



Australian Government
**Australian Centre for
International Agricultural Research**

SUBMISSION

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

The work of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) with partner countries in our region reflects our commitment to the strategic objective of improving gender equity and empowerment of women and girls. This focus is critical to progressing many of the Beijing Platform for Action critical areas of concern and Sustainable Development Goals (SGDS) including gender equity, as well as reducing poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

The ACIAR commitment to the empowerment of women and girls is articulated in its Gender Equity Policy and Strategy¹ as well as its Gender Guidelines to assist researchers to incorporate gender research into their project design. ACIAR convened and funded the world's first international agricultural research for development gender conference in 2019, *Seeds of Change*, held at the University of Canberra, and attended by many Pacific-based researchers and development practitioners, among 280 participants from 45 countries. In addition, ACIAR provides strategic leadership and targeted funding to the CGIAR Gender Platform and has been at the centre of its reform process to allow a broader outreach into developing countries including the Pacific.

ACIAR-funded applied research projects improve the lives and livelihoods of smallholder farmers, particularly women, across the Indo-Pacific region. Focused attention on gender equity and empowerment is hard-wired in our approach at all levels of the organisation.

Background

ACIAR is Australia's specialist international agricultural research for development agency. An independent statutory agency within the foreign affairs portfolio reporting to the Foreign Minister, the ACIAR mission under the ACIAR Act 1982 is to achieve more productive, resilient and sustainable agriculture in developing countries through international agricultural research partnerships. Over the past 39 years, ACIAR has brokered partnerships between researchers from Australia and the developing world to improve agricultural productivity and sustainability for healthier and more equitable societies. Australian government international development policy guides our research agenda. This includes the commitment that 80 percent of all development aid must engage with gender equality and women's empowerment.

ACIAR has ten country offices, including in Fiji and Papua New Guinea (PNG), both led by Pacific women. These offices facilitate links between Australian research organisations and research agencies in

¹ The ACIAR Gender Strategy is available on the website: <https://www.aciar.gov.au/publication/Gender-Equity-Policy-and-Strategy>

developing countries. Our country office staff play an important role in managing negotiations between ACIAR, in country governments and officials and Australian scientists. Projects in the Pacific have also identified non-governmental organisations to partner with.

Context

Women smallholder farmers work long, hard days. Women perform nearly half of agricultural labour in developing countries – but are paid less than men, even when doing the same work. Men own more agricultural resources (land or livestock) than women. When women do own resources, their land and livestock are smaller and less valuable. They work more part time, seasonal or low paying jobs than men do, and find it more difficult to borrow credit. Women are often less educated than men; few finish high school, and in some countries only a handful of women can read. This limits their ability to run households or compete with men in agriculture.

ACIAR projects are helping to create gender equality in developing countries. Women should be paid as much as men for the same work, and should have the same opportunities as their husbands or brothers for education, to own and manage their farm, to make their farms prosperous, and to lead a happy and fulfilling life. In addition, female research scientists should have access to participate in research projects in a meaningful way.

Term of reference 4: The effectiveness of Australian overseas development assistance programs in supporting human rights of women and girls

ACIAR works to empower women and girls and improve greater gender equity in all projects. Project proposals must address gendered social relations from design to completion including the composition of research teams, any gender differentiated impacts, and application of the ‘do no harm’ principle. Guidance is provided through the ACIAR Gender Equity Strategy and project-level Gender Guidelines. Gender equity and women’s empowerment is one of the six objectives in the ACIAR 10-year strategy. In addition, ACIAR investment includes an Associate Research Program Manager for Gender and the Meryl Williams Fellowship for women in research leadership. The first cohort of the Meryl Williams Fellowship includes two women from PNG and three from Fiji. The second cohort is targeting women from Samoa, Vanuatu, Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Solomon Islands. ACIAR supports two other fellowships for further study and capacity building and strives for a minimum 50 percent participation of women in all capacity building programs. In 2019, ACIAR ran a PNG-only round of the John Dillon Fellowship which provides in-service training in management and leadership for mid-career professionals.

Examples of our work in overseas development assistance in supporting women and girls

ACIAR Research Program Managers ensure that gender differentiated impacts are considered in the design of research proposals, and that research teams ‘practice what they preach’ by adequately including women in decision-making and leadership. The following five examples illustrate this.

Example 1 Empowering women smallholder farmers in rural Papua New Guinea

Integrating gender in agricultural research for development is smart and sensible development as it addresses the needs of both women and men, while recognising and addressing unequal access to resources and decision making. The Transformative Agriculture and Enterprise Development Program

(TADEP) is a multidisciplinary research program that aims to improve the livelihoods of rural men and women in Papua New Guinea through five research projects. TADEP is co-funded by DFAT and ACIAR at AUD 23 million over six years.

Part of this are the Family Farm Teams² working with women farmers to build their agricultural and business skills and knowledge as part of a family unit. The Commissioned Organisation is the University of Canberra, working loosely with partner country project leaders and institutions. The ‘family farm team’ activities focus on reorienting women and men towards a gender equitable and planned approach to farming as a small family business.

Women smallholder farmers in Papua New Guinea grow essential subsistence crops while caring for their families. They are key to agricultural livelihoods but face significant constraints including educational disadvantages and limited access to training or extension services. To address this, previous ACIAR research identified that a whole of family approach to farmer learning enabled farming families to work more equitably and effectively and improved livelihoods. The Family Farms Teams was developed using a peer education approach that saw local farmers trained as Village Community Educators (VCEs).

Building on this research, the project “Improving opportunities for economic development for women smallholders in rural PNG” scaled out into three Highlands provinces and two New Guinea Islands provinces. A total of 266 farmers were trained as Village Community Educators (165 women and 101 men). These VCEs then trained a total of 1,622 women and 869 men. A further 45 women and 53 men were also trained as Family Farm Team trainers with support from Australia’s Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development and Pacific Governance Facility.

The research has found a marked improvement in gender equity and the roles of children in the family. Research found that families were able to see the inefficiency and inequity of their current roles and workloads, then understood the family would not have a secure and sustainable future. When families developed family and farm goals together, they had a shared vision that they could commit to. Through planned farming, families met their short-term goals, and the whole family benefited and could see the tangible benefits of working together in a new and equitable way.

The training saw a change in perspectives by both men and women about their role, place in the family, = their skills, and community contributions. By making their multiple roles more visible, the place of women was elevated. For many, this enabled them to see themselves as more than ‘just a wife and mother’.

As the women applied skills and knowledge that helped their family, they then were able to help other families, which in turn raised their own sense of self-esteem and worth. Others saw the skills, and the progress of the family, which elevated that woman and her family in the community.

Importantly, research has also found a change in the mindset of a number of men, who are more focused on the family unit, giving them the space to consider how they could lead a family to be successful and united. Due to its success in highlighting the importance of women’s equal participation in decision making in family farming it is being rolled out in Solomon Islands and guiding other ACIAR projects and the PNG Government more broadly.

² For more detail on who was involved see Family Farm Teams Fact sheet 2017 <https://co-lab.aciar.gov.au/tadep/sites/co-lab.aciar.gov.au/tadep/files/2019-02/Family-Farm-Teams-2017-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

Example 2 Improving gender equitable approaches in agroforestry

The second example is ACIAR project, 'Enhancing value added products and environmental benefits from agroforestry systems in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific'³. The project, led by the University of the Sunshine Coast partnering with the Southern Cross University and the University of Adelaide, aims to benefit smallholders in the Pacific Islands by improving economic, social and environmental outcomes and is a partnership between ACIAR, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), and relevant Government ministries. A relevant outcome is an improved understanding of approaches to gender equitable participation in agroforestry.

In Nadroumai, Fiji the project began with community awareness activities, and learning about community decision-making processes. The Nadroumai Women's Club (NWC) was identified as a potential partner and agreed to setting up and managing a tree nursery. NWC members were provided with training in nursery management, tree propagation and essential business skills. SPC also facilitated the development of business by-laws with a clearly laid out benefit-sharing mechanism that allowed the women to reap the benefits of their activities. According to Veniana Devu, Nadroumai Women's Group President, by 2019, the NWC nursery was successfully producing tree seedlings, which the project was purchasing and using to rehabilitate the catchment. Some of the women took the initiative forward, also growing their own seedlings and selling them. The NWC President noted: *'Women have vital roles in households and livelihoods, but engaging women in land-based enterprises is not always straightforward in Fiji, because of customary division of tasks, and customary land tenure. For the first time, our women are empowered to take control as they have gained the necessary skills through the trainings and be decision makers'*.

The project is having an impact. At the start of the project, 10 women agreed to participate. As it progressed, and the community witnessed its success, 20 more women joined the initiative. Club savings increased from F\$1000 in 2018 to more than F\$4000 in 2019 as a result of the project and will be used towards village development projects. By the end of the project a total of 10 hectares were planted under agroforestry, the elders of the community having agreed to extend the area from one hectare to ten. The project ended in 2019, but SPC is continuing to work with the NWC, with a focus on building links with the tourism industry along Fiji's Coral Coast.

Example 3 Building the capacity of women in horticulture as frontline responders during COVID-19.

Pacific women supported by ACIAR are plant doctors on the frontline support farmers to ensure food security. ACIARs informal 'on-the-job' training and research partnerships across cultures and countries are delivering significant outcomes. Newly trained plant doctors are considered an 'essential service' and they are continuing to offer their services during COVID19, remotely to farmers with the use of innovative technology. These plant doctors have come out of a project that the ACIAR supports in partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC) Land and Resources Division and relevant Government ministries. The project is being implemented by University of Queensland on behalf of ACIAR. Together they support plant doctors to deliver plant health services to farmers in Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands. Under normal circumstances, farmers take their unhealthy plants to farmer-friendly plant health clinics for a diagnosis and recommended treatment. The clinics aim to help improve biosecurity by preventing the spread and negative impact of plant diseases on agricultural production.

³ For more detail see the Fact Sheet https://www.aciar.gov.au/sites/default/files/project-page-docs/factsheet_fst2014_067_v1_a.pdf

In Fiji for example, Agricultural Field specialist, Maca Vakaloloma works at the Lakena Agriculture Office in Nausori, located in Eastern Viti Levu. She attended the preliminary plant health clinic training to become a plant doctor. In terms of impact she indicates the plant health training has been life-changing for her in terms of her everyday work and given her a leadership opportunity as well as access for farmers in rural and remote communities who cannot access agricultural offices in their districts. Similar sentiments are shared in Samoa, by Temukisa Tofilau, Project Leader, Savaii Farmers Association who found the ACIAR supported plant health trainings enhanced her knowledge on plant health. A total number of 30 women in the Pacific have been trained through the project.

Example 4 Research that is helping women farmers build commercial businesses

At the heart of ACIAR's research partnership with Papua New Guinea, is research collaboration to overcome social, cultural and policy constraints to gain benefits from agricultural technologies, particularly in terms of gender equity and the role of women. Current research has a focus on fostering private sector led development in agriculture, increasing agricultural productive capacity and improving access to markets for farmers in PNG and Bougainville, particularly women farmers.

Women farmers not only play a significant role in the agricultural industry in PNG but are also key to PNG family livelihoods. The role is often concentrated in early stages of production and they rarely participate in cash crop marketing and financial decision making. ACIAR has been working in partnership with smallholders, the National Agriculture Research Institute (NARI) and the private sector to enhance private sector led development of the canarium industry in PNG. Canarium Indicum or Galip nut as it is locally known, is an edible nut produced by an agroforestry tree. ACIAR has been working to expand markets and improve the processing quality by strengthening the capacity and engagement of the private sector, using nuts from existing trees. Since its inception in 2015, thousands of local farmers, many of them women have been benefitting from selling galip nuts directly to the factory. People near the factory can collect galip nuts, bring them in any quantity, show up at the factory and hand over the nuts and walk away with cash. A mentoring program and more than 12 formal workshops have been undertaken in East New Britain and Bougainville, which included tree maintenance, Galip processing, food hygiene, income diversification, drying and value adding. A Galip club, consisting of 20 SMEs, has also been formed in East New Britain and Port Moresby to support women to start and sustain microenterprises to add value and market Galip products. One of these participants is local entrepreneur, Dorothy Luana. Her SME, Devine Management Services and the villagers she sources her Galip nut from received training in food safety, financial literacy, solar drier construction, supply chain and value-adding. Dorothy now sources and produces product separately to the NARI factory, with product now at the Jackson's International Airport duty free lounge. She continues her collaboration on the project, which has since entered its second phase, with a focus to improve rural farmer benefits and attracting further private sector investment.

Example 5 Capacity Building and Training

Formal fellowships and scholarships are also delivering significant outcomes. An example is the Meryl Williams Fellowship- Building women's leadership for influential careers in the agri-food sector⁴. The Fellowship, funded by ACIAR and run by the University of New England, supports women in agricultural

⁴ For more information see the Meryl Williams webpage <https://www.aciar.gov.au/Fellowships-Scholarships-and-Alumni/Meryl-Williams-Fellowship>

research to enhance their leadership skills and increase their impact through a combination of immersive learning, mentoring, networking and professional development.

It is funded by ACIAR and supports female international agricultural researchers and scientists across the Indo-Pacific to improve their leadership and management skills. The Fellowship contributes to more productive and secure food systems in developing countries by providing women with greater access to resources and decision making.

The Fellows are selected to take part because of their commitment to positively impacting agricultural development, research excellence and demonstrated capacity for leadership and innovation. In addition to working with individual women, the MWF program supports the institutions that they work in to identify and address systemic barriers to advancement: *The content of the training was designed in a way that it enabled me to know myself, and how I can bring about positive changes in workplace to improve individuals' performance by empowering both women and men'* (MWF fellow 2020, Fiji).

Conclusion

These are just some illustrations of the work ACIAR does in agricultural research for development, placing gender at the centre of all our work, as a key strategic objective. By identifying the barriers to women's equal participation in decision making and leadership, listed as a critical area of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action, we work in the Pacific region to promote greater equality and opportunities for women and girls. Our work also contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals including Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls as well as reducing poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

For a visual summary, ACIAR's long term commitment to working together to support gender equity in the Pacific is captured in a short video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45gk0IMZhJw>

ACIAR would be happy to provide more information on these or other initiatives and to answer any questions the Committee may have.

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