

Understanding Women's Political and Administrative Leadership in the Pacific

Regional Leadership And Decision-Making

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Project name: Improving women's leadership, political participation and decision making in the Pacific

Project partner: State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM) program, Australian National University

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Pacific Women aims to better understand and improve women's leadership and decision making in the region. Researchers from the SSGM program at Australian National University have produced an overview of the existing research and analytical work on women in political and administrative leadership in the Pacific. This research¹ will be used to inform future Pacific Women programming on this topic.

Over the years, efforts around women's leadership in the Pacific have not resulted in the gains expected or desired. For example, women's representation in parliament for the region remains the lowest in the world. Understanding what has enabled women to be elected successfully to parliament can lead to new ways of engaging and new modalities for support, so that future efforts do result in change.



L-R: Senators Jerrlyn Uduch Sengebau Senior (Palau) and Daisy Alik-Momotaro (Republic of the Marshall Islands) joined fellow Pacific women parliamentarians in Samoa to discuss women's access to formal and informal economies. Photo: Shazia Usman/Pacific Women Support Unit.

SSGM's report 'Women's political and administrative leadership in the Pacific' found that, across the region, women candidates who poll well are typically community-based, have deep connections to their electorates, are well educated, have strong male backers, are from high-profile families, have often built good reputations as a local representative, have a strong constituency support base, have significant involvement in the church, and are recognised as serving the community or delivering benefits locally.

The report cautioned that focusing on political representation at the national level is not sufficient; support to women in local leadership positions is required or there will not be a critical mass of women in leadership positions across all levels of decision making. Researchers, Dr Nicole Haley and Dr Kerry Zubrinich, note: 'The success or otherwise of initiatives aimed at improving women's political participation and political representation need therefore to be assessed in broader terms not just in terms of the number of women elected to parliament. Because even when women's formal participation is secured (i.e. through special measures) their access to informal political spaces may remain constrained.'

The report also recognised that public administration offers an important opportunity for women's leadership, particularly as the public sector is the largest single employer of women across the region. Positive factors for

women in administrative leadership positions were found to be access to scholarships and professional mentoring. However, research shows that gender inequalities make it difficult for women to reach positions of leadership in the public service. Women are more likely to be found in professional services roles such as teaching or health work, than in decision making positions. Using statistics from Papua New Guinea in 2014 as an example, 38 percent of all public servants were women, but only 18 percent of senior management positions and seven percent of executive appointments were held by women.

The reports' findings, drawn from the pool of existing evidence, will help shape future Pacific Women initiatives.

This Story of Change was originally published in the [Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2015-2016](#). All values are consisted with that reporting period. For the most up-to-date value of activities, visit our [interactive map](#).

¹Research available on *Pacific Women's* website under the Resources section.