

We Don't Whisper Anymore

Ending Violence Against Women in the North Pacific

*Gender Based Violence (GBV) Stories of Change -
Sharing the journeys of Pacific women leaders and women's movements*

November 2021



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Gender-based violence (GBV) 'story of change' for the North Pacific. Sharing the journey of Pacific women leaders and women's movements to establish and expand three countries' first crisis centres.

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Cover photo, from left: Jayrene Engichy, Chuuk Women's Council (CWC) in FSM (credit: Pacific Women, James Benito); Daniya Note, Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI) (credit: Pacific Women, Chewy Lin); Tomiko Maddison, WUTMI (credit: Pacific Women, Chewy Lin); Etita Teiabauri, Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre (credit: UN Women), and Lestina Berdon, Chuuk Women's Council (CWC) in FSM (credit: Pacific Women, James Benito).

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Forewords



Tara Chetty, Co-lead Partnerships, *Pacific Women*

Once a crisis centre is open, we need to all work together to ensure their doors never close. This is why we continue to listen to the needs of our emerging crisis centre partners and, guided by their leadership, to work with them to help facilitate service expansion, along with quality delivery of services through multi-country learning and training exchanges. This approach supports our partners to share their challenges, ideas and solutions to deliver quality crisis and support services, especially during COVID-19, a time of increased violence against women in many countries.

Here in the Pacific, we are pleased to have supported three countries to have their first crisis centres. This was enabled through technical and funding support from Australia through *Pacific Women* for Women United Together Marshall Island's *Weto in Mour*, Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre, and Chuuk Women's Council's *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center in the Federated States of Micronesia.

Pacific Women has supported 15 crisis centres in the Pacific since it began in 2012 and, as it closes in 2021, Australia will continue to support crisis centres through its new Pacific Women Lead program. We acknowledge and thank the many crisis centre leaders and services, partners and friends who contributed to the compilation of this story of change.



Teretia Tokam, Director, Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre (KWCS)

I want more women in Kiribati to be supported and able to stand up and speak about women's rights. I've been coordinator of Kiribati's only crisis and support centre since it launched in January 2018, but my journey to start the centre and to end violence against women and children has spanned two decades. It will likely last my whole lifetime.

I feel blessed to dedicate my life to this journey, and thank my family and those who support me. Domestic violence is so deeply entrenched in our modern-day Kiribati villages and society that it's often regarded as normal, yet it's against the law and against a culture that promotes caring families. Our culture is about protection and shared roles and responsibilities, about men and women working together and respecting each other. Shifting today's mindsets to reject violence will take time.

But steady gains are being made against this seemingly insurmountable task of advancing gender equality and reducing violence against Kiribati women and children. I am proud to stand with my team at the forefront of this progress, alongside the many partners working together towards this common goal.



Christina 'Kiki' Stinnett, President, Chuuk Women's Council (CWC)

I believe all women should live a life free from all forms of violence and discrimination. To support this vision, it's essential to establish and promote women's support services and to ensure they are accessible for women survivors of violence. That is why Chuuk Women's Council dedicated so many years to opening the *Tongen Inepwineu*

Counseling Center. *Tongen Inepwineu* translates to 'Love of the Family'. This is the first crisis centre in the Federated States of Micronesia, and an integral part of CWC's network of more than 60 women's organisations and over 1,000 women members in Chuuk State.

Together with our members and partners we will continue to work tirelessly to help and support Chuukese survivors of violence against women and children, while also advocating for improved human rights and gender equality. We need to water and nurture the plants that our aunties, mothers and grandmothers planted and keep them safe and growing for future generations. We say 'Kinisou Chapur', or thank you, to Australia and its *Pacific Women* team who have offered intense support for so many years; they are part of our team making this dream a reality.



Daisy Alik-Momotaro, Executive Director, Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI)

Surveys show an alarming one in three Marshallese women experience some form of abuse in their lifetime. Here in the Republic of Marshall Islands, or RMI, the rates of violence against women and children are unacceptable for a nation whose culture is built on peace, care and love for family and clan. We have a traditional culture with a matrilineal structure that has existed for centuries. We want to help our nation return to its culture of peaceful families. At WUTMI we are committed to working to end violence against women and children, and to ensure men who perpetrate violence and abuse are punished to the highest extent of the law.

We established RMI's first counselling service called *Weto in Mour* in 2016, supported by Australia through *Pacific Women*, and in 2021 worked with the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to expand to the island of Ebeye. Expanding our services is critical, as survivors of family violence in remote and island locations need support.

Our expansion this year to Ebeye Island sets a milestone in WUTMI's fight against sexual and other violence and harassment against Marshallese children, young adolescents and women of all ages.

Acronyms and abbreviations

BIMBA	<i>Boutokaan Inaomataia ao Mauriia Binabinaine</i> Association
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CWC	Chuuk Women's Council
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [Australia]
DVPPA	Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act
EVAW	Ending Violence Against Women
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
FWCC	Fiji Women's Crisis Centre
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KWCSC	Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MIDPO	Marshall Island Disabled Persons Organization
MLSC	Micronesian Legal Services Corporation
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
Pacific Partnership	Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls
<i>Pacific Women</i>	<i>Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development</i>
PSO	Police Safety Order
PWNAVAW	Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women
RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SPC	The Pacific Community
TICC	<i>Tongen Inepwineu</i> Counseling Center
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNTF	United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAW	Violence against Women
VAWG	Violence against Women and Girls
WAVE	Women Against Violence through Education
WiM	<i>Weto in Mour</i> [Counselling Service]
WUTMI	Women United Together Marshall Islands

Introduction: We don't whisper anymore

This story shares the journeys of Pacific women leaders and women's movements – over a close to 40-year period to the present day – who have struggled, lobbied, organised, stood in solidarity, supported each other and survivors of violence against women, and triumphed.

Their triumph in the North Pacific is the establishment of three new violence against women crisis support centres, located in Chuuk in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Kiribati, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). Offering refuge, emergency shelter, health, counselling, and referrals to access justice, legal, and financial support to survivors of violence, the crisis centres make a fundamental difference in women's, children's and families' everyday lives. All three centres provide a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week (24/7) telephone helpline. Women who lead the crisis centres and work as counsellors and case managers work tirelessly to serve survivors and to change the attitudes and behaviour in families and communities, which keep women silent and normalise violence against women.

Up to two-thirds of women in the North Pacific experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime, and most have never sought help, because there were no services available, and for the fear and violence they experience if they do try to seek help. This is slowly changing, as the crisis centres reach out further into communities, and build credibility, trust and women's confidence to seek help.

*'We don't whisper anymore
but speak out loud.'*

– Stakeholder, Republic of the Marshall Islands

With the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic, the crisis centres responded quickly, lobbying to be declared essential services and learning new skills to safely provide quality telephone counselling services and ensure continuity of their services during lockdown and other movement restrictions. New telephone counselling and outer island satellite services are now also expanding the reach of services to remote outer island locations. FSM, Kiribati and RMI are vast island nations with widely dispersed populations, making it even more difficult for women to access services.

These national milestones build on a solid foundation of an enduring network of solidarity and collaboration between Pacific women's movements working across the region to end violence against women.

This story celebrates the achievements of women helping women. It documents the journeys of the North Pacific crisis centres, the lessons they have learned, their advice for other centres in countries where women face similar challenges, and what is required from donors, governments, and regional and national stakeholders to build on successes, expand further and continue to improve the lives of women who experience violence.

Critical ingredients to establish and expand services



The symbolic breadfruit tree

The bountiful breadfruit tree is a symbol of hope and survival in the North Pacific. It represents the journeys of change undertaken by Pacific women's movements to establish, grow and expand North Pacific crisis centres to protect and support women experiencing domestic and intimate partner violence.

Strong roots are the foundation. They represent more than 40 years of Pacific women's solidarity and collaboration to end men's violence against women. They include the research and evidence of the scale and scope of violence that prepared the groundwork for legislation and policy to criminalise violence against women. They also depict the donor funding, technical support, government partnerships, and peer learning and exchange.

The trunk holds the tree firm and stable. It represents the strength of the courageous women who lead the crisis centres and the counsellors who support survivors.

The large, protective leaves represent the crisis centre services. These continue to grow and expand to reach further and offer new services to provide support for survivors of violence against women.

Context: Violence and isolation

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Kiribati and Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) are all Small Island Developing States facing unique social, economic, and environmental challenges, including small population size and remoteness.

- Chuuk is the most populous state of the FSM, with 50,000 citizens spread over 120 km². The four states of FSM span nearly 2,700 km² of ocean.ⁱ
- Kiribati includes 32 atolls and one island over a vast area of 3.5 million km² of ocean. Kiribati is the only country in the world that spans all four hemispheres – northern, southern, eastern and western. Over 50 per cent of the 117,000 population lives in Tarawa. It takes about 10 days by boat from Tarawa to Kiritimati Island.
- RMI spreads across more than 29 islands and atolls made up of 1,156 islands and islets across 1.9 million km² of ocean, with only 180 km² of land mass. The total population is 59,000, 73.3 per cent of which is urban.

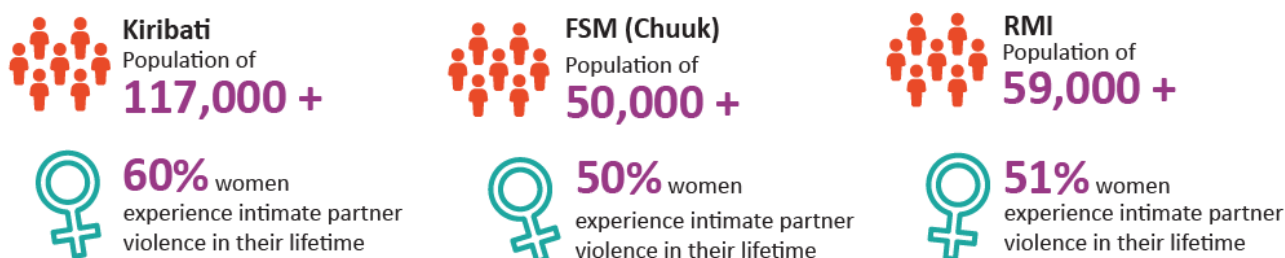
The situation of violence against women in the North Pacific

Women in FSM, Kiribati and RMI report experiencing high rates of violence, particularly intimate partner (usually boyfriend or husband) violence. Up to 60 per cent of women in Kiribati have experienced sexual or physical violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime, as well as 50 per cent in Chuuk, and 33 per cent in RMI. In the three North Pacific countries, women lacked access to crisis support, refuge, safety planning and counselling services before 2016.

‘Women had nowhere to go, but now they do. The journey started in 1984 to today where the centres can provide telephone and online response and referral, a safe refuge, and can even reach remote women.’

– Stakeholders, Federated States of Micronesia

Prevalence rates of intimate partner violence



Data Sources: FSM – Government of FSM, DFAT and UNFPA. (2014), *FSM Family Health and Safety Study*. FSM Department of Health and Social Affairs, Pohnpei; Kiribati – Kiribati National Statistics Office. (2019), *Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey 2018-19*. National Statistics Office; RMI – Government of Marshall Islands, WUTMI, RMI, *National Study on Family Health and Safety*. (2014) Ministry of International Affairs, Majuro.

Globally, less than 40 per cent of women who experience violence seek help of any sort.ⁱⁱ In the North Pacific, 55 per cent of women in Kiribati, 54 per cent in RMI, and 35 per cent in FSM have not told anyone about the violence they experience. Only a very small fraction (less than 2 per cent) of women reported the violence to a formal service such as a crisis centre.

Women do not report violence for several reasons. Many men and women have accepted that violence against women is ‘normal’. This is reinforced by women having lower status in most areas of life and women often not having equal access to work and income, and thus being financially dependent on their husband. In addition, there are challenges for survivors specific to the region, such as religious and cultural beliefs.



Maria has been living in a violent relationship for over 10 years. As a child, she saw her father beat her mother. She has told her mother about her husband's violence, but her mother has told her that she should try harder to be a better wife. She also told the wife of her pastor when she needed to go to the hospital. The wife of the pastor encouraged her to pray and forgive her husband.

Maria's story is a fictionalised account of a typical Pacific woman survivor's perspective. It weaves throughout this Story of Change, showing what many women in the North Pacific experience.

The islands are dispersed, which requires survivors to have funds to travel to centres to access services, both to pay for transportation, and also for food and accommodation while staying in the main centre. The populations are small and it is very challenging for survivors to access services confidentially.

'Most women still refuse to report to the legal system regarding the physical and sexual violence they have suffered. I think it is a universal culture of saying what is normal, what is acceptable? Especially when you are married. That challenge is all over Marshall Islands. Most cases that come through my door for health support, they still refuse to report. This is the biggest challenge, but I have seen this change over the past three years. There is a steady increase in the number of women reporting to the legal system and building their confidence in WUTMI and the Police Domestic Violence Unit.'

– Stakeholder, Republic of the Marshall Islands

A strong foundation: Pacific women's movement

The leaders of the Pacific women's movement were crucial to the establishment of crisis centres throughout the region. The women's movement in the Pacific was a leader in the global feminist movement through the 1980s, particularly its activism following the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, and leading up to the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. The women's movement was also active in the nuclear-free Pacific movement from the late 1970s. Pacific women's rights activists have lobbied and advocated for decades to change laws and policies to improve the lives of women.

RMI was also the first Pacific country to have a woman President, Dr Hilda Heine, who is a founding member of Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI).

This legacy of sustained struggle and the courage, leadership and commitment of the leaders of women's rights movements in the North Pacific is a crucial component that contributed to the establishment of the crisis centres. Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre, *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center in FSM and *Weto in Mour (A Place of Life)* in RMI were built from existing women's rights organisations with decades of experience working to address violence against women.

Weto in Mour (A Place of Life)

Women United Together Marshall Islands established *Weto in Mour* (WiM), the first specialist violence against women service in RMI in 2016. WUTMI was established in 1984 with a mandate to improve the lives of Marshallese women, and in doing so strengthen Marshallese families. On 24 of RMI's atolls and outer islands it has chapters, or member groups, which connect to the umbrella organisation of WUTMI. The organisation has a strong history of community outreach and capacity building.

Prior to establishing *Weto in Mour (A Place of Life)*, WUTMI had been working to end violence against women through previous projects, including the Women Against Violence through Education (WAVE) project supported by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Better Response to Address Violence Everywhere (iBRAVE) project funded by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (UNTF). During this time, one of WUTMI's successes was the passing of the *Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act* (DVPPA) in 2011, the third country in the region to do so. WUTMI and *Weto in Mour* were key contributors to the RMI National Gender Policy (2015), which has a focus on providing support services for survivors of violence.

The **Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC)**, the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women (PWNAAVW) and *Pacific Women* provided technical support and training to WUTMI's *Weto in Mour*. *Pacific Women* commenced funding and organisational development support to WUTMI to establish *Weto in Mour* in 2015. The development phase of *Weto in Mour* was comprehensive, including community consultations and working with partners such as police and health services.

In 2020, *Weto in Mour* extended its service operation by providing a 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week telephone counselling line.

In February 2021, WUTMI opened its first outer island satellite office on Ebeye, with plans to expand to other atolls. The opening of the support service for women in Ebeye resulted from strong support from WUTMI's national network of chapters, keen to see more services in rural and remote locations. Ebeye is located on a very small, heavily populated island in the Kwajalein Atoll.

Funding for the new Ebeye centre is from the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, via UN Women, complementing the support from Australia through *Pacific Women* that funded the Majuro *Weto in Mour*, and provides ongoing technical support for all WiM staff in Ebeye and Majuro.

Crucially, the Ebeye office was made possible with the support of local government, community leaders and women on Ebeye.

The three staff at the Ebeye office are raising the WUTMI profile by informing the community about their services, visiting key stakeholders, and training police officers working in Ebeye to better respond and support survivors of violence against women and children.

The Ebeye centre has extended the reach of gender-based violence (GBV) services to women in the Marshall Islands who are marginalised due to their geographic location. The Republic of the Marshall Islands is made up of two parallel island chains of 29 atolls, called the Ralik and Ratak Chains, with women from both chains able to access Ebeye WiM services.

‘Within WUTMI, there is increased confidence in dealing with and advocating for issues that affect and impact women; we don’t whisper anymore but speak out loud!

There [are] more women, more younger women involved in advocating for women’s issues. There are more women involved in the civil service leadership and in state owned enterprises, and this is where we see advancement of women in leadership roles in RMI. Our young staff are presenting, convincing, and educating the police to create awareness of the existence of the Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act in the country.’

– Stakeholder, Republic of the Marshall Islands

WiM has recruited Women Champions on the islands of Arno, Wotje and Jaluit. These women will be trained by WUTMI to respond to survivors and become their eyes and ears in the outer islands. The champions will learn how to be community-based advocates who will identify and refer survivors to WiM services. The three islands were selected from the 29 atolls as they are the most populated islands. WUTMI is planning to hold further police training for these outer islands, building on the success of recent training with the Majuro and Ebeye Police.

Tongen Inepwineu (Love of the Family) Counseling Center

The **Chuuk Women’s Council (CWC)** was established in 1984 to assist women in becoming more productive and self-sufficient members of society, through comprehensive programs that enhance the social, economic and physical wellbeing of women and their families. CWC’s membership includes over 1,000 women and it is the umbrella organisation for more than 64 individual women’s organisations. The council focuses on the areas of health, education and cultural preservation.

In *Pacific Women’s* 2017 assessment of violence against women services in Chuuk,ⁱⁱⁱ CWC was identified as the leading women’s rights organisation in Chuuk. An assessment of services in Chuuk conducted in 2017 by *Pacific Women* found that there were:

- Limited crisis counselling services for women experiencing violence.
- A loose referral network between the police, hospital, Micronesian Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) and CWC.
- A need for longer-term assistance to support the recovery of women affected by violence.^{iv}

In 2020, the Chuuk Women’s Council launched the *Tongen Inepwineu* (Love of the Family) Counseling Center (TICC). TICC is the first specialist crisis service for survivors of violence against women in the Federated States of Micronesia. The centre provides free, confidential, and non-judgemental counselling and support to women survivors of violence, including the operation of a 24/7 counselling line.

Funding for TICC is through the Australian Government's *Pacific Women* program, which also funds the CWC's Young Women's Empowerment project, and includes renovation of the CWC building to house the TICC counselling services and cost of staff over the next three years, with their services to include advocacy work, training and mentoring.

TICC envisions a Chuuk State that is free from all forms of violence and discrimination against women, and builds on decades of lobbying work to improve the lives of women in Chuuk by CWC. For example, the CWC successfully lobbied the government to increase the age of consent from 13 to 18 years of age in 2014. TICC continues to lobby for domestic violence law for Chuuk and has contributed to drafting the legislation. The success of the centre is due to the commitment of CWC President Christina 'Kiki' Stinnett and the counselling staff.

Since 1984 – almost 40 years ago – CWC has committed to educate and support other women to become leaders in their communities, businesses, and in health care. Kiki's mother, Shinobu M. Poll, was one of the founding members of the Chuuk Women's Advisory Council and past CWC President. Kiki was behind the scenes until her mother passed in 2010, when she was elected President. The council changed its name to Chuuk Women Council in 1993 as it transitioned from an advisory role to implementation.

'I see, I learn, I stayed on that path of wanting to make life better for myself and others.'

– Christina 'Kiki' Stinnett, CWC President

CWC actively seeks funding and support for a wide variety of programs, projects, and activities to have the resources and influence to bring about positive changes for women in Chuuk. The funding and technical support from *Pacific Women* in 2019 was the tipping point in the establishment of TICC.

'The sustainability of the funding is key for the continuity of the counselling service. The grant has enabled us, got us going to provide the service that is so needed in our communities.'

– Christina 'Kiki' Stinnett, CWC President

Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre

The Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre (KWCS) has a slightly different history to the other centres. It was nurtured by the Kiribati Family Health Association (KFHA), a women's rights organisation with strong leadership in sexual and reproductive health, which had successfully lobbied for the *Te Rau N Te Mwenga Act 2014* (Family Peace Act). Kiribati Family Health Association supported all aspects of KWCS's transition from 2016 to become an independent organisation in 2019, particularly for finance and governance. The Director of the Centre, Teretia Tokam, had a long history of promoting women's rights in Kiribati, first as a prosecutor and then within the Ministry of Women when it was first established.

The creation of the KWCS as an independent entity with strong donor support was largely the result of an evidence-based need seen in the findings of the Kiribati Family Health and Support Study 2010. A key recommendation from the study was to strengthen and expand formal support systems for women living with violence in Kiribati and establish a multi-sectoral referral system.

'I knew by the time the centre opened, many women will come in and there won't be any time for training...I moved away from being a lawyer to becoming an advocate for ending violence against women. My turning point was when I did a domestic violence case in the Court of Appeal, appearing for the state. It was a brutal case: the woman was badly bashed up by her husband, who bit her upper lip

right off. A number of women would come to see us, me and my lawyer friends, for help and it gave me the idea that perhaps I can do more for the women.'

– Teretia Tokam, KWCSO Director

FWCC is a key partner, along with the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women, providing technical support, coaching, and mentoring support to KWCSO since 2017, with staff and other Kiribati stakeholders receiving ongoing assistance to build their capacity in counselling, case management and crisis service operations. This included intensive support in 2019, firstly with FWCC staff visiting Kiribati to provide staff with support to address processes and counselling skills required for KWCSO to become independent, and secondly a study tour to Vanuatu Women's Centre for staff to exchange learning.

Other key partners are *Pacific Women* and UN Women, who jointly funded the establishment of the KWCSO. *Pacific Women* provided core funding, while UN Women and partners provided technical support and training for counsellors. *Pacific Women* continues to support strategic planning, accountability and governance, and UN Women continues to provide technical support and training to staff and counsellors.

Since KWCSO became independent, it has increased the number of staff and continues to improve their expertise in counselling and case management. Establishing KWCSO as an independent non-government organisation (NGO) also enabled it to expand its scope of work from basic counselling for survivors, to community outreach and increasing referrals in partnership with other service providers.

Since opening its doors, KWCSO's services to support survivors of violence against women have expanded to respond to the needs of their clients, and to their evolving operating environment. In 2016, the centre offered counselling, a victim support fund, a 24-hour helpline, legal information, and community awareness. In 2018, this expanded to include referrals from social welfare, plus applications for police safety orders (PSOs). By 2020, KWCSO began an emergency shelter, and then in 2021 expanded to open its second centre on Kiritimati Island.

'Wherever KWCSO sees a gap to fill, they are quick to raise those issues at national levels and with different stakeholders.'

– Stakeholder, Kiribati

With the new centre on the second most populated island in Kiribati, survivors have more access to services right at their doorstep. GBV services are now available to women and girl survivors on Kiritimati Island and the nearby islands of Tabuaeran, Teraina and Kanton. The new Kiritimati centre responds to an increase in cases reported, revealed in KWCSO's client data, with KWCSO then working with the community, Ministry of Women, Youth, Sport and Social Affairs, SafeNet members, and UN Women through the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls (Pacific Partnership^v) program, to establish the new centre.

'A lot of work and training was done prior to the opening of the centre. But doing the work really needs time to deal with the clients and the police at the same time. We hadn't set up the Standard Operating Procedures for GBV and referral pathways, we started the hard way. After consultations with communities and the Ministry, the year after more clients started coming in. Working with partners was really tough. Lots of training with police on the Family Peace Act and other service providers. We faced lots of questions from the police, we have to advocate for the clients, it can take two weeks for the police to serve the PSO. I had to write letters and email their superior. That was the only way to handle the matter. If they don't do their job right, I was the one to write... I do this for the women, I have to do it, otherwise nobody will voice their concern and issues. From there the police started to respect KWCSO, the process became smooth and turnaround time for the PSO was quicker. We did the work the hard way.'

– Teretia Tokam, KWCSO Director

Enabling factors

The advocacy of the leaders of the Pacific women's movement contributed to increasing the commitment of Pacific governments and donors. The following milestones are crucial contributors to laying the groundwork for the establishment of the crisis centres.

- **Health and safety studies measuring prevalence of violence against women.** In the late 2000s, a series of health and safety studies were carried out throughout the Pacific using the World Health Organization (WHO) methodology. Many of the leaders of the crisis centres were involved in the studies. The resulting reports provided the first data that governments and Pacific activists had about the prevalence of violence against women. These studies were used by activists to lobby governments to improve and change legislation, and for donors to support services. The first one was conducted in Kiribati in 2008, followed by RMI and FSM in 2014.
- **Family violence legislation.** RMI was the first to implement domestic violence legislation in 2011, which was before the health and safety study. The Kiribati Family Peace Act was passed in 2014. In 2017, Pohnpei, another state in FSM passed its *Domestic Issues Act*. Work is currently underway for a Chuuk Domestic Violence Act.
- **Increasing donor commitments.** *Pacific Women* is one of the largest global commitments to gender equality. UN agencies, particularly UN Women, but also UNFPA and UNICEF have continued to increase their funding on ending violence against women (EVAW) in the region. Since 2018, the EU and New Zealand have also increased funding for EVAW. This funding focuses on the prevention of violence, and improving data and coordination between referral partners.

COVID-19 and the North Pacific

Kiribati has had two cases, and RMI has had four cases, while FSM as of September 2021 has had no COVID-19 cases. The international borders of the three countries remain closed as a preventative measure and there are domestic measures in place to prevent an outbreak of COVID-19, which restrict certain activities. The border closures have had significant impacts on economies and communities. They also meant that the leaders of WiM and TICC were based in other countries and the centres had to adapt to being managed remotely.

To respond to domestic restrictions on movement and gatherings, the three centres introduced telephone counselling services for new and existing clients. Telephone counselling has also substantially increased the ability of women in remote areas to contact all three centres.

COVID-19 has contributed to increased coordination with referral partners. In addition to coordinating referral networks and strengthening coordinated responses to survivors, the three centres all participate in sector committees and processes to address violence against women. These include, for example, the development of policies, joint activities and, more recently, the gender and protection clusters activated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center and *Weto in Mour* distributed dignity kits to women as part of government responses to COVID-19. The Government of Kiribati has recognised the importance of KWCS services, including during the current COVID-19 pandemic, approving KWCS to operate as an essential service. In addition, KWCS opened a temporary shelter service in response to COVID-19.

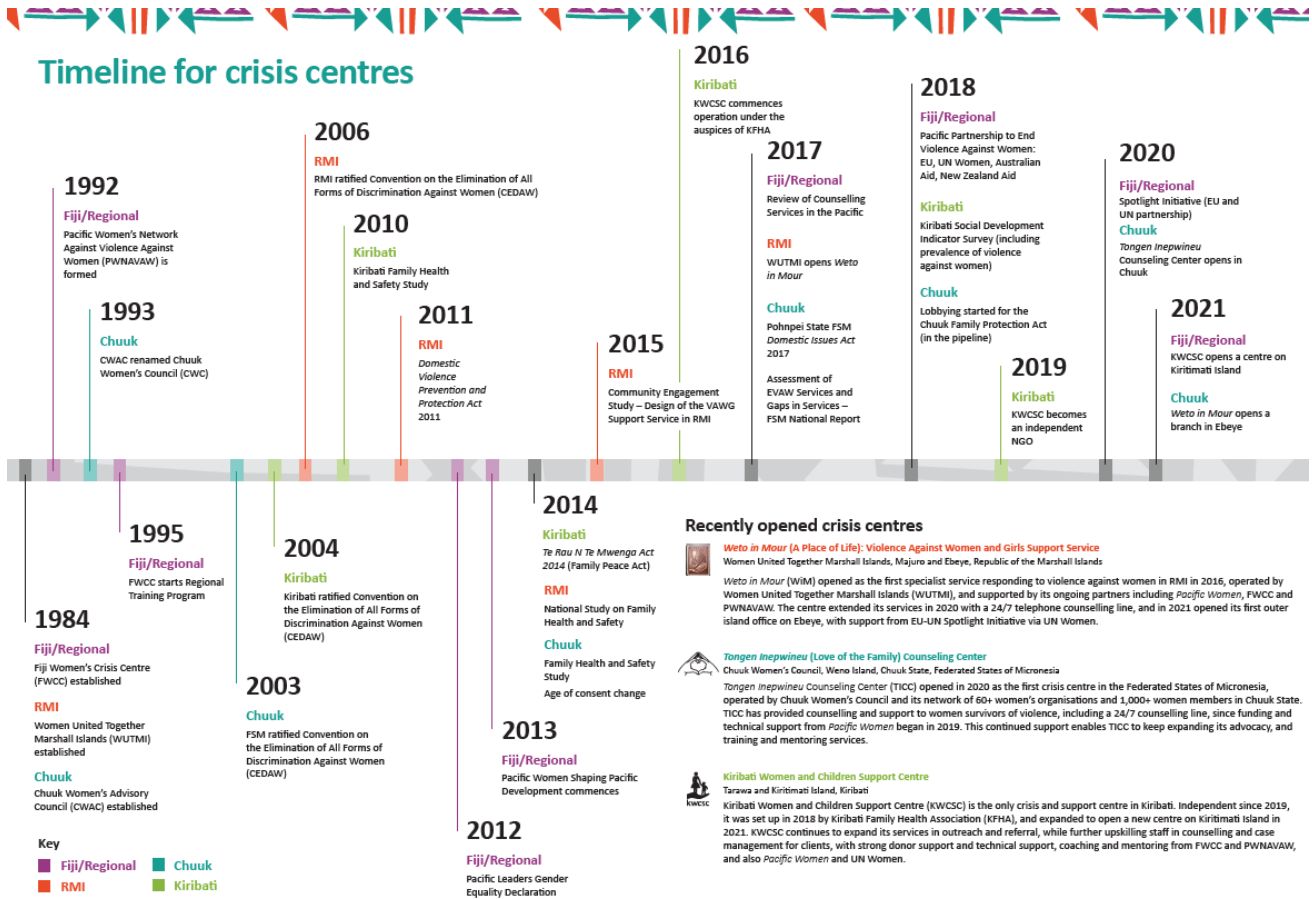
Advocacy by the TICC, WUTMI and KWCS resulted in GBV response services being deemed essential services in the three countries.

All centres developed Standard Operating Procedures for safely providing services in the COVID-19 context. This includes safety protocols during counselling, community outreach and a 24-hour counselling line for both TICC and WUTMI. Kiribati was already providing 24-hour counselling services before COVID-19.

In response to COVID-19 lockdowns, the crisis centres worked with *Pacific Women* to produce a local language 'Staying Safe at Home' video animation to help women stay safe during lockdown periods, and a call to action for communities to support women and families experiencing violence.

Timeline for crisis centres

Following is the timeline of some key milestones in the North Pacific, cross-referencing with regional key dates, for the planning, establishment and expansion of crisis centres and support services.



Drivers of success

'A common practice here in the islands, women in [a] domestic relationship when they experience violence or [try] to seek help; they are encouraged to return home and tolerate the violence to keep the peace and stay safe and not make trouble. So often, in very violent homes, they understand it to be just normal.'

– Stakeholder, Chuuk State

Pacific Women, alongside other development partners, has continued to support the establishment and growth of the three countries' crisis centres, along with the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women (PWNAAVAW), Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, and development partners such as UN Women. *Pacific Women* funding provides core funding, ongoing technical and organisational support, and peer exchanges with other crisis centres in the Pacific.

The result is that the three crisis centres have supported 377 women in the past five years.

This section discusses the catalysts of change and drivers of success that have led to the centres' growth, expansion and service quality. There are eight key drivers of success analysed, including:

1. Reaching vulnerable women in remote communities
2. Counsellors' skills and professional development
3. Peer learning: exchanges between crisis centres and partners
4. Referral networks
5. Government and in-country partners
6. Core funding
7. Organisational development
8. Donor coordination.

1. Reaching vulnerable women in remote communities



This story follows Maria, who is a survivor of violence from her husband and has three children. Maria is not a real person. She represents the experiences of survivors in the North Pacific. Maria lives on Jaluit, an island in RMI. To get to Majuro, the main centre, she needs to travel on a boat for 24 hours. To travel to Majuro, she needs money for the boat fare, food and accommodation, and someone to look after her children. Maria is dependent on her husband for money. However, she has an opportunity to travel to Majuro coming up with her church women's group who have raised funds for the trip. She is thinking about going to see a counsellor while she is there.

The defining feature of the North Pacific is widely dispersed islands and populations spread over vast distances. It is challenging both for survivors to access counselling services and for the counselling services to reach out to survivors. The centres work to overcome the distance through telephone counselling, outreach and expanding their services to new locations.

All centres have **telephone counselling** services as part of their core services. In 2020, *Pacific Women* co-developed training on telephone counselling with counsellors from TICC and WiM Counselling Service to ensure their services could be accessed remotely over the telephone despite COVID-19 restrictions.

WUTMI expressed that this process has resulted in *Weto in Mour* staff being more empowered and confident when assisting survivors over the telephone, and *Pacific Women* has seen the growth of counselling knowledge, confidence and skills in counsellors.

Another strategy used by the centres is **outreach visits**. Counsellors travel from the centres to the islands. They provide awareness sessions to community members about violence legislation and services available such as telephone counselling. TICC describes the role of its outreach as discussing the importance of speaking out, breaking the silence and seeking help. The counsellors also provide one-to-one counselling support on-site with the women instead of them going to the centre.

KWCSC operates **mobile clinics** in rural areas, which make referrals to their centre or other services such as police and health services. TICC uses a range of techniques to raise awareness about their services, including public launches of their services, awareness with schools, communities and churches, and participating in the CWC market day.

Both WiM and TICC have developed a **volunteer presence** in some isolated communities. TICC developed a **Family Champions** service model, which involves six women who conduct outreach to communities. The idea behind the Family Champions comes from the fact that local women know best when other women in their community are going through difficult times and experiencing violence. The role of the Family Champion is to listen with patience to other women for comfort, guidance, and to encourage and support. They are trained on EAW and referral. WiM has Women Champions, which is an idea they adapted from TICC Family Champions. They have recruited three Women Champions on Wotje, Arno and Jaluit Atolls and hope to expand to have them on other islands.

Both KWCSC and WiM have opened new crisis centres in outer islands. Since commencing services for survivors of violence against women, KWCSC and *Weto in Mour* have begun expansion to locations outside the capital. It has taken time – over two years to fully scope and negotiate with government and community partners to open new centres. In Kiribati, it was a recommendation to open a centre on Kiritimati Island in the 2010 Family Health and Safety Study.^{vi} Over the past few years, the Kiribati Police Service and health support services have continued to request that KWCSC open a centre on the island, which will provide crisis counselling and referral to police and health services. KWCSC collaborated with government partners on a joint mission to hold community consultations in early 2021. The expansion to Kiritimati Islands is funded by the Australian High Commission in Kiribati, who support the Strategic Plan (2021–2025), and UN Women through the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls.

WiM started investigating expansion to Ebeye from 2017, after receiving referrals of women from Ebeye who were victims of human trafficking. They have continued to increase their outreach to Ebeye, which resulted in further cases. *Pacific Women* supported the induction of the new staff for the Ebeye centre in 2021.

Tongen Inepwineu Counseling Center and WUTMI have community-based champions who can make referrals to the centre, with a high number of cases received from their champions.

2. Counsellors' skills and professional development

A significant change in all three countries has been the increased capacity of counsellors. The growing skills of counsellors continue to improve the quality of services for survivors.



It has taken Maria a long time to get to the point of going to see a counsellor in person. She is scared they are just going to tell her to get a divorce. She doesn't want a divorce; she just wants the violence to stop. She is also scared that when she gets to Majuro her cousins will see her in town, or one of her friends from the women's groups will see her going to the counselling centre or police, and her husband will find out and come to Majuro and beat her.

When a survivor approaches a crisis centre primarily for counselling support, they need counselling that is centred on their needs and supports their decision making, provides options and is non-judgemental, safe and confidential. This is known as survivor-centred counselling. Many survivors attend multiple counselling sessions and decide to stay with abusive partners long-term.

Counsellors are at the heart of the crisis centres and their work requires personal sacrifice in working long hours and supporting women who are suffering. All the centres have counsellors who are young women, which helps to sustain the women's movement. Counselling requires a high level of skill and sensitivity that requires ongoing training and support, which isn't available within RMI, FSM or Kiribati, due to the small size of the populations. *Pacific Women* builds on the support of PWNAVAW and the FWCC, along with UN Women in providing ongoing support to counsellors.

'For me, also it's the personal commitment to the work, to women and girls experiencing violence. It is really hard sometimes to put ourselves in their place and the issues they face. Through this work, I have committed myself to this work.'

– Staff, WiM

'I appreciate the approach Pacific Women takes with Tongen Inepwineu Counseling Center, and Weto in Mour, the design or development of TORs [terms of reference] for Advisers emphasises that the organisation leads the work. We know our community better. Despite what GBV work is happening in the Pacific, the work needs to be tailored to the context – the kinds of services they want it to be.'

– Stakeholder, RMI

From 2014 to 2017, *Pacific Women* supported WUTMI to develop its crisis centre, including through the deployment of a technical adviser, based at WUTMI, who also supported community consultations to design the **Weto in Mour** services. The adviser also provided hands-on training to WUTMI on women's rights, violence against women and basic counselling.

Technical support has continued as WUTMI moved through the phases of developing and strengthening **Weto in Mour**. Starting in 2020, *Pacific Women's* adviser provides ongoing weekly technical support to WiM, which has included supporting the induction of new staff and facilitating weekly supervision with counsellors. *Weto in Mour* staff expressed that this support has assisted them in their work to identify what needs to be improved to strengthen their services.

In 2020, *Pacific Women* appointed an adviser who was physically based in FSM within the CWC. However, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the adviser returning to her home base and providing support online. Prior to leaving Chuuk, the adviser conducted counselling training for TICC staff. In 2020, *Pacific Women* provided ongoing supervision to counsellors to support them with challenging cases.

'We have seen WiM staff gain more knowledge and understanding of the work and issue we are trying to prevent. More empowered and confident in doing what they do – assisting women and girls. For the other WUTMI staff, the training we conducted with the help of GBV Adviser, they have gained more knowledge.'

– Staff, WiM

In addition to training, *Pacific Women* facilitated supervision sessions with *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center. Counsellors are also reaching out to the adviser to discuss particularly challenging or high risk cases. TICC expressed that this training was helpful, particularly the weekly support, and that it should continue.

UN Women also provides technical support for counsellors throughout the Pacific region. For KWCSC, in addition to FWCC, UN Women has been a key partner providing technical support and training to counsellors. This training has been ongoing since KWCSC's establishment to continue to develop the skills of counsellors and to expand their skills. Specific support to KWCSC has included training in counselling of survivors of violence against women, telephone counselling, and counselling in specific areas such as domestic violence, child sexual abuse and suicidal counselling. KWCSC have supervision and debriefing sessions in-person, over the telephone and online from UN Women. KWCSC has also been supported by UN Women to develop its capacity in data collection and the management of case files.

3. Peer learning: exchanges between crisis centres and partners

Another strategy for increasing both technical and organisational capacity and solidarity is through exchanges between crisis and support centres, and partners and networks (especially the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women), some of which are facilitated and/or funded by *Pacific Women*. Exchanges enable ongoing learning and consolidation of Pacific networks and solidarity.

'I can provide basic counselling to women and girls seeking help, also gained more knowledge and understanding on issues on GBV and EAW. I am glad that I was able to meet sisters of other neighbouring islands in the Pacific and learn from them and share our issues – before I used to think I was the only one going through them, but they are also facing the same issues.'

– Staff, *Weto in Mour*

Examples of exchanges and information sharing include:

- WUTMI visited violence against women services in Hawaii to learn how they developed their services.
- Teretia Tokam, the Executive Director of KWCSC, spent 10 days in 2019 with the President, Christina 'Kiki' Stinnett, and staff of the CWC.
- The support from *Pacific Women* has also brought staff from *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center and *Weto in Mour* together through joint training sessions, which has enabled the exchange of learning. One example of this is *Weto in Mour* changing their counselling space to be more accessible and confidential after hearing how TICC described their counselling space, and WiM also adapted the Family Champion approach to RMI.
- Teretia Tokam visited Chuuk to share her experience of the first year of operations of KWCSC and to exchange ideas as Chuuk Women's Council prepared to open the TICC. KWCSC has provided its code of ethics, survival stipend criteria for survivors, and client intake form.

'I want to recognise those that have helped in creation of TICC – especially our partner and sister from Kiribati, Teretia who Pacific Women contracted to come to Chuuk to share her experience on how she established KWCSC. We were able to mimic and follow her example to start TICC. ...With her help and Pacific Women, we rely on each other's ability, support, and help. I love to ask people to help because

I'm limited in my capacity, and I know things can only improve through learning. So I'm passionate to reach out and take advantage of resources and one resource I have is Pacific Women and KWCSO through Teretia. Thank you Teretia.'

– Christina 'Kiki' Stinnett, CWC President

PWNAVAW and FWCC:

'It will not be easy in the beginning. We will hear many backlashes; our culture is something that will prevent us from doing our work. To overcome this, we have to gain more knowledge and understanding on the issue we [are] trying to prevent – GBV. The more we know the more confidence we will have, we can approach anything. Networking is very important: reaching out to organisations, to programs familiar with our work and learn from them, our neighbouring islands with similar crisis centre like ours.'

– Staff, *Weto in Mour*

PWNAVAW and other leading violence against women (VAW) services in the region, such as the FWCC, are critical in the establishment and development of emerging services such as those provided by KWCSO, CWC and WUTMI. **Pacific-grown and led services are best placed to support emerging services, as they can share their Pacific-based approaches, which are informed by and aligned to international standards and good practice.**

KWCSO, CWC and WUTMI are all members of PWNAVAW and have all benefited from this wealth of experience. Fiji Women's Crisis Centre is the secretariat for PWNAVAW, and supports emerging crisis centres through training sessions, solidarity and work attachments in Fiji. They have also provided a four-week Regional Training Program since 1995, which provides human rights, gender equality and counselling training.

Examples of support to KWCSO and WUTMI from PWNAVAW and FWCC

KWCSO

- 2017** All four staff of KWCSO, including the director, were attached to FWCC to build their capacity in counselling, case management and management of a crisis service.
-
- 2018** FWCC provided training in counselling and counselling child victims.
-
- 2019** FWCC visited KWCSO to provide support to review the necessary steps, documentation and counselling skills required prior to KWCSO's independence.
Two KWCSO staff participated in a study tour to Vanuatu Women's Centre to explore and learn how the centre manages its clients and programs.
FWCC provided counselling and case management training.

WUTMI, *Weto in Mour*

- 2019** *Weto in Mour* program coordinator and one prevention worker attended FWCC's four-week Regional Training Program.

FWCC reflects that they know the training has been effective because KWCSO continues to come back to FWCC, and talks with FWCC about their work and the support that they need. KWCSO has been proactive about making sure they are included in FWCC and PWNAVAW meetings, training, and events. KWCSO staff also expressed the importance of the training provided by FWCC, recognising their counselling training as a specialist skill being shared.

4. Referral networks



Maria has travelled to Majuro and seen a counsellor who has listened sensitively to her with a non-judgemental attitude and gave her the option to apply for a protection order that can keep her safe from further violence. Maria is scared to go to the police because she has never spoken to the police before and she is afraid that they will think that she is a bad wife. The counsellor has told her that she will go with Maria to the police station and stay with her and help her through the process and explain anything to her that she doesn't understand.

Crisis counselling services are part of broader violence against women support services, including police, justice, and medical and shelter services, known as referral networks because clients get referred between services. Crisis centres also accompany clients to these various services to support them and provide transportation if they don't have their own, as well as lobby and advocate on their behalf. In the North Pacific, the crisis centres are part of referral networks with these other services to ensure that clients get comprehensive assistance. This is known as SafeNet in Kiribati and *Apimar* in Chuuk, FSM, and is guided by a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) in RMI and Chuuk. The crisis centres continually increase their coordination with referral government partners.

'They [TICC] have been very instrumental in referring victims to us. And they don't just refer and that's it. They stay with the victims throughout the case and continue following up on the case until [the] case has been prosecuted. They also still follow up after the case has closed.'

– Stakeholder, Chuuk State

TICC is the secretariat for *Apimar*. Prior to *Apimar*, there was a loose network and TICC has driven improved coordination of services to support survivors of violence. The name *Apimar* comes from a food basket used by Chuukese men to carry food from farms to the family. *Apimar* consists of health services, the Attorney General, Micronesia Legal Service, Ministry of Education, faith-based organisations, and police.

Since its inception, KWCSO was an important member of SafeNet, as was the Kiribati Family Health Association, which is led by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sport and Social Affairs. SafeNet is a network of government and non-government service providers supporting survivors of violence against women. In addition to active participation in SafeNet, KWCSO has worked with specific service providers to expand services for survivors of violence against women, and to improve their response.

WUTMI developed formal agreements with other services providers, including Ministry of Health: Human Services, Ministry of Health: Reproductive Health Unit, Marshall Islands Police Department, Office of the Attorney-General, Majuro Atoll Local Government Police, Majuro Atoll Local Government (MALGov), MLSC, International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Marshall Islands Disabled Persons Organization (MIDPO).

Training of referral partners

There can be challenges with the attitudes and behaviour towards survivors from some health and police service providers, and therefore crisis centres train police and other stakeholders to ensure that they respond sensitively and appropriately to survivors of violence against women. TICC has not been operating as long as the other centres, but has provided training to health workers.

'Most women are afraid to come to the police station to report what's going on with them, but they are more comfortable when they come to TICC. I think they are more comfortable because there are a lot of women here. They aren't afraid to

express their feelings. When they come to the police station, there's more men than women there. I think men don't really understand what they are going through. This place gives them a safe space.'

– Stakeholder, Chuuk State

For example, in 2019, KWCSC conducted dialogue with police officers from the four police stations to introduce KWCSC services and to establish a referral pathway for women who come to the police station and require counselling. KWCSC has reflected that the collaboration with the police has been valuable and that the partnership has achieved more together in a shorter time. Also, now the police understand more about what services KWCSC provides and how they can work together. KWCSC has also been trained by national partners such as the Office of the People's Lawyer, who provided training to counsellors in family law and protection orders.

Like KWCSC, *Weto in Mour* has trained more than 30 local and national police officers on Ebeye and Majuro. As a result, WUTMI has seen an increased understanding of *Weto in Mour's* services among stakeholders since it first started providing services. While earlier on in its establishment *Weto in Mour* faced difficulties obtaining referrals for cases, support from referral partners has increased, including from the police. This, in part, results from training that WUTMI does with referral partners, which strengthens the working relationship and improves its services. Changes within the police are also likely linked to training funded by the Australian Federal Police, which enabled the FWCC to train Marshall Islands police officers.

WUTMI identified its strengthened relationship with the police as a key change, explaining that before, if a survivor made a report to police, often they would face more problems in the family, but now there is a clear message in the community that everybody's rights are respected. Referral partners also shared the importance of *Weto in Mour's* support to survivors, reflecting that prior to *Weto in Mour* there were no services to which they could refer survivors. Instead, a survivor was provided with medical treatment and discharged back into the community without further support, and there was no clear path for a survivor who wanted to pursue legal action. Now, referral partners can refer survivors to WUTMI to provide support and assist them in accessing other services. The Government of RMI has also provided training to *Weto in Mour* staff on access to justice.

'We rely on them a lot. Especially in RMI, there is no government social services available. Once we are done with the health/medical service, most of the time, we open the door and let them go – but now it is a connection with WUTMI.'

– Referral Partner, Republic of the Marshall Islands

WUTMI also has a service agreement with a private accommodation provider to provide short-term accommodation for women and their children. *Weto in Mour's* effective working relationship with other service providers has been critical for survivors who can now access holistic support, where WUTMI can assist the client in choosing the path they want to take.

5. Government and in-country partners

'KWCSC have built alliances with the police, judiciary, Office of the Attorney-General and other government bodies for cases that are high risk and serious.'

– Stakeholder, Kiribati

The establishment and growth of KWCSC, Tongen Inepwineu Counseling Center and Weto in Mour are also strengthened by the broader changing environment, where the efforts to address violence against women are increasing from government and other stakeholders, such as civil society, faith-based organisations, and communities.

Recently, there has been an increased focus by Pacific governments, crisis centres and development partners on strengthening coordination between government, civil society, and faith-based services to ensure survivors of violence against women are provided quality services. For example, SafeNet in Kiribati is led by the Kiribati Government through the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sport and Social Affairs and includes KWCSC, KFHA and other government agencies, civil society and faith-based organisations. SafeNet has established guidelines for services to work more effectively with one another.

At the national or state level, KWCSC, TICC and WiM have developed partnerships with government and the private sector to expand access to services for women.

KWCSC partners with ANZ Bank to promote KWCSC's messages to stop violence against women and girls within their branches and in the community. KWCSC has also conducted training for ANZ staff on domestic violence.

KWCSC and other women's rights organisations advocated that the government change the Kiribati Social Development Indicator Survey to include data collection on domestic violence and then conducted training for enumerators and staff from the Statistics Office.

TICC works with the mayors who hold monthly meetings to discuss violence. The mayors are supportive of the proposed domestic violence law. CWC also has partnered with FSM Telecom to include the contact details for Tongen Inepwineu Counseling Center on the back of top-up cards.

'With this MOU it has been easier to do our job because each of us knows what our roles and responsibilities are. For example, if a victim reports to the hospital, we already know who to contact and who the responsible person in the hospital is.'

– Stakeholder, Chuuk State

WUTMI is partnering with the Government of RMI, which provides funding to Weto in Mour and has supported awareness activities and training of Weto in Mour staff. WUTMI is also collaborating with the private sector to participate in campaigns to raise awareness of violence against women through a partnership with K&K Islands Pride Supermarket for staff to wear campaign t-shirts.

6. Core funding



Maria decided to stay in Majuro a few more days to spend more time with the counsellor and make sure that the protection order is sorted out. WiM has funding to support her stay, including food and to pay for her transportation back home because she didn't catch the boat with her church group.

KWCSC, CWC and WUTMI were resourced with core support, funding offices and staff to establish their services. This support was critical to ensure that there were office spaces tailored to providing services, including counselling rooms, and to ensure there were adequate staff to establish the service and support clients. Core funding also promotes the autonomy of Pacific organisations. The North Pacific crisis centres are best placed to support survivors of violence and to negotiate and maintain partnerships with referral and government partners. Core funding enables crisis centres to focus on their core work of counselling. Often donors only support activity funding that covers activities additional to the counselling work of the centres.

'Client numbers will increase and repeat clients will come. We will need more space and more personnel to deliver counselling and other relevant services that a counselling centre is expected to deliver.'

– Chuuk Women's Council

WUTMI had existing office space and was funded to purchase information technology and communication equipment for *Weto in Mour*, including laptops, telephones, a power bank, a wi-fi device and SIM cards. WUTMI appointed counsellors when *Weto in Mour* was established. Critically, the Government of RMI has commenced funding *Weto in Mour* under a specific item in the government budget, resulting from the efforts of Dr Hilda Heine during her tenure as the President of RMI. However, this allocation was reduced due to broad budget reductions by the Government of RMI.

KWCSC, with the support of *Pacific Women*, secured an office location that was renovated to provide a tailored space for the provision of counselling services. KWCSC was also funded to purchase office furniture and recruit four key staff in 2017, including the coordinator. *Pacific Women* continues to support KWCSC office space and core staff, with UN Women providing support for office space and core staff costs for the Kiritimati centre, through the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls.

CWC had an existing office space but was provided with key equipment and supplies to resource the TICC, including laptop and desktop computers and renovation of the office. CWC commenced the recruitment of staff for the centre in 2019, and the positions of program coordinator, senior counsellor, and two assistant counsellors were filled in 2020.

'More women are starting to speak up and the culture of silence is starting to gradually fade away.'

– Stakeholder, Chuuk State

7. Organisational development

In addition to technical support for counsellors, *Pacific Women*, together with other agencies, provided organisational development support to promote sustainability and autonomy. Organisational development includes support with project management, donor liaison, monitoring and evaluation, and financial management and support to the directors. Organisational development is linked to technical support for counsellors, particularly around issues such as data collection and monitoring and evaluation.

'For myself, the biggest change would be, I am able to report, improved reporting to donors, more confident in approaching.'

– Staff, *Weto in Mour*

Core funding supports organisational development. It supports the salaries of counsellors and support staff, rent for counselling space, and awareness and communications for centres to promote their work. Core funds also provide emergency funding to support clients, including for transportation, safe accommodation, and food. Core funding supports both technical and organisational development through supporting strategic planning and governance.

In addition to strengthening the technical capacity of KWCS, TICC and *Weto in Mour*, the organisations themselves were strengthened to improve their capacity to provide services and fulfill their role as catalysts for gender equality across the North Pacific

WUTMI was supported to strengthen its policies and procedures, such as reviewing its policy and procedures manual, finance policy and child protection policy. WUTMI staff completed training in program management and financial management. *Pacific Women* also supported the development of the WUTMI database to collect client data. WUTMI staff expressed that they have improved their skills in donor reporting as a result of *Pacific Women* support.

Pacific Women supported CWC to develop the proposal for the *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center, including an assessment on community and stakeholders. TICC has also been supported in its client data management.

While KWCS was being established, intensive support was provided for the organisation to establish and implement key policies and procedures, including the transitional plan, workplan, operations manual, victim support fund guidelines, constitution, finance manual, administration and management procedures, strategic plan, child protection policy, and counsellors code of conduct. KWCS was also funded to establish its council (or board) and hold annual general meetings and regular meetings of the council. In 2021, *Pacific Women* supported KWCS with the development of its second strategic plan, with technical support from UN Women.

'One of the key successes I would say is I and my staff are passionate and determined to help our people. Having a core belief in counselling services. It will take a lot of time, a lot of sacrifice. You never know day and night, you'll be called upon and you have to be ready for the call.'

– Christina 'Kiki' Stinnett, President, Chuuk Women's Council

8. Donor coordination

In the case of KWCSC, *Pacific Women*, and UN Women through the Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls, have both funded the establishment of the organisation and mobilised technical supports. In addition, the FWCC provided technical support, along with UN Women and *Pacific Women*. The work of all three institutions was funded by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as well as other donors.

For KWCSC, having multiple development partners funding them and providing technical support could have been burdensome. It could have led to conflicting demands and conflicting advice. To ensure aid effectiveness, it was essential that there was ownership of strategies by KWCSC. *Pacific Women* and UN Women coordinated their support to meet KWCSC's objectives.

While working towards organisational independence, KWCSC also had a Monitoring Committee for coordination between *Pacific Women*, UN Women and others supporting the establishment of the centre, to ensure that support to KWCSC was aligned to KWCSC's Strategic Plan. The progressive increase in demand for KWCSC's services, and the expansion of services to meet the needs of clients, indicated positive results from the combined efforts of KWCSC and its partners – FWCC, *Pacific Women* and UN Women. These results are also influenced by broader work being supported by SafeNet partners in Kiribati by UN Women to strengthen services for survivors of violence against women.

Now that KWCSC is independent, it has a council (or board) and the monitoring committee, which continues to include development partners as members. While the specific role of the monitoring committee continues to evolve, it will remain an important avenue for continued harmonisation among development partners.

Lessons

‘Gender-based violence work is still at its infancy stage in the North. High need for capacity training and skills transfer... for resilience and longevity, we need that continued support. Until we have trained and educated professionals from our own countries, we need hands-on support.’

– Stakeholder, Chuuk State

Through the process of developing this story of the journeys of the three centres, and the partners and processes that have supported the realisation of their goals to establish services where these did not exist before, the centres have reflected on what they have learned through their first few years of operation. These five key lessons are described in more detail in this section, and fall within the following areas:

1. Multi-year, reliable and flexible core funding for quality services, reach and access
2. Coordinated and harmonised centre-led technical support
3. Organisational development
4. Gaps in services
5. Expansion to outer islands.

1. Multi-year, reliable and flexible core funding for quality services, reach and access

‘Resourcing is required to reduce barriers to access for specific groups of women who are more likely to experience violence and face more barriers to access support. Meaningful inclusion requires resources to train staff, adapt services and develop specific communication to target different groups of women.’

– Chuuk Women’s Council

While KWCS, CWC and WUTMI have all received multi-year donor funding for their services, they are limited to three-year agreements. The funding uncertainty and limitations are key concerns for WUTMI and CWC. Where VAW services in other countries in the region have received long-term, stable funding, it has enabled their growth, and it has provided stability for staff and clients and improved referrals, for example in Fiji and Vanuatu.

Core, stable and long-term funding, together with project-specific additional funding and capital investment, is needed for centres to continue providing and expanding quality services. For example, KWCS’s current space does not allow for private rooms for clients, which makes the provision of tailored and confidential services difficult when there are multiple clients within the centre. CWC requires additional funding for expansion to meet the demand for its services, and ensure women have access to the best-possible services that meet regional and international standards. As demand is created, more women will seek help, and funding needs to support expansion to meet demand. It is unethical to generate demand for services through awareness and outreach and then not be able to meet the demand safely and confidentially.

Funding limitations restrain services from addressing barriers that limit access for women with disabilities and adolescent girls to their services. For example, the WUTMI office, and *Weto in Mour*, are located on the second floor, making it inaccessible for some women with disabilities. The office is also located in a supermarket, which might be a barrier for some survivors to access the service, as it may not be perceived as confidential. To address these barriers, WUTMI requires funding for an alternative space.

2. Coordinated and harmonised centre-led technical support

In all three locations, technical expertise in counselling and case management for survivors was limited prior to the establishment of the service. While this is in many ways unavoidable, it is evident from all three partners that where this technical support was regular, consistent, relevant and targeted based on the needs of the centre, the quality of services improved.

Both CWC and WUTMI have struggled with staff turnover; in some cases, in key positions more than once since establishing their services. This results in organisational challenges and has also, in some cases, impacted the continuity of services for clients, highlighting the need for sustained technical support for counselling staff.

3. Organisational development

There remains a need to continue to invest in the organisational strengthening of KWCS, CWC and WUTMI to support their services for survivors of violence against women. Consistency of data collection was an organisational development issue for all centres. Data collection for VAW services is complex and requires training of counsellors to ensure that accurate data is recorded during intake and counselling sessions. The management and analysis of VAW administrative data is crucial in understanding how services respond to violence and how services are meeting the needs of women. Having strong knowledge management systems to manage client records is important for organisations delivering VAW services. Other areas that need continued support are governance, financial management, operations and monitoring, evaluation and learning.

4. Gaps in services

'More people are learning about the ... counselling services. We've helped a few, and more people are coming. The more that people are learning about the service, the more people they see coming to our centre, the more confident they will be to come to the centre. We are the first one, and this work on domestic violence is never-ending.'

– Chuuk Women's Council

KWCS, *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center and *Weto in Mour* are all the first crisis centre providers in their countries. As new services, they are limited in what services they provide, but gaps in the availability of essential services for survivors, such as shelter, limit their ability to provide the support needed by survivors. The absence of specialist safe houses or refuges for survivors of violence against women is an ongoing challenge in Kiribati, Chuuk and RMI, as it is in many other Pacific island countries.

While the presence of KWCS, TICC and WiM means that more survivors of violence against women are seeking support for the violence that they experience, barriers to access remain and require long-term investment funding to address the attitudes that prevent women from seeking help for the violence. There are also physical and economic barriers to access, such as not being able to pay for transport or telephone credit, which need to be supported through flexible survivor support funding managed by the crisis centres.

Resources are also needed to invest in referral partners to expand their services to better support survivors. For example, more police officers and health professionals need training to respond to cases of VAW. While KWCS, *Tongen Inepwineu* Counseling Center and *Weto in Mour* have been developing their own capacity to provide quality, survivor-centred services, they remain dependent on other services to provide support that they do not and cannot provide to clients – most notably access to justice and health care. The centres provide this training and require funding to continue.

'A huge support that KWCSO provides is legal representation on violence against women and domestic violence issues including child custody and maintenance cases.'

– Stakeholder, Kiribati

WUTMI highlighted that survivors remain reluctant to make a complaint to the police about the physical and sexual violence they experience, and that referral partner services need ongoing training so that women are not afraid to go to them when they experience violence. Developing the capacity of referral partner services to provide quality, survivor-centred services is essential to supporting holistic services for survivors. Specifically, the need to address issues of confidentiality and safety in small island communities was highlighted as a key challenge when working with referral partner services, along with attitudes. There is an indication that changes within police in Kiribati and RMI are starting to improve the experience for survivors.

5. Expansion to outer islands

'KWCSO is seeing more clients because of the quality of their service — not everyone can provide this service.'

– Key Stakeholder, Kiribati

Establishing new violence against women services takes time. It takes time to develop policies and procedures and to develop the capacity of staff, particularly in locations where there are limited people with skills and experience in counselling survivors of violence against women. For example, KWCSO spent a month training staff before opening their doors. Building trust with survivors and women in the community also requires time for them to trust that they will be safe and that their confidentiality will be upheld. It also takes time to build relationships with other referral service providers and strengthen their services.

While a challenge faced by both Kiribati and RMI is the limited services available for survivors, particularly in the outer islands, KWCSO and WUTMI started slowly establishing their centre in the capital before expansion. WUTMI staff reflected on advice for other centres to start small and gradually strengthen and grow the capacity with the staff, rather than trying to do too much too soon. While in the short-term this limits the availability of services, in the long-term, this will make the services safe and more sustainable and ensure greater quality and consistency in the services provided across locations.

'Once a crisis centre is open, we need to all work together to ensure their doors never close.'

– Tara Chetty, Pacific Women

Recommendations

Multi-year core funding is needed to ensure continuity of safe, confidential, survivor-focused, quality services for survivors. Funding is also required to reduce barriers to access for specific groups of women, such as women with disabilities and adolescent girls who are more likely to experience violence from both families and partners, and face more barriers to access support. Meaningful inclusion requires resources to train staff, adapt services and develop specific communication to target different groups of women.

Ongoing technical capacity and organisational development. Along with core funding, technical capacity and organisational development should be delivered together, as issues of governance are closely related to the quality and reach of services. For example, data is a key area that needs additional focus and resources. There is a need to facilitate and coordinate technical support with PWNAAVAV, and also to coordinate learning exchanges between centres when COVID-19 restrictions are no longer in place.

Safe houses are a key gap in services that need to be addressed by donors. They are sometimes missing or extremely difficult to access in a referral pathway for many countries, particularly in remote areas.

Training of referral partners. Ongoing support and training of referral partners is necessary, so that service providers have greater capacity and emphasis on holistic care. Referral partner services need to be sensitised so that women are not afraid to go to them when they experience violence. Continuing to develop the capacity of referral partner services to provide quality, survivor-centred services is essential. Specifically, the need to address issues of confidentiality and safety in small island communities was highlighted as a key challenge when working with referral partner services.

Endnotes

i World Bank Group. (2021). *World Bank Open Data*. <https://data.worldbank.org/>; FSM Statistics Office. (2020). *FSM Statistics*. <https://www.fsmstatistics.fm>.

ii UN Women. (March 2021). Facts and figures: Ending violence against women. *UN Women*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

iii Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development. (2017). *Eliminating Violence against Women (EVAW) in Pohnpei and Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia: Assessment of EVAW Services and Gaps in Services Section 3 – Chuuk State*.

iv Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development. (2017). *Eliminating Violence against Women (EVAW) in Pohnpei and Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia: Assessment of EVAW Services and Gaps in Services Section 3 – Chuuk State*.

v The Pacific Partnership is funded primarily by the European Union, the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, and UN Women, and is led by the Pacific Community (SPC), UN Women, and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

vi The Pacific Community. (2010). *Kiribati Family Health and Safety Study*. Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs – Pacific Community, Noumea, New Caledonia.