

Women in Politics

(Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu)

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Introduction

Pacific governments have committed to equality for women in political representation through a range of international and regional commitments in recognition of the critical importance of the representation of women in politics in achieving democracy. There have been a number of activities aimed at building national and regional capacity to move this agenda forward. For example, UNIFEM's Women in Politics project (1995-2006) jointly with national Women in Politics committees conducted over 20 trainings in the areas of voter education, candidate training, leadership and political empowerment. Views on the efficacy of previous training and the value of training materials vary¹.

What is clear, however, is that there is no systematic way of tapping into the trained pool of resources or training materials produced through previous efforts. There is an urgent need for more coordinated and strategic approach to supporting women in politics activities.

As a follow up to the CDI Women in Politics (WIP) course in Canberra in November 2008, I visited Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu on 21 January – 3 February. The main purpose of my visit was to take stock of relevant activities which will help to form a position on better ways of assisting national efforts to get more women elected in the next cycle of elections in the region.

Key Relevant Activities - Fiji

UNIFEM Gender Equality and Political Governance project (GEPG)

- The project is still at its inception phase. The project is in the process of recruiting national coordinators for the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Country level activities would become clear by June 2009.
- BRIDGE (Building resources in democracy governance and election) training will be one of the main focuses of the GEPG training. Following on from a two-week regional BRIDGE course in November 2008, UNIFEM will fund USP to conduct another training (with accreditation) in February 09.
- UNIFEM will not get involved in candidate training.

¹ UNIFEM Pacific considers that materials produced by its own WIP program (1995-2006) and publications on candidate training are not of high quality or of high relevance therefore they will not be used for future UNIFEM's multi-year high profile project, Gender Equality in Political Governance (GEPG). Others view that some of the materials produced previously can be adapted for future use.

- UNIFEM research will take the social change approach and will intervene at individual, community, and national and global socio-political context.

UNDP National Initiative on Civic Education (NICE) project

The project is designed to facilitate civil rights awareness, information on democratic governance and help build civil responsibility and support the foundation of a democratic society by promoting people's involvement in national governance. It also looks at creating a better understanding of State institutions and functions, the constitution and the law, human rights and democracy.

Following the events of 5 December 2006, the design of the project had to be changed, including the change from national execution to UNDP direct execution.

Main components are capacity building and networking and develop and disseminate civic education messages, leadership and negotiation skills, citizen education on the importance of democratic participation through voting, citizen's education and project impact evaluation.

Gender is well integrated into the project. Among others, the project will deal with campaign financing issues. Project target groups are women, youth faith-based communities, people with disabilities and informal settlements.

Joining of Pacific Parliamentary Assembly on Population and Development (PPAPD) hosted by UNFPA and Forum Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference (FPOCC) hosted by SPC

PPAPD and FPOCC will be merged under one PPAPD-FPOCC secretariat and one Executive Committee. The joint meeting in November 2008 discussed the role of independent Pacific parliaments in tackling priority regional and national issues including the promotion of good governance, improving oversight and accountability, sustainable human development, and **equal representation of women in parliament.**

This meeting agreed that future conferences will focus on the Clerks and Speakers to share their experiences in bringing important issues to the attention of the Chair and members of the Committees of the respective Parliaments and Congresses. More sessions would be geared towards improving the important roles of clerks.

Participants of the conference expressed their wish to discuss climate change and **gender issues** in the next conference.

Key Regional NGOs

- A few international and regional NGOs are involved in activities related to women and leadership (eg. AFAP, PacFAW)².

² AFAP (Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific) see http://www.afap.org/sectors/sec_pacific_home.php, PACFAW (Pacific Foundation for the Advancement of Women) see <http://www.governance.usp.ac.fj/top-menu-29/thematic-areas-236/peace-and-security-242/pacific-based-ngos-involv-419/pacfaw-420/>

- Of particular relevance is the Bottom up Governance Leadership Program by The Foundation for Development Cooperation (UNDEF funded). It is designed to target young and emerging women leaders from PNG, the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga. It will train 65 women in two years (<http://www.vision6.com.au/download/files/14090/626935/BGLP-Release.pdf>)
- PCRC (Pacific Concerns Resource Centre), PIANGO (Pacific Island Association of Nongovernmental Organisaion), FSPI (Foundation of the Peoples of the Pacific International), Oxfam NZ, Pacific Disability Forum are accredited to engage in the Forum dialogue on relevant policy issues. While none of these NGOs focus on gender issues specifically, key gender issues can be raised through any of these NGOs.

Women's wings of political parties - While specific goals of women's wings vary, they are generally to promote gender equality within the party. Major parties in Fiji have created women's wings in their structures. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that women's wings are not functioning properly.

Key Relevant Activities – Solomon Islands

The Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Priorities

- Review and update of women's national policy
- Reserved seats for women – Further to the Ministry's submission to the constitutional reform unit of the Prime Minister and Cabinet seeking approval for ten reserved seats for women, the ministry are developing a green paper, to generate discussion and debate. Once done, it will be sent to the parliament.
- A study of economic situation of women and women and the private sector
- Completion of the first CEDAW (Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women) report

Political parties – A weak political party system predominates in the Solomon Islands. Currently there is no legislation governing parties. Parties are registered as charity organisations. Parties tend to spring up just before the election. In the 2006 election, 13 parties contested with some parties claiming the same candidates. The Government is planning to introduce the integrity bill.

2009 Population Census funded by AusAID and UNFPA

The accurate counts of people and their residence will be vital for registration of voters and election boundaries/political delineation. The preparatory work is under way with the census to be held in November 2009.

UNDP Parliamentary Strengthening Project

CDI has worked closely over the past three years with UNDP's parliamentary strengthening project. This project focuses on building capacity of offices of the parliament for effective functioning operates at the provincial level as well as at the national level. The main focus of provincial parliamentary strengthening is financial management capacity building.

UNDP – a survey of existing gender program - UNDP will conduct a survey of existing gender program to find opportunities for joint programming between UN agencies.

Electoral Commission– An AusAID funded Electoral System Strengthening project is at its design stage. It is a long term project aimed at upgrading the country's electoral system to bring it up to the international standards.

The Electoral Commission is well aware of gender issues and the current discussions on the reserved seats. There was a suggestion to have a gender officer within the electoral commission, but no movement on it yet.

Civic education carried out in 2005/06 didn't work well, apparently.

BRIDGE training evaluation - The evaluation on the BRIDGE training conducted a few years ago produced a few key lessons learnt. Training was often done in a rush and conducted too late to be useful. Selection of trainers would be critical.

National Council of Women (NCW)

The NCW, created in 1983, is involved in some of the key initiatives. NCW is a member of the Task Force on the proposal for the reserved parliamentary seats for women.

NCW networks have been extended to provincial level; women's resource centres are being established in all provinces with funding from the Government, AusAID and Soroptimist International. At the village level, a ward council of women has been set up.

NCW has a chequered history, but it has a few very dedicated and capable staff. NCW is suffering from insufficient funding, limited human resources and perceived division within the NCW. NCW needs a strategic plan which sets out its roles more clearly, its priorities and its work plans. NCW also needs to expand its partnership. The Ministry of Women, Youth and Children have a plan to review NCW.

Church women's networks

Christian Association for Federation of Women has extensive networks throughout the country. The Ministry of women, youth and children are holding consultations and training programs with church women on economic empowerment.

Other NGOs

- *Development Services Exchanges*, an NGO umbrella organisation is currently mapping and profiling of NGOs.
- *Voice Blong Mere* – This information dissemination organisation plays an important role of disseminating relevant information. This NGO will conduct an audience survey.
- Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) is involved in a few projects relevant to women in politics. NZAID funded people & policy project aims to help communities to articulate issues and get them in touch with provincial governments. This project works with established groups such as women's

groups (Sava Council of women, which is linked to NCW) and church women's groups.

Key Relevant Activities – Vanuatu

The Department of Women's Affairs has developed the National Plan of Action for Women 2007-2011, based on consultations at the 2006 National Women's Forum. The Plan is a whole-of-government document.

Increasing female representation in parliament is one of the key areas. Some specific action plans include:

- urging all political parties to nominate at least 30% women candidates – by 2008
- examining the possibility of a legislated gender quota (also the recommendation of the 2002 Electoral Observer Group)
- gender sensitisation of Parliamentarians in the parliamentary induction program
- creating women political adviser positions, and
- Voter education and civic education

Political parties – A couple of political parties do have clear statements to promote gender equality. Vanua'aku Pati (VP), in particular, has provisions for the empowerment of women³. This is the only party to have two women MPs in the 2004 and one in the 2008 parliaments.

VNCW – Vanuatu National Council of Women is listed as one of the key actors in helping to implement the National Plan of Action for women 2007-2011. It has an extensive network throughout the country, at the provincial, municipal and Torba levels. NCW has been suffering from internal divisions, weak financial management and funding shortages. NCW is in the process of working through these issues.

Pacific Institution of Public Policy (PiPP) – PiPP has a strong gender program. Its current and planned work programs (eg. A household study on voter behaviour with electoral commission data, network mapping and financial literacy training) would have important implications for increasing female representation in parliament.

Transparency International (TI) – TI has programs, among others, on civic education, corruption, and media. The office manager is a founding member of Vanuatu National Council of Women and sits on the CEDAW committee.

³. PIPP, Political parties and grouping in Vanuatu (2008)
http://www.pacificpolicy.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&Itemid=23&gid=36&orderby=dmdate_published

Priorities identified by women's groups – At the workshop on 3 February, participants⁴ formed a working group and identified the following as priorities to get more women elected in Vanuatu.

- (1) 2008 election diagnostic study forum -
- (2) Women candidate training
- (3) Capacity building of women MPs
- (4) Women reconciliation process – to ensure women groups work well together. Reconciliation discussions took place among chiefs, government, and churches. It is time for women to have a similar one and to ensure everyone works toward the same goal.
- (5) Constitutional reform and reserved seats
- (6) Women's networking and lobbying skills training

Who is currently doing what

Getting more women in politics requires action in the following four broad areas:

- (1) National Action Plan – having an action plan (or a road map) based on broad consultations on women in politics with clear sense of priority, timing and identification of person/organisation responsible is an essential first step.
- (2) People Issues – candidate training, capacity building of female MPs, voter education, civic education, campaign and fund raising strategies for women candidates
- (3) Systems Issues – the role of political parties, electoral systems, election processes, gender quotas (eg. Legislated gender quotas, voluntary party quotas), and laws regarding campaign finances
- (4) Culture and Leadership issues – different types of leadership, churches, women and parliamentary leadership

The following summarises who is doing what in which area. This is not an exhaustive list – it is based on my short visit to countries and needs to be updated periodically.

⁴ List of participants:

Letty W. Kaltonga representing SDA women's network
Lora Lini, Daily Post, Convenor of the 2006 Women's Forum on media
Leiasmanu Cullwick, MOFA
Grayleen Lapi, Gender/Education officer, MOE, Convenor of the 2006 Women's Forum on education
Vivian Obed, Director Habitat for Humanity
Meresi Sham, CEO M & SM
Manina Packett, President, VNCW
Maryanne Bani, Assistant Project officer, VNCW
Seman Delmas and Rotina, Department of Women's Affairs – invited but could not attend
Marilyn Abel, National Coordinator, Vannuaaku Party

	Fiji	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu
National Action Plan on women's political representation		Women's policy being revised	Critical areas of concern #8 of National Action Plan 2007-2012
Strengthening National council of women's capacity to plan and implement		-NZAID -AusAID/Sorop-tomist Int'l, support for NCW provincial women's resource centres	
Candidate training			Commonwealth Local Governance Forum (in Tana)
Voter education	-UNDP NICE project		-One small bag -Voice Blong U Me
Civic education in schools	-UNDP NICE project		-Vanuatu Technical College
Capacity building of Elected female MPs		CPA WPA twinning	CPA twinning
Capacity building in financing women in politics	UNDP NICE project		
Integrating Gender into Parliament induction programs			
Election officer training through BRIDGE and BRIDGE evaluation		- UNIFEM-USP (regional training) - AusAID evaluation of BRIDGE training	- UNIFEM-USP (regional) - AEC-UNDP (country specific)
Election Monitoring	Electoral Commission	Electoral Commission	-Electoral Commission -USP study on 2008 election monitoring
Legal /constitutional reform and Reserved seats for women		Ministry of Women, Youth and Welfare's proposal and green paper	Transparency International study on reserved seats
Party gender quotas			Included in the National Action Plan 2007-2011
Election diagnostic study on women candidates and the way forward		RAMSI MOG	A proposal
Research – peoples' surveys on governance including women in politics		RAMSI peoples' survey	
Women and local leadership	AFAP -	-SIDT people and policy project, Village SAVE project, and Participatory rural assessment training -Bottom Up	

		Governance Leadership	
Women working well together			

Summary and Recommendations

There are notable positive developments in the region to increase female representation in parliament. A few countries (PNG, the Solomon Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia) are either implementing or discussing the introduction of reserved seats for women. It should also be noted that the ministries/departments of women are now staffed with people with gender expertise and experience. Similar can be said about the experience and commitment of staff at the National Councils of Women in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

However, activities in women’s political representation seem to take place in an uncoordinated manner. As a result, perhaps enough is planned in some areas (eg. BRIDGE training) and little planned in others (eg. candidate training). There does not seem to be cross fertilisation of activities done by different partners.

(1) The first step to address this issue is for the country

- to develop a very short strategic plan with clear priorities and timing and sequencing of activities, which can be used for all national organisations and international/regional partners.
- The lead organisation (the national) and key partner organisation (national and/or international) should be clearly identified for each of the strategic areas.

(2) Partners then should support the lead and key partner organisations.

- UNIFEM Gender Equality in Political Governance has arguably the best potential to serve the region’s needs on women in politics, given the funding level (over AUD 6 million over 5 years) and the coverage (13 Pacific island countries). GEPG activities therefore could have significant implications for related gender and politics activities. The project focuses on increasing women’s representation in local and national governments, increasing leadership and participation in parliamentary committees, electoral bodies and political parties. Information on specific activities to achieve these results at the national level should be made available as soon as possible. Given that the Solomon Islands election in 2010 is not far away, there is a clear urgency in this.
- Both Solomon Islands and Vanuatu identified well-planned candidate training as one of the key areas of training needs. UNIFEM GEPG made it clear that it will not get involved in candidate training. Partners who can do in-country candidate training should be clearly identified.

(3) Capacity of women's machineries (including the ministry/department of women and National Council of Women) and resources seem to fall far short of the current mandates. This is an ongoing issue.

- The national machineries may have to scale back their activities to focus on a few key priority areas.
- At the same time, there is a need for women's machineries to expand their partnerships to include government departments and partners operating in governance and finance.
- A low cost option to consider is to explore the feasibility of replicating UNDP NICE program model to the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.
- Strengthening capacity of National Council of Women (NCWs) – NCWs are an integral part of the women's national machineries promoting gender equality within the community. NCWs in both the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have experienced difficulties over the years. NCW will have to develop a strategic plan, clarify its role, and develop internal financial systems, and expand its partnership base. As NCWs will have to continue to exist, appropriate support should be provided to help NCW to address these issues.

(4) From experiences of women candidates in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, it is clear that running as a party nominee would raise the chance of getting elected. This requires women groups working actively with parties or political groups more actively.

(5) Supporting targeted research and analysis – Remedies for more women in politics should be based on clear problem analyses. The situation of women in politics in the Solomon Island and Vanuatu are very different, in terms of the candidate pool and success rates, among others. Vanuatu conducted a study on women candidates after the 2004 election. The proposal to hold a forum to review the 2008 election to inform future planning should be supported.

Country specific recommendations

Fiji

Future Women in politics activities in Fiji should work closely with UNDP NICE project. Fiji has a number of NGOs which can partner with women's groups to work toward the goal of getting more women elected. Working with political parties to remove barriers for women to get nominated, party gender quotas and functioning women's wings should be given a priority (eg. political parties' role to remove financial barriers to women in politics and discussing strategies to provide women candidates with access to funding).

Solomon Islands

The upcoming year – 2010- offers exciting opportunities for changing the current situation. A diagnostic study of the 2006 Solomon Islands election⁵ identified the following as main constraints for women candidates:

- irregularities in the electoral system particularly voter registration and campaign finance,
- inadequate candidate training and campaign strategies (eg. access to funding and having little connection with electorates),
- voter education and
- weak political party system and loose party groupings.

Since the 2006 election, some notable progress has been made: the proposal for reserved parliament seats for women, the design of electoral strengthening project, the integrity bill and the population census in November 2009.

Leading up to the 2010 election, short term actions should be taken to get potential women candidates prepared for the next election as soon as possible. Such actions should include:

- A short strategic plan outlining priority issues, specific activities, responsible organisations for each activity, and the time line (Lead agency: Ministry of Women, Youth and Children)
- Candidate training and campaign strategy development (Lead agency: NCW?)
- Voter education (lead agency: NCW and Church women's groups?) The Solomon Islands and Vanuatu might like to consider utilising NICE modules, until UNIFEM GEPG activities take off on the ground.

Vanuatu

Vanuatu has a 2007-2011 National Action plan which outlines specific activities to move the women in decision making agenda forward. The main issue for Vanuatu seems to be to review and revise the National Action plan on women in politics based on available resources, capacities of organisations responsible for each action and to prioritise.

On the proposal of introducing special temporary measures (eg. Quota systems and/or reserved seats), a few attempts have been made such as a study of different quota models (2006) and forums to discuss reserved seats and voluntary party quotas (2006-2008)⁶. It is not clear the current status of the recommendations and the study done at various stages.

⁵ (http://www.cdi.anu.edu.au/x_GEN_D_P/2006_10_SI_diagnostic_study.pdf)

⁶ Transparency International Vanuatu (2007), "Study on the methods by which Vanuatu can increase female representation in Parliament."

The 2004 election experiences of women candidate⁷ list the following as the main issues.

- Getting selected as a candidate by a political party
- Lack of support of women for women
- Implementing candidates' policies when standing as independents
- Lack of planning (e.g having a short period of time to organise and present campaigns, and
- Funding and transport

It would be useful to examine the experiences of women candidates in the 2008 election, with a focus on how to inform future planning to increase women's representation.

Centre for Democratic Institution Training Follow up

Trainees of the CDI Women in Politics November 08 developed action plans at the end of the course. Trainees have made some good progress on their action plans in two months - some formed a working group (e.g Vanuatu), others are working on some elements of their action plans. WIP participants of all three countries have extended their networks significantly.

CDI's future activities in Women in Politics

CDI's strong links with Parliaments and its flagship training courses such as political party development and responsible parliamentary governance can play a very useful role for getting more women elected in parliaments. It is recommended that CDI

- (1) continue with CDI WIP training in Canberra
- (2) help to integrate gender into the Parliamentary Induction program. The demand should come from countries - The gender focal point in parliament (eg. Ellen Rii in the Solomon Islands parliament) should coordinate closely with CDI. In Vanuatu, there is a plan to have a focal person in Parliament, but this hasn't been done yet.
- (3) work with female parliamentarians mentoring/training (eg. CPA Women Parliamentarian Association Twinning program); and
- (4) support and disseminate relevant research findings (eg. Vanuatu diagnostic study forum)

The future CDI involvement in women in politics should be reviewed every six months in view of developments in the region, especially the UNIFEM GEPG project activities.

⁷ J. Strachan and S. Delesa (2005) The experiences of Women Political Candidates in Vanuatu