

Inquiry into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific



It starts with equal

CARE Australia seeks a world of hope, inclusion and social justice, where poverty has been overcome and people live in dignity and security. Formed in 1987 by former Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Malcolm Fraser, as a humanitarian aid organisation, and part of a global movement founded in 1945, CARE Australia has a strong focus on gender equality as an essential component in bringing lasting development to communities. The primary geographic focus of CARE Australia is the Pacific and South-East Asia where we manage all programs and activities of the CARE International confederation in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Tonga. In addition, CARE Australia undertakes development assistance and disaster response activities in another 17 countries in the Pacific, Middle East and Africa.

In this submission CARE Australia is responding to points 1, 2, and 4 from the Terms of Reference.

1. The role of civil society groups in Pacific Islands in responding practically to domestic, family and sexual violence, and other human rights issues such as gender equality
2. The key figures and groups which advance the human rights of women and girls' in the Pacific context
4. The effectiveness of Australian overseas development assistance programs in supporting human rights of women and girls

Executive Summary

The story of human rights in the Pacific for women and girls is sobering — we live in the region with some of the highest rates of gender based violence, some of the lowest rates of women representatives in parliaments, and high rates of maternal mortality. In a region feeling the significant impacts of climate change, women are also more likely to be killed by natural disasters. However women and girls living in the Pacific are afforded human rights that should be protected, promoted and realised. Australia's development programs, in partnership with local civil society and women-led organisations, has been shifting the narrative. Positive outcomes, such as improving gender equality in families and across communities, are being achieved. These impacts can be built on to ensure lasting change only with ongoing resources and support.

In order to see this country develop well, we need to involve women in the leadership role. And through this [young women's leadership] program I can see clearly that women can grow on their leadership skills if we involve them more. This program is an eye opener for me, it is a seed that has been planted, and I believe that it will grow. - male family member, CARE's Gender Equality Together project¹

¹ YWLP participant's male family member interview as part of CARE International in Vanuatu and CARE Australia, 2020 (not yet published) 'Midterm Review - Gender Equality Together and Leftemapa Sista II'

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Recommendations Summary

1. As change needs to take place and be sustained in three domains (individual agency, structure and relations) to achieve long lasting and meaningful impact for gender equality all Australian-funded activities should use a holistic approach, such as CARE's Gender Equality Framework, to support women and girls' rights. This involves working with men, national and local leaders (and seeking to increase the diversity of local leaders), civil society, service providers and women and girls' families.
2. To ensure humanitarian and development efforts and response are not further discriminating and excluding those most at risk, ensure meaningful engagement of local civil society, including women-led organisations in decision making on development and humanitarian preparedness and response at the national, provincial and community levels.
3. In looking to enable positive outcomes for gender equality, the significant gains from projects supported under the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative must be acknowledged and embedded, with ongoing resources for projects (beyond the current timeframe for Pacific Women).
4. Scale up financial support for women's organisations to engage in policy advocacy at the global, regional and national levels.
5. Introduce investment targets measured against the OECD DAC gender marker, that 20 per cent of Australia's aid budget is dedicated to investments which list gender equality as their primary objective and 65 per cent list gender equality as their secondary objective (85 per cent overall). This recognises the cross-cutting benefits of gender equality programming to the goals of the development policy and raises the ambition for aid programs to integrate gender equality.

The role of civil society groups in Pacific Islands in responding practically to domestic, family and sexual violence, and other human rights issues such as gender equality

CARE works across the Pacific region with local organisations (often as a member of an active civil society in the countries where we deliver programs), in tackling a range of issues impacting on gender equality; including violence and sexual harassment, and limited access and knowledge regarding sexual, reproductive and maternal health.

Gender Inequality, Violence and Sexual Harassment

Through a decade of work and conversations with adolescent girls in rural and remote areas of Vanuatu, CARE knows they face incredible challenges. Adolescent girls face the double discrimination of their gender and their age. They also face obstacles because they live in isolated communities, which are difficult and expensive to physically access. In addition, adolescent girls live in communities with strong conservative kastom practices where deeply rooted social norms, values and practices condone and perpetuate discrimination towards girls. These challenges manifest in limited opportunities, limited access to and control over resources, limited freedoms and a lack of safety in their homes and communities.

Deep-rooted gender inequality is also a key underlying cause of poverty among women and girls in rural disadvantaged areas across the region.² For example, despite Timor Leste's progressive policies and laws, unequal treatment of women continues. This is due in part to poor implementation of laws and policies and in part to deeply embedded cultural norms that discriminate against women.³ Gender inequality is a strong factor underlying women's limited involvement in decision making in the home and community, their small numbers in leadership positions and the subsequently poor representation of women's needs at all levels of government from local to national. Gender inequality and women's limited participation in decision making cut across and exacerbate all other underlying causes of poverty.

The prevalence rates for violence against women in the Pacific region are some of the highest in the world with 60-80 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 years experiencing some form of partner violence in their lifetime.⁴ Women and girls in the Pacific are more susceptible to sexual and gender based violence, recording one of the highest rates globally in the aftermath of a disaster.⁵ Studies show that women and girls with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be victims of physical and sexual abuse than women with no disabilities and they also experience different forms of violence from women without disabilities such as the denial of food or water, and forced sterilization and medical treatment.⁶

² CARE International in Timor-Leste, 'Women and Girls in Rural Disadvantaged Areas Long Term Program, 2015 – 2018'

³ CARE International in Timor-Leste, 2018, 'Gender and Power Analysis Report - Safe Motherhood Project 2 (Hamoris)'

⁴ Kate Morioka UN Women, 2016 [Time to Act - Gender, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction](#) p 21

⁵ Kate Morioka UN Women, 2016 [Time to Act - Gender, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction](#) p 11

⁶ Joanna M. Spratt UNFPA, 2013 [A Deeper Silence The Unheard Experiences of Women with Disabilities – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Violence against Women in Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tonga](#) p 11

Young women in remote outer islands of Tafea in Vanuatu have highlighted the use of pornography on mobile phones as an issue affecting relationships.⁷ The uptake of technology has enabled increased access to the internet, allowing communication and connection, however girls who attended CARE's Pacific Girls consultation in 2018, including girls from very small remote islands such as Futuna (Vanuatu), identified cyber bullying such as sharing intimate photos without consent as a key challenge they face.⁸ All forms of violence have serious consequences for women and girls, negatively impacting physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health as well as their role in the public and private spheres. Girls in Tafea speak of many barriers to accessing services including lack of information, fear and shame, power holders in communities not supporting survivors to seek support, and low capacity of service providers.⁹ These challenges are often repeated across the region.

Supporting women and girls' empowerment and attainment of their human rights

Violence prevention work in the Pacific is highly challenging and requires significant investment in changing the attitudes and behaviours of women and men. CARE's extensive evidence base emphasises change needs to take place and be sustained in three domains to achieve long lasting and meaningful impact – individual agency, structure and relations. Change is also required in both private and public spaces (i.e. at individual, household, community and societal level). CARE has seen progress in only one realm can lead to fragile or reversible gains. Despite historical interventions focused only on the agency of individual women and girls “individual capacity improvements do not necessarily lead directly and inevitably to increases in gender equality.”¹⁰ A woman who develops her own skills and access to resources through a microfinance program may still be held back because others in her household or community prevent her from deciding how to spend the income she earns, or because her activities outside the home ignite frictions, fear or even domestic violence.

Globally CARE is committed to strengthening gender equality and women's voice. To properly measure the effects of strengthening women's voices and participation, CARE created the Gender Equality Framework¹¹ which emphasises the need to work on individual and collective agency and empowerment, relations between groups and power-holders, and the broader structure and enabling environment. CARE programming has wider impact and deeper influence when we are able to positively influence social norms change. This requires experimenting with an innovative mix of methods that foster communication, and harness the rich creativity of communities we engage, to promote healthy relationships and expand choices and options for women and girls. It also requires the institutions and structures that support change along with stakeholders (from the public sector, private sector, and civil society) having the capacities and incentives to sustain change, and to adapt to future changes and shocks.¹²

⁷ CARE International in Vanuatu, 2017 'Leftemap Sista II Readiness Assessment'

⁸ CARE International in Vanuatu, 2018 'Pacific Girl Meeting Report, May 12-16 2018'

⁹ CARE International in Vanuatu, 2018 'Tafea EVAWG Mapping'

¹⁰ Kharas et al (eds), 2020 *Leave No One Behind* p 26

¹¹ CARE International, 2018, [Gender Equality and Women's Voice, Guidance Note](#)

¹² CARE International, 2018 [Gender Equality and Women's Voice Guidance Note](#) p 14

Outlined here are a few examples of projects working in the Pacific, demonstrating the efficacy of the Gender Equality Framework, to support women and communities to share in the benefits of increased gender equality.

Family Business Management Training

In the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in PNG CARE works with communities producing cocoa, to help reinvigorate the cocoa industry and improve the lives of farming families. Through targeted programming, women and men are able to understand the importance of giving women an equal role in decision making on the farm and about incomes. Participants come to recognise this is not only fair, but can also improve cocoa quality and yields — with cocoa production increasing by an average of three bags, the equivalent to an income increase of \$430. Household chores are also shared more equally, and cocoa cooperatives function more efficiently, thereby getting better cocoa prices for their members.¹³ In order to be truly effective, gender equality programming and integration across the development program cannot be focused on just individual-level solutions — such as supporting a woman into education, training or economic productivity — “the achievement of gender equality is dependent on structural change.”¹⁴

Community Score Cards

Hamoris Mortalidade no Risiko ba Inan Sira (HAMORIS) is a community based health project working with rural communities in Timor Leste. HAMORIS seeks to contribute to lasting reductions in maternal mortality and disability by increasing the number of women in communities accessing appropriate and quality maternal health services. CARE has been using the Community Score Card (CSC) program to ensure local voices and concerns are heard, and shared issues progressed within the community. The CSC program can enable women’s contribution to agenda-setting and decision making, even in the absence of formal leadership. There is promising evidence that the CSC approach can contribute to: citizen empowerment; service provider and power-holder effectiveness; accountability and responsiveness; and spaces for negotiation between the community and service providers that are expanded, effective and inclusive. There is also evidence the CSC may contribute to improvements in service availability, access, utilisation and quality.¹⁵

In the communities using CSC as part of HAMORIS the evidence from the community surveys showed there is a big gap between service providers and service users.¹⁶ While services were being offered, they weren’t being taken up and were seen as inaccessible. By engaging both mother and father support groups, and providing Social Analysis and Action (SAA) training across communities to challenge gender norms, a significant positive impact is being tracked in the use of modern contraceptive methods and use of skilled birth assistants.¹⁷

¹³ J Cousins, 2018 *BECOMES Mid Term Review Report*

¹⁴ Kharas et al (eds), 2020 *Leave No One Behind* p 27

¹⁵ Sara Gullo et al, 2016 ‘A review of CARE’s Community Score Card experience and evidence’ *Health Policy and Planning* v31

¹⁶ Julie Imron, 2020 (not yet published) ‘Mid-Term Review - Hamenus Mortalidade no Risiko ba Inan (HAMORIS 2017-2021)’

¹⁷ Julie Imron, 2020 (not yet published) ‘Mid-Term Review - Hamenus Mortalidade no Risiko ba Inan (HAMORIS 2017-2021)’

Family Financial Management Workshops

Family Financial Management (FFM) workshops are a key component of CARE's work in Vanuatu with families in rural and remote communities, and have been fundamental to supporting changes in household decision making.¹⁸ The workshops teach both men and women skills to manage their family's resources and to make financial decisions together. With a focus on roles and responsibilities in a household, discussions are encouraged about working together for the benefit of all. With women having a greater role in decision making in the household, men and women have shared that there were fewer conflicts and disagreements, although they remain cautious about how they approach arguments, as there is still a potential for violence. Overall, however, women participating in FFM have reported that with them now contributing to decision making, better decisions were being made to benefit the family. This increase in confidence, knowledge and skills has also, according to Chiefs interviewed as part of a mid-term review of the project, acted as a facilitator for women to step into leadership roles within their community.¹⁹

Recommendation

1. As change needs to take place and be sustained in three domains (individual agency, structure and relations) to achieve long lasting and meaningful impact for gender equality all Australian-funded activities should use a holistic approach, such as CARE's Gender Equality Framework, to support women and girls' rights. This involves working with men, national and local leaders (and seeking to increase the diversity of local leaders), civil society, service providers and women and girls' families.

The key figures and groups which advance the human rights of women and girls' in the Pacific context

Strong civil society organisations provide the foundations for good governance, the recognition of human rights, and the provision of essential services. Women's movements, or collective organising, and a strong civil society more broadly, are often seen as an example of a healthy democracy and legal system. In a global survey of the state of civil society, researchers found that "[r]obust democratic and equitable social development is more likely to be obtained when civil society functions well in terms of both advocacy and service delivery."²⁰ However, women's engagement in decision making and leadership is very low across the Pacific from household through to national levels. Globally, women comprise 25 per cent of national parliamentarians but the percentage of women in Pacific parliaments is currently around 6.4 per cent.²¹

At the household and community level across the Pacific, women typically have limited influence in decision making about expenditure and resource use. At the

¹⁸ CARE International in Vanuatu, 2020 'ANCP Interim Report 1 Jul - 31 Dec 2019'

¹⁹ CARE International in Vanuatu and CARE Australia, 2020 (not yet published) 'Midterm Review - Gender Equality Together and Leftemap Sista II'

²⁰ V. Heinrich & L. Fioramonti (eds), 2008 *CIVICUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society: Comparative perspective* p 363

²¹ IPU Parline, as at June 2020 [Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments](#)

community level this is partially attributed to traditional governance structures, which specifically exclude women, especially women with disabilities, combined with complex social norms which fail to value women's contributions.²² Even in Pacific communities where women hold traditional titles and where matrilineal ownership of resources, such as land, exists, community decision making tends to be dominated by male traditional leaders.²³ Women are often found in small numbers on community decision-making bodies and in consultations on disaster risk management and climate change adaptation. This underrepresentation makes them less likely to receive critical information for preparedness and to be able to influence decisions. "Until we better enable [localisation and feminism], women and girls in crisis — and especially the most vulnerable subgroups — will continue to be left behind."²⁴

Building from our knowledge and application of the Gender Equality Framework, and working closely with local communities, CARE has seen significant change, with support for women's leadership, resulting in wide-felt positive outcomes. In working with local civil society and organisations CARE looks to use close mentoring and partnership to establish relationships based on respect, support, mutual learning and value adding. This vision is driven by balancing the most appropriate technical support options as requested by our partners and valuing the rich two-way learning we gain from the experience of our partners. "Development can be inclusive — and reduce poverty — only if all groups of people contribute to creating opportunities, share the benefits of development and participate in decision-making."²⁵

Gender and Protection Cluster

As part of the recovery response to Tropical Cyclone Pam CARE helped facilitate the Gender and Protection Cluster to bring together a range of organisations to advocate for the rights of women, girls, people with disability and children during times of emergencies, to ensure they are protected, assisted and participating in post disaster emergency responses. Membership of the Cluster covers 20 organisations including seven national bodies (Wan Smolbag Theatre, Vanuatu Christian Council, Vanuatu Society for People with Disability, Vanuatu Women's Centre, Department of Women's Affairs, National Red Cross Society, Disability Desks and Child Desks (under DWA Ministry of Justice) and 12 international bodies (UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA, Oxfam, Save the Children, CARE, Red Cross, Israid, Action Aid, Act for Peace, ADRA, Vanuatu Technical Vocational and Educational Training). Even outside of active emergency situations, the Cluster has been highly active, and has successfully developed joint collaborative programming. Of great importance to the Cluster is the opportunity for women leaders and those working for gender equality to come together, across organisations, to share resources and mutual support. A government partner on the Cluster has noted "CARE's biggest contribution is how it works with other partners whether they are government or NGOs or INGOs. Their humility sets them apart. When they are at

²² Charlie Damon et al CARE, 2020 [CARE Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region \[v1\]](#) p 6

²³ Charlie Damon et al CARE, 2020 [CARE Rapid Gender Analysis COVID-19 Pacific Region \[v1\]](#) p 6

²⁴ Kharas et al (eds), 2020 *Leave No One Behind* p 36

²⁵ UNDP, 2014 [A Glimpse Around the World - United Nations Development Programme](#)

the table it's not about them leading it's about how they bring people and organisations together. They respect the work that other[s] are doing."²⁶

Recommendation

2. To ensure humanitarian and development efforts and response are not further discriminating and excluding those most at risk, ensure meaningful engagement of local civil society — including women-led organisations — in decision making on development and humanitarian preparedness and response at the national, provincial and community levels.

The effectiveness of Australian overseas development assistance programs in supporting human rights of women and girls

We commend the Australian Government's prioritisation of gender equality and women's empowerment in our aid program, and its role in championing women's rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, globally. The Gender Equality Fund and Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development have been valuable resources for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment alongside the Australian Aid program, working to achieve human rights. The strong signal sent by the Government has inspired agencies across our sector to prioritise gender equality as well. CARE partners with a range of organisations including directly supporting women's rights organisations to advance their agenda, and other community development organisations to strengthen gender equality approaches more broadly. For example, CARE has been working with a local Pacific agency — Live & Learn — supporting them to prioritise gender equality in their own service delivery.

Live & Learn

In the Solomon Islands and Fiji, CARE is delivering the Australian Government funded Disaster Ready program in partnership with local organisation Live & Learn. The partnership is supported by regular communication, strong personal relationships, a commitment to joint planning, periodic in-country technical work delivered along with training and mentoring to counterparts, and participatory reflection, monitoring and evaluation. This process focuses explicitly on building the skills and capacity of our partners. Live & Learn Solomon Islands implements the program in-country including managing staff and local relationships, delivering the activities, and applying their extensive local expertise and experience to the development problems being addressed. CARE manages the contract including ensuring effective management oversight, leading the relationship with the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) Support Unit and providing technical advice on gender, capacity development and mentoring to Live & Learn, as well as supporting monitoring and evaluation and other priorities identified through partnership dialogues. Live & Learn have been able to improve their understanding of gendered impacts of disasters and work with CARE to ensure appropriate and accessible responses for women and girls.

²⁶ Government agency representative interview as part of CARE International in Vanuatu and CARE Australia, 2020 (not yet published) 'Midterm Review - Gender Equality Together and Leftemap Sista II'

Australian Government and other donors' engagement

Dedicated funding pools such as the Gender Equality Fund and Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development should be continued, focused on supporting civil society and women-led organisations, and even expanded to prioritise funding for ending gender-based violence (GBV) across our region, including in Middle Income Countries. DFAT's *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy* supports women's representation, noting "it is particularly crucial for ensuring women's perspectives are heard"²⁷ and that the presence of strong women's organisations is a key factor in delivering legislation that criminalises violence against women.

As noted in the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, "Australia is committed to protecting and strengthening civil society internationally."²⁸ Civil society has proven effective in promoting the rights of women and girls, and as such, support for local civil society needs to be made a more explicit strategic priority for Australia across all aspects of international engagement. Highlighted as part of the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, words of support are not being reinforced with resources. Although Grand Bargain signatories have committed to ensuring that 25 per cent of humanitarian funding reaches local and national actors as directly as possible, less than 0.1 per cent of COVID-19 funding currently tracked has done so.²⁹

Private and bilateral donors, as well as international organisations, can play an important role by increasing core and multi-year funding for women-led organisations, and gender responsive programs. The financial stability that comes with this funding enables women's organisations to respond flexibly to changes in context and facilitates the medium- and long-term advocacy, planning and programming needed to keep gender equality at the centre of implementation and monitoring.³⁰

To help achieve long-term, targeted funding to enable civil society organisations with experience to continue their work in promoting the rights of women and girls, and to demonstrate the positive outcomes this investment brings, Australia needs to meet the commitment that 80 per cent of Australia's development program effectively address gender issues in their implementation³¹ and set targets for addressing gender issues at inception. Progress towards the 80 per cent performance target would be further supported by complementary investment targets, ensuring Australia's international development cooperation efforts are directed towards gender equality initiatives. This would not only support progress towards the gender target, but improve effectiveness overall, as DFAT performance data has shown that programs with a gender focus outperformed the average across all 6 performance criteria including effectiveness, efficiency and relevance.³² Having an investment target also ensures infrastructure and aid-for-trade priorities also promote gender equality outcomes.

²⁷ Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2016 *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy* p 7

²⁸ Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017 *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* p 89

²⁹ Charter4Change, 2020 [Charter For Change Statement on the Revised UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan on Covid19](#)

³⁰ UN Women, 2018 *Turning Promises into Action - Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* p 256

³¹ Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2014 *Making Performance Count*

³² Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2018 *Performance of Australian Aid 2016-17* p 14

Recommendations

3. In looking to enable positive outcomes for gender equality, the significant gains from projects supported under the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative must be acknowledged and embedded, with ongoing resources for projects (beyond the current timeframe for Pacific Women).
4. Scale up financial support for women's organisations to engage in policy advocacy at the global, regional and national levels.
5. Introduce investment targets measured against the OECD DAC gender marker, that 20 per cent of Australia's aid budget is dedicated to investments which list gender equality as their primary objective and 65 per cent list gender equality as their secondary objective (85 per cent overall). This recognises the cross-cutting benefits of gender equality programming to the goals of the development policy and raises the ambition for aid programs to integrate gender equality.