smart workplace policies and practices through a set of gender-smart HR templates that businesses can adopt and adapt to suit their needs;
- Promote women’s leadership through supporting a Certificate IV leadership training course for high potential women in the private sector; and
- Expand opportunities for women-owned businesses in supply chains through upgrading of women-owned businesses in their supply and distribution chains.

The Board noted that while civil society organisations and governments have been at the centre of progress on gender equality, private sector had a role—and a vested interest—in responding to gender inequalities, in particular gender based violence and women’s economic empowerment. The Board

agreed that further research was needed into the costs of gender based violence on the private sector in order to prompt effective responses from businesses.

The need for governments and donor partners to better respond to the needs of women in emergencies and natural disasters was discussed. Responding to violence against women in disasters is a new area for the Vanuatu Women's Centre. There is often an escalation of family violence during times of crises, but this issue has not yet been properly addressed by either government or donors.

The Board discussed a range of issues including:

- the need to support women working in the informal sector, noting the high rate of small business failure due to lack of expertise and lack of support from the formal financial systems—including high interest rates from formal and informal lending institutions
- endorsing the need for the Pacific Women commissioned research on the social impacts of the seasonal worker program;
- the need for effective use of the [Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration](#) reporting, including a communication strategy – to ensure that it is used as an advocacy and accountability tool by governments and civil society. PIFS and SPC are looking at the reporting format, including the indicators now that the Sustainable Development Goals have been finalised.
- the importance for gender equality actions to be included in national development plans and the need for central departments to take action and not leave responsibility to the women's machineries.

The Board heard a presentation from staff at the Australian High Commission in Honiara on the work undertaken under Pacific Women and across the bilateral aid program in Solomon Islands. Examples of activities funded through Pacific Women are:

Women's Economic Empowerment and Leadership

- Support has been provided to the Ministry of Women, Youths, Children and Family Affairs to draft a women's economic empowerment policy

which was recently launched and an Adviser to provide long term support.

- Technical support was also provided to help develop the National Action Plan for Women Peace and Security.
- The Markets for Change program is a major investment which is supporting women in leadership – eg supporting vendors association to participate in the budget consultation with Honiara city council – improving market infrastructure and strengthening women’s financial literacy and skills.
- A new partnership with the International Financial Corporation (IFC) will improve the business environment for women in the formal sector and will work with major employers in Solomon Islands as well as undertake research in drivers and motivating factors to women’s employment in the formal sector.
- Core funding has been given to the Solomon Islands Women in Business Association, which has enabled them to establish a training centre. Another initiative is the quarterly Mere Market where women can sell their handicrafts and produce.

Ending Violence Against Women

- A major focus on ending violence against women including the Channels of Hope program which works with churches and communities to reinterpret biblical messages to challenge notions of gender inequalities and violence.
- A new Safe Families program aims to work with existing provincial networks, local service providers, government and civil society representatives, church leaders, chiefs, female community leaders to support change in community attitudes so that family violence is no longer considered an acceptable behaviour in Solomon Islands.
- Red Cardim Vaelens is working with male sporting teams to address attitudes and beliefs held by men and another new program will focus on addressing youth and alcohol use issues.

Pacific Women complements and supports the larger investments in the bilateral program through health; justice; private sector investment and financial inclusion. One of these programs is Seif Ples which provides a multi-sectoral response to violence against women in Solomon Islands.

Progress of gender equality in the Pacific

The Board noted that progress was happening in all countries and across all outcome areas of Pacific Women, but recognised that this progress was uneven across the Pacific and that major gaps in the response to women's empowerment remain. The following barriers were discussed:

- Inadequate government resources and budget
- Lack of political will to finalise or implement policies
- Weaknesses in women's departments/ministries
- Limited progress on temporary special measures
- Women's ability to run for parliament hampered by cost and women's separation from the electorate
- Insufficient services for survivors of violence – quality and quantity
- Social, cultural and structural barriers to women reporting violence
- Women's access to education is not translating to formal employment
- Women's lack of access to land and other major assets
- Growing STI rates and lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services
- Limited reintegration programs for young pregnant women/mothers

The Board noted examples of progress and discussed examples of successes including Samoa's move on temporary special measures. The need to improve communication between governments on progress and barriers was discussed.

The Board agreed that it was important that specific and relevant gender equality issues are included on regional Leaders and Ministerial meetings. It was agreed that progress against previous year's recommendations should be discussed at these meetings as it was important to ensure accountability on previous decisions. It was suggested that a joint Finance and Women's Ministers meeting could be held.

It was noted that cervical cancer is identified as a priority issue for the Pacific region by the leaders. SPC has been identified to lead this issue with development partners and national governments. Prevalence data, treatment and prevention through vaccinations are priorities.

It was noted that Pacific Women does not fund major programs in health, education and law and justice because DFAT also has major sector

programs. However, Pacific Women can respond to specific issues, particularly through advocacy. For example, more awareness on, and funding for, sexual and reproductive health and rights, particularly for young women is required. There are also opportunities to expand women and girls access to education including through APTC and other education providers, and through policy changes to reduce drop-outs of boys and girls in early high school.

Priorities for the Board

The Board noted the strategy for 16 Days of Activism which DFAT has developed for the Pacific and members are willing to engage with DFAT across the Pacific to support activities. The next major advocacy opportunity is International Women's Day (8 March) and International Day of Rural Women (15 October).

While recognising that the Board does not have a mandate outside of Pacific Women, members noted that they have the capacity to engage with their own networks and peers and will also look for opportunities to work together on specific issues.

Operations of the Board

The Board noted the advantages of meeting in Pacific Island countries and appreciated the opportunity to hear directly from implementing partners. The members would like the opportunity to meet with Government and civil society organisations when the meetings are held in Pacific Island countries.

The members recommended that the Chair be selected from within the Board, possibly on a rotational basis.

Next Meeting

It is proposed that the meeting will be held in May or July 2016, preferably in a North Pacific country. The date and location are to be confirmed.

Conclusion

The Board expressed its appreciation to DFAT for the opportunity to engage with Pacific Women and thanked Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls Natasha Stott Despoja for chairing the meeting. The Board asked her to feed back their views to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for International Development and the Pacific.

Attachment A

Agenda

Pacific Women Advisory Board Meeting

4 November 2015

Venue: Heritage Hotel, Honiara

Chair: Natasha Stott Despoja, Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls

10:00 – 11:00 Welcome and Update

10:00 Welcome and Introduction: Natasha Stott Despoja

10:20 Summary update on implementation of the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative: Tracey Newbury, Director

11:00 – 12:45 Key themes and approaches of Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development

11:00 Working with the public sector to achieve gender equality: Jane Kesno

11:20 How the private sector can respond to violence against women: Lesieli Taviri

11:40 Responding to the needs of women in times of emergencies: Marilyn Tah

12:00 Case study from Solomon Islands: response to ending violence against women: Rochelle White, Counsellor

12:20 Presentation from Kim Abbey, Manager of Seif Ples

12:45-2:15 Lunch (Heritage Hotel Dining Room)

The Advisory Board will be joined at lunch by Rochelle White, DFAT Counsellor and Kim Abbey from Seif Ples.

2:15-4:00 The roles and direction of the Advisory Board

2:15 Discussion on the progress of gender equality in the Pacific and what Pacific Women needs to do to better respond to current and emerging needs.

2:45 Discussion on the operations of the Advisory Board to date and into the future

3:15 Afternoon Tea

3:30 Priorities for Advisory Board for the next six months

4:00 Agreement on the Communique

4:15 Date and location for next meeting and Wrap Up

4:30 Meeting End

Attachment B: Members of the Advisory Board

Ms Andie Fong Toy, Deputy Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat;

Dr Lawrence Kalinoe, Secretary Department of Justice and Attorney-General (PNG);

Ms Jane Kesno, former head of the PNG Office for Women (PNG);

Dr Colin Tukuitonga, Director General, Secretariat of the Pacific Community;

Ms Natalia Latu, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Ministry of Finance and National Planning (Tonga);

Reverend Sereima Lomaloma, Anglican Minister (Fiji);

Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Minister of Justice and Courts Administration (Samoa);

Ms Savina Nongebatu, immediate past Co-Chairperson of the Pacific Disability Forum (Solomon Islands);

Ms Marilyn Tahī, Coordinator of the Vanuatu Women's Centre;

Ms Lesieli Taviri, Chairperson of the PNG Busies Coalition for Women (PNG);

Hon Maere Tekanene, Minister for Education (Kiribati); and

Ms Yoshiko Tamaguchi, Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance (Republic of Marshall Islands).

Dr Tukuitonga, Hon Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Hon Maere Tekanene and Dr Lawrence Kalinoe sent their apologies for this meeting.