



Recommendations and outcomes of the 12th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women

National Auditorium
Rarotonga, Cook Islands (20–24 October 2013)

PREAMBLE

1. The 12th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, hosted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the government of Cook Islands, was held from 20 to 24 October 2013 at the National Auditorium, Rarotonga, Cook Islands.
2. The conference celebrated progress in gender equality in the Pacific region and discussed the future and how, as Pacific nations, to position gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda at the national, regional and international levels. The conference reviewed national and regional implementation of gender equality commitments: the *Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005–2015* (RPPA), the *Forum Leaders' Declaration on Gender Equality*, and treaties and conventions, including the *UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women* and *UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security)*. The review emphasised critical areas of concern and there was discussion on strategies for accelerating progress on mechanisms to promote the advancement of women.
3. The conference acknowledged the need for support for the ongoing ratification, reporting and domestication of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*

(CEDAW)¹ into legislation, policy and practice, including, where appropriate, constitutional reform.

4. With the theme of ‘Celebrating our Progress, Shaping our World’, the conference highlighted the progress made so far towards gender equality while recognising that the Pacific Islands region has a long way to go to achieve substantive gender equality. Some Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) have passed domestic violence legislation, have supported the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health rights at international meetings, and have made progress on gender equality at national level, and have included gender equality in development forum discussions. As some of the commitments made are yet to be fully integrated into wider national and regional development agendas, the conference focused on strategies and mechanisms for refining national and regional approaches to ensure that gender equality becomes a high-level priority.

5. The conference made a number of recommendations regarding the priority areas of violence against women, health and access to services, as well as on gender disaggregation in the context of the ‘data revolution’ recommended by the UN High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Discussions highlighted actions taken by the Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) to improve prevention and response to violence against women.

6. The conference welcomed participation of the 26 delegates from the Pacific Young Women’s Leadership Alliance. The Pacific Young Women’s Dialogue, held on Rarotonga immediately prior to the 12th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, emphasised five areas: eliminating sexual and gender-based violence, ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights, eliminating all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities, promoting full and decent employment and economic empowerment for young women, and ensuring full participation of young women at all levels of decision making. Annex 1 contains the outcomes of that meeting.

¹ UN General Assembly, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 18 December 1979, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1249, p. 13 <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3970.html>> at 11 September 2013.

7. The conference recommended strategies and innovations for accelerating progress in achieving gender equality. The three objectives of the conference were to:

- a) identify lessons from past successes;
- b) develop recommendations for a ‘strong message of renewed commitment’; and
- c) identify new strategies to ensure faster and more sustainable progress.

8. Conference participants numbered over 200, making it the largest Conference of Pacific Women on record. Participants included representatives of 21 SPC member countries and territories – American Samoa, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna, Australia and New Zealand – and regional, non-governmental, civil society, academic, United Nations and donor partner organisations.

9. The conference acknowledged diverse forms of discrimination and struggles women experience based on their age, their physical condition, their location, their social status, their economic situation, their sexual orientation and their matrimonial status. The conference also reflected on further vulnerability caused by the impacts of climate change, by radiation resulting from nuclear weapons testing, and by practices such as sorcery-related violence and killing and human trafficking. Hence, the recommendations contained in the outcomes document target the advancement of all women, including women with disabilities and those living in remote areas.

2013 PACIFIC REGIONAL MDG TRACKING REPORT

The 2013 Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report and the *2012 Pacific Forum Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration* were presented at the conference. The section of the tracking report the conference focussed on was section 3 on MDG 3: gender equality and women's empowerment. It highlights achievements in terms of parity in education, but draws attention to significant progress

still required to increase women's representation and participation in political leadership and to eliminate violence against women.

In 2012, Pacific Forum Leaders committed to implement specific national policy actions to advance gender equality in the areas of gender-responsive government programmes and policies, decision-making, economic empowerment, ending violence against women, health and education.

The conference:

10. Called for SPC and development partners to support countries to develop an integrated regional set of statistical indicators for national, regional and international frameworks to streamline annual and periodic reporting processes.

11. Urged regional and international partners to harmonise reporting on gender equality and support national reporting initiatives.

12. Recommended PICTs to strengthen existing reporting mechanisms on international, regional, and national instruments to parliament so as to inform leaders and decision makers and all other stakeholders on the progress made towards gender equality.

13. Requested SPC to extend technical and reporting assistance to all SPC members for annual reporting, including on the Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration.

MECHANISMS TO PROMOTE THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Strengthening institutional mechanisms and support for the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment was discussed in several areas: statistical information for improved evidence-based policy-making and advocacy; the gender mainstreaming approach; national machineries for women and their role; and the role of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP). Regional mechanisms of note to support the advancement of women include the

Forum Reference Group to Address Sexual and Gender Based Violence and the Regional Peace and Security Action Plan and Working Group – the first regional action plan in the world.

The conference:

14. Acknowledged ongoing regional work to compile gender indicators and supported the establishment of a regular monitoring and reporting system across sectors in all PICTs.

15. Acknowledged and supported ongoing capacity building of national statistics offices, planning departments and sectoral agencies of governments, including national women's machineries (NWMs) to collect, analyse and use gender statistics, and urged SPC to increase capacity to supply training and technical assistance to all PICTs to improve their statistics on gender.

16. Supported capacity development of NWMs, other government institutions, and civil society organisations (CSOs) on gender mainstreaming, and called on PICTs to enhance support for the capacity development and adequate resourcing for NWMs to support the process of gender mainstreaming.

17. Called for public service commissioners to mainstream gender within the public service, including strengthening human resource development policies to advance gender equality.

18. Acknowledged the need to strengthen engagement between government and CSOs, including shared resourcing arrangements and clarity of roles and responsibilities to achieve goals in advancing gender equality.

19. Commended the development and endorsement of the *Pacific Regional Action Plan: Women, Peace and Security 2012–2015*, and recognised the complementarity of it to the RPPA and supporting instruments on gender equality.

20. Encouraged development partners, including CROP agencies, to establish and strengthen efforts to mobilise resources for its implementation.

21. Endorsed the review of the RPPA, and requested SPC to take the lead in this process with the support of PIFS and other CROP agencies, in consultation with all PICTs, taking into consideration the need to harmonise RPPA reporting with other regional and international mechanisms and to accelerate gender mainstreaming across all programmes.

WOMEN'S LEGAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Progress made in women's legal and human rights since the 11th Conference were presented. Key issues where progress has been slow are enforcing gender responsive legislation for CEDAW commitments; legislative measures, policies and plans for the elimination of violence against women and girls; adequate resourcing for policies and laws that address gender equality; implementing temporary special measures and affirmative action to rectify the region's low level of representation of women in national legislatures. CEDAW reporting also remains a challenge.

The conference:

22. Called for governments to consider social protection measures for vulnerable women, including but not limited to women with disabilities, older women, women living with HIV/AIDS/STIs, young women, girls, female-headed households, widows, divorced women, migrant workers and caregivers.

23. Recognising the high prevalence rates of violence against women, young women and girls, including those with disabilities, and the impact of gambling, drug and substance abuse on increasing violence, the conference called for urgent and increased investment in policies, programmes, research and legislative reforms that provide services and support, including access to rights and justice.

24. Commended the regional advocacy work conducted by the Pacific Islands Forum Reference Group to Address Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), supported their proposal to conduct national studies on the economic impacts of SGBV, and requested dissemination of the findings to all PICTs on completion.

25. Called for PICTs and development partners to support research regarding social and economic impacts of all forms of violence against women/SGBV, including sorcery-related violence.

26. Acknowledged the importance of creating temporary special measures (TSMs) and appropriate strategies to increase political and public participation and representation for women – including young women, indigenous women and those with disabilities – at all levels of government, including traditional systems,

27. Acknowledged the need to ensure that discrimination faced by women, young women, and girls with disabilities and their particular vulnerability to SGBV and poverty be recognised in line with CEDAW and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), and supported evidence-based studies by PICTs (with the support of development partners) to improve knowledge and data on women with disabilities for improved policy and programming.

28. Called for the elimination of SGBV and violence against women, young women and girls, including those with disabilities, and those in rural and remote locations, and for this:

- a) to be included in national development strategies, plans and public financing mechanisms;
- and

- b) to be adequately resourced through clearly identifiable budget allocations, expenditure and human resources.

29. Supported access to justice for survivors of violence by the adoption of national legislation, effective legal assistance, and just and effective remedies, which involve both the formal and the non-formal (or traditional) justice systems to be addressed through the development and coordinated implementation of effective multi-sectoral national policies, strategies and programmes that include measures for prevention, protection and support services, and monitoring and evaluation.

30. Supported the engagement of adolescents and youth as strategic groups for ending the cycle of violence through the implementation of educational programmes, based on gender equality and human rights.

31. Called for the post-2015 development agenda to adopt a transformative stand-alone goal to achieve gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment, structured around several target areas: freedom from violence, gender equality in capabilities and resources, gender equality in decision-making power, and a voice in public and private institutions.

32. Called for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) to be guaranteed, ensuring that women, young women, and girls, including those with disabilities, receive comprehensive and confidential SRHR services that respect their human rights throughout their life cycle.

33. Called for legislative reform to eliminate discriminatory laws and harmful practices that criminalise or impede access to abortion, emergency contraception and HIV/AIDS services, and instead create survivor-centred approaches for people with a history of sexual abuse.

34. Called for accountability from representatives at regional and international levels, including reporting back from CROP working groups to PICTs and reporting back on progress made since the last Triennial.

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES – EDUCATION

Education is vital for women's empowerment, and also benefits families, communities and economies. The 2013 Pacific Regional MDG Tracking Report highlighted the achievement of gender parity in most PICTs, yet this remains a challenge for several PICTs. Issues affecting enrolment and retention rates amongst girls include pregnancy, travel to school risks, early marriage, insecure toilet facilities, risks of harassment and sexual assault, and costs associated with education. Women and girls with disabilities experience worse access to education and training than their peers without disabilities.

The conference:

35. Called for PICTs to adopt measures that ensure that girls have equal access to primary, secondary and tertiary education, especially in rural and remote areas, and areas of great hardship.
36. Called for PICTs to adopt measures that promote respect for the safety of women and girls in the school environment, including measures to prevent as well as to respond to SGBV.
37. Encouraged training and education institutions to expand choices for women and girls in accessing technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and higher education.
38. Called for PICTs to put in place inclusive policies to accommodate pregnant young women and mothers to complete their education.
39. Requested countries and CROP agencies to support greater research and gender analysis with strategies to address the root causes of the lower retention and achievement rates of boys in some PICTs.
40. Called for PICTs to disseminate data regarding Pacific women's access to education and to support initiatives that address all barriers – civil, political, social, cultural, economic and physical –

faced by women, young women, and girls, including those with disabilities, to access all levels of education.

41. Supported improvements in the quality of education towards strengthening literacy and numeracy rates, and noted that SPBEA and the Forum Education Ministers have initiated work in this area.

42. Called for PICTs to review school curricula and all teaching materials in order to eliminate gender stereotypes and all forms of discrimination.

43. Called for PICTs, with the support of CROP agencies and development partners, to implement initiatives for (a) the ongoing professional development of teachers and vocational trainers, and (b) a core basic teacher training programme that includes compulsory areas in family health and comprehensive sex education, counselling and working with those with special needs.

44. Requested the Forum Education Ministers' Meeting, and all other regional ministerial fora, to include a gender perspective in the development of all education policies and programmes.

45. Requested CROP agencies to provide research on the quality of training and professional development, particularly in the area of health education.

46. Called on PICTs to conduct research into the obstacles to women's access to decent work, even after investments made in higher level and tertiary studies, and identify links between higher education and employment outcomes for women.

47. Requested that all school buildings improve access to people with disabilities on their campuses and in their distance learning programmes.

48. Requested PICTs' education systems to include climate change and gender in school curricula.

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO SERVICES – HEALTH

Women's health involves concerns regarding women's sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and health concerns faced by women with disabilities. Access to good health care remains a challenge because of social and cultural issues, the health care system itself, the set-up of sexual and reproductive health services, and access issues specific to certain groups, such as women who have been subjected to violence and women with disabilities.

The conference:

49. Noted the discussion of the *Pacific Sexual Health and Wellbeing Shared Agenda 2014–2018* and acknowledged the importance of addressing the social determinants of health, such as gender-based violence and the transformation of gender roles having negative impacts on women's health.

50. Supported the incorporation of strategies for ending violence against women, young women, and girls, including those with disabilities, into health policies, training curricula, medical guidelines and standard operating procedures, including strengthening of health systems and their human resources, in order to assist efforts to effectively prevent and address violence against women.

51. Supported better access to family planning, including for women with disabilities, as a means of improving women's health, empowerment and social advancement, and reducing the risk of maternal death and STI and HIV transmission. The conference also requested the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting to include an agenda item at their next meeting on ways to address the major problem of the unmet need for contraceptives in the Pacific.

52. Supported access to inclusive, youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, education and information, including access to safe spaces for women, young women, and girls,

including those with disabilities, and supported the teaching of comprehensive sexuality education with appropriate content starting in primary school.

53. Commended the collaboration of parliamentarians, government, development partners, and civil society organisations at the recent 6th Asia Pacific Population Conference, and recognised the recently passed *Moana Declaration*² on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights at the Pacific Parliamentarians' consultation on the ICPD Beyond 2014 meeting, and requested this agenda be included in the health ministers' annual meeting and in decisions on national government allocations to ensure adequate resources for sexual and reproductive health.

54. Highlighted the need to strengthen national screening programmes for breast and cervical cancers, and immunisation against the human papillomavirus (HPV) to prevent cervical cancer, as well as treatment for STIs, including chlamydia, and requested that governments prioritise support in these areas.

55. Acknowledged the positive and negative impacts of traditional medicine and called on governments to examine and explore the use of traditional medicine and practices in the Pacific, and their impact on women's health.

56. Requested that PICTs make health sector information available and accessible to the community and grassroots level.

57. Requested that SPC explore funding opportunities to conduct family health and safety studies for the French territories.

58. Requested PICT governments to explore innovative strategies and new technologies to increase access to good quality, comprehensive, and inclusive health systems, including social

² United Nations Population Fund, *Moana Declaration returns people to the heart of development agenda* (2013) <http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/pacific/2013/08/17/7672/moana_declaration_returns_people_to_the_heart_of_development_agenda/> at 1 October 2013.

protection, to improve health outcomes, including reducing NCD-related deaths and disability in women, especially in rural and remote areas.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Women's economic empowerment is part of the *Revised Pacific Platform for Action*, the Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting action plans 2012 and 2013 and the *Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration*. Women face barriers to employment and economic empowerment, and they do not have equal access to financial services, business ownership and markets, nor the right to safe, fair and equal participation in local economies.

The conference:

59. Urged governments to act and report on their commitments to women's economic empowerment as outlined in the *Revised Pacific Platform for Action*, the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM) 2012 and 2013 action plans, and the *Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration*.

60. Supported the development and use of sex-disaggregated data on women's economic empowerment.

61. Called for all PICTs to review the implementation of national employment legislation and policies, to promote decent work, to remove discriminatory practices and pay, and to eliminate sexual harassment that limits women's overall participation in the economy.

62. Supported and welcomed initiatives that improve the efficiency, productivity and safety of local markets and encourage national ownership by PICTs' governments.

63. Encouraged state-owned and private enterprises to improve and expand women's employment opportunities, and to promote, equitably, women to leadership positions.

64. Called on governments, the private sector and financial institutions to invest in and support women and young women, including those with disabilities, women living in rural and remote areas, and working in the informal sector, by:

- a) giving access to productive resources;
- b) establishing business incubators;
- c) promoting financial literacy programmes and access to financial services (noting potential negative risks associated with credit programmes); and
- d) guaranteeing safe and sanitary conditions.

65. Called on PICTs to secure food sovereignty based on the recognition of smallholder farmers, particularly women, as key economic actors whose sovereign right to use and own land should be protected through legally binding safeguards, including against land grabbing.

66. Urged governments to provide economic incentives for the private, not-for-profit, and state sectors to train and employ young women.

67. Called on governments and the private sector to provide good quality, accessible and affordable childcare as a critical driver of women's economic empowerment and economic development.

68. Urged FEMM to identify investment opportunities for women's employment and women SMEs and entrepreneurs in all regional and national tourism strategies and plans, and called on PICTs with support from development partners to invest in these areas.

69. Called on governments and development partners to ensure that all environmental and social impact assessments of extractive industries, which disproportionately affect women and children,

include a rigorous gender analysis to identify and mitigate against economic, social, cultural and environmental risks.

EMERGING AREAS OF WORK

The issues identified at the last conference were discussed as new priorities at the regional and international level. There is labour migration. The power of the media to address gender inequality was noted, as well as the challenges of eliminating gender-bias and the traditional stereotypes portrayed of women in the media. Climate change was stressed as a critical regional priority, which should no longer be considered as an emerging issue and should be a separate item in the RPPA. Women and girls with disabilities face a double burden of discrimination due to their gender and their disability and this is now recognised in some national gender equality policies and national disability policies.

The conference:

70. Urged CROP agencies and development partners to facilitate regional research, with gender analysis, on the impact of labour migration and remittances in the Pacific to develop strategies to empower people to migrate with dignity.

71. Considered the threats of human trafficking and urged regional cooperation between governments and relevant stakeholders to take immediate national and regional measures to eliminate it through:

- a) enactment of effective legislation;
- b) protection mechanisms within existing regimes; and
- c) development of appropriate support services.

72. Acknowledged the importance of keeping the intersectional issues that women and girls with disabilities face on the regional and national agenda, and reiterated support for the inclusion of those issues in national gender and disability policies to be reported on via CEDAW, CRPD, and other relevant human rights instruments.
73. Encouraged CROP agencies and development partners to increase and strengthen efforts to mainstream gender into climate change and disaster risk management in the delivery of services to PICTs, recognising women's cultural knowledge and skills as custodians of the environment, and emphasised the importance of the production of sex-disaggregated data and indicators to monitor the impacts of adaptation and mitigation initiatives and increase institutional capacity.
74. Called for governments to recognise that community media and women's media networks are important for collaboration and partnerships.
75. Called for governments and NWMs to use the Global Media Monitoring project to conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis of content to be able to ensure that government communication and media strategies effectively promote their gender equality commitments.
76. Called for PICTs to recognise and fully respect the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples, especially the knowledge held by women, as well as in territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities.
77. Called for research with gender analysis by PICTs, in collaboration with development partners, on the impact of inappropriate uses of ICTs, and called for the development of national regulatory infrastructure and policy.

UPCOMING REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES

After the summary of the regional and international processes guiding gender equality work, panellists presented their experience in engaging with CSW, the ICDP review, the MDGs and the development of the post-2015 agenda. The role of civil society organisations in these processes was highlighted as was also the importance of mainstreaming gender equality into all processes and frameworks. The Conference noted the historically low representation of PICTs on UN bodies, in particular the CSW and CEDAW committee, and the need for increased representation to ensure PICT perspectives in the global development agenda.

The conference:

78. Considered the opportunities available through regional and international processes to advance gender equality. Applauding development partners' support to gender equality in the region, PICTs called for more support and shared strategies to advance regional issues into international processes, with particular attention to the special circumstances of SIDS and LDCs in the post-2015 development agenda.

79. Called on all stakeholders – governments, development partners, civil society and regional agencies – to improve efforts towards increased coordination and harmonisation, including reporting of gender and development outcomes.

80. Reminded CROP agencies of their obligations to actively promote and demonstrate commitment to gender equality in the development and delivery of programmes and services.

81. Called for PICTs' leaders, CROP agencies and development partners to actively promote gender equality as a stand-alone goal in the post-2015 agenda, as well as for gender to be mainstreamed across all areas.

82. Supported the strengthening of national women's machineries and civil society to ensure the voices and experiences of women, young women, and women with disabilities in the Pacific are reflected in regional and global processes.

83. Recognised the need for PICT representation on international bodies, including the CSW, the CEDAW committee, (and other gender and human rights bodies), and called for enhanced regional coordination of the nomination process.

84. Called for accountability to PICTs from the relevant Pacific representatives on regional and international level bodies, including reporting by regional working groups on progress made towards implementing recommendations from the last Triennial.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES RAISED BY PICTS

Following the discussion of the recommendations for all agenda items, several countries proposed additional recommendations and these were endorsed by the conference.

The conference:

85. Called for increased ratification of CEDAW and CRPD in the region.

86. Called for PICTs and CROP agencies to foster mentoring opportunities and the creation of mechanisms for young women leaders to engage in national, regional and international processes.

87. Took note of the increased incidence and reporting of sorcery-related violence, including murder, against women in some PICTs. The conference also urged governments and relevant stakeholders to establish measures to eliminate sorcery-related violence and to address its causes, consequences and impacts.