

Collaborating to Progress Women's Economic Empowerment

Regional

SHARE

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Gathering stakeholders to increase knowledge and improve Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) programs was the aim of a recent roundtable event hosted by the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women) Support Unit on 22 March, 2018.



Lanieta Vakadewabuka – Independent Consultant:

'Women hold up half the universe, so It's important to empower women because of progress and development,' said Lanieta Vakadewabuka. 'If we don't, it'll be a lopsided walk for everyone in the community.'

'Everyone deserves opportunity,' added Bronwyn Wiseman, Deputy Team Leader of the Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access Program (PHAMA) Program. 'I think the opportunity to know more about the community and the economy you're in, but also to know you can have an influence – you don't always have to just respond to it. You, as a young woman or older woman, can have an influence and change it.'

And to change systems to be more gender equitable requires investment in women themselves as economic actors:

‘It’s about confidence,’ explained Cema Bolabola of the Fiji Women in Fisheries Network. ‘When women are confident, they’re able to make choices and pursue whatever they’d like to pursue.’



Bronwyn Wiseman – Deputy Team Leader, PHAMA Program

At the semi-regular Roundtable, partners share project successes, challenges and any innovative tools, and building up a knowledge base on Pacific approaches to WEE.

Pacific Women initiated the platform in 2017 after the completion of the [WEE Synthesis Report](#), part of the Pacific Women Roadmap development, which noted that ‘Pacific Women has an opportunity to work with bilateral and regional DFAT teams to determine their specific needs to strengthen women’s economic empowerment within their current portfolio. This may include convening relevant stakeholders to coordinate initiatives, results and sharing of lessons.’

The WEE Roundtable convenings are developing to meet expectations from partners for increasing their knowledge, to be able to improve their WEE projects and better support the empowerment of women in the Pacific.



Stephen Hazelman – Acting Coordinator, SPC POETCom

‘The gender aspect of the work is not one of our strengths,’ said Stephen Hazelman, Acting Coordinator of the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom). ‘Some of our members are quite advanced in this. We have 50 members in 17 countries in the Pacific. For example, in Samoa, our founding member is Women in Business Development, they do this. So, for us, being involved in this is a learning – we know value chains, we know the culture – it’s the gender dimension that we are very encouraged with the experience around the room, the methodologies, the processes that are there.’

While there are organisations that are beginning to develop deeper understandings of gender and WEE, women are often not new to the sector:



Cema Bolabola – Fiji Women in Fisheries Network

‘Women in our movement, women are founding members – Adi (Maimalaga) Tafunai from Women in Business Samoa is a founding member of this organisation and we have Karen Mapusa who is now with the Land Resource Division of the Pacific Community,’ continued Mr. Hazelman. ‘In Palau, women there are also quite active. So, we have very strong women in our organisation and it’s just to tap on their capacity and we thank Pacific Women for agreeing to do this journey with us.’

From last year to date, Pacific Women has convened a total of 4 meetings, which included stakeholders such as PHAMA, Market Development Facility (MDF) Fiji, Asia Development Bank (ADB), UNWomen Pacific, the Pacific Community, POETCom, Oxfam and the Australian Government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).