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Hon. Kevin Andrews, MP
Chair, Human Rights Sub-committee
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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

Dear Mr Andrews

We are pleased to make this submission to the Human Rights Sub-committee's (the Committee) inquiry into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific.

Who are we?

The **Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA)** is the leading international centre for applied multidisciplinary research and analysis concerning contemporary state, society and governance in the Pacific. Situated within the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, at the Australian National University, DPA seeks to set the international standard for scholarship on the region. Research concerning gender, social change and inclusion is core to our program. This research seeks to understand transformations in social and cultural landscapes and gender identities in the Pacific, and what they mean for politics, security, and more inclusive development outcomes, with particular emphasis on: [women's leadership and political participation](#), [women's economic empowerment](#), and [ending violence against women and girls](#).

In addition to being uniquely positioned in terms of its geo-political outlook as one of the few academic departments in Australia – and indeed, the world – focussed solely on the Pacific, DPA also stands out in its administrative composition and staff profile. DPA is led by the only female Head of Department in the Coral Bell School (Associate Professor Nicole Haley), and has an equitable gender profile of staff and students, including higher degree by research (HDR) students. Recognising the importance of policy impact, the Department regularly engages with government and non-government sectors in events and seminars, highlighting the contemporary state of Pacific Affairs.

The Department prides itself on a collegial approach to research, with staff often working across multiple projects together. Collectively, our established hub of Pacific gender scholars has designed and implemented Pacific-responsive research projects, teaching courses, and development programs to support the human rights of women and girls across the region (see full list at Appendix 1). In doing so, and over a long period of time, we have developed relationships across the region built on trust and respect, that value and privilege Pacific knowledge and voices. It is based on this experience that we present this submission.

Key points

We are pleased to take this opportunity to stress the following points:

- The economic shock caused by current global health crisis, coupled with the devastation wreaked by Cyclone Harold in March 2020 will have a severe, and grossly disproportionate, effect on women and girls in the Pacific. This will require both gender-targeted and gender-mainstreamed solutions.
- Little substantive progress has been made since the 2015 report of the Human Rights Sub-committee across various indicators of human rights in the Pacific, from rates of intimate partner and family violence to women's political representation and leadership. While existing data often paints a disheartening picture, there is also a need to understand human rights concerns more comprehensively. This will require support in designing and maintaining data collection systems that capture gender-sensitive quantitative and qualitative data and strengthen capacity in data analysis across the Pacific.
- Pacific Islanders are best placed to identify gaps, needs and the solutions to gender inequality in the Pacific. Australia must be guided by the Pacific – notably, Pacific women and gender advocates – in its approach to gender program design and research. Co-designed research that is conducted and analysed in partnership with Pacific Islanders is the most effective approach to identifying and addressing the full range of structural discrimination and human rights abuses.
- The Australian Government can and should play a critical role in the promotion of human rights and the value of democracy – exemplified, for example, through free and fair elections, the promotion of a free and independent media, and the rule of law – and in continuing to support Pacific-led action towards the elimination of all forms of gender inequality. Locally-led approaches are key to progressing gender reform and minimising backlash against perceived outsider agendas.
- Non-government organisations, faith based institutions, and local community networks provide essential services that support the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific. They are frequently involved in community development and education, training of professionals and practitioners, and research, usually without core funding. Women are at the forefront of these organisations, regularly showcasing their capacity for leadership and achievement of results for their communities.
- The Australian Government should see out its 10-year commitment to gender equality in the Pacific and continue to fund the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative until the end of 2022. Further extensions of the initiative should be subject to an inclusive, rigorous, evidence-based design process that involves consultation with a wide range of Pacific stakeholders.

Response to the Inquiry Terms of Reference

1. Role of Pacific civil society in responding to human rights of women and girls

For over two decades, DPA researchers have been involved in research and programmatic work, in collaboration with academic, government and non-government partners in the Pacific, across multiple areas of human rights. In this section, we use our research to consider progress and setbacks made since the Committee's 2015 report, *Empowering women and girls: The human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific region* (hereafter 'the 2015 report').

Personal and legal rights, including freedom from violence

Being able to live free from violence is a core human right for all. High levels of violence against women and girls contribute to and exacerbate socio-economic fragility. Violence is a symptom, contributor to, and an outcome of instability and insecurity. Empowering women and girls is widely regarded as central to achieving key development goals. Improvements in women's economic status and girls' literacy reduce poverty but are impeded by endemic domestic, family and sexual violence.

As the 2015 report acknowledged, there are high levels of domestic, family and sexual violence across the Pacific region. Available evidence indicates the majority of victims are women and girls. In collectivist-oriented societies, where there is no welfare safety net, the family and community context has profound implications on whether individual victims are protected and assisted. Efforts to improve the personal and legal rights of women and girls entail fostering family and extended kin networks that support and sustain survivors rather than ostracise and place pressure on them. In a context where there is a weak and fragile state and limited service provision, village-based dispute management and mediation is widespread. Gendered biases exist in both the state-based and local justice processes with often-conservative local community and church leaders, and in policing and the legal and judicial professions.

In low to middle-income countries, the capacity to support survivors and to enable their access to justice can be very limited, and often illusory. The 2015 report highlighted that despite criminal law reforms, enforcement is compromised often by a weak, inconsistent and underfunded justice sector, including the police. A similar concern was expressed in relation to the family protection laws enacted in many Pacific countries over the past twenty years. These laws introduced civil protection orders to protect victims of domestic and family violence and specifically criminalise domestic violence. However, since 2015, there are indicators of change in community attitudes and in women's willingness and ability to access the formal justice sector. Based on the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) evaluation of Australia's aid assistance in the region to end violence against women and girls during the past decade,¹ and on studies that we and others have undertaken, in some settings there is:

- Increasing awareness and recognition of domestic violence as a crime;
- Improved knowledge of the family protection legislation in the community and among justice stakeholders;
- Increasing use of family protection orders;
- Established and/or expanded specialised units and expertise within the police, and across the justice sector;

¹ ODE, 2019, *Ending violence against women and girls: Evaluating a decade of Australia's development assistance*, DFAT, Canberra.

- Improved networks of justice and community actors that seek to support survivors and provide legal and personal protection; and
- Increased employment and acceptance of women in the law and justice sector.

Building upon and consolidating these gains will require political will and expanded investment in initiatives that are cross-sectoral in application, involve local actors, and strengthen advocacy and support networks. The evidence of effective strategies, and of the implementation of reforms in the law and justice sector, remains thin and centred on program evaluations. To ascertain whether the rights of women and girls are being upheld, in multiple contexts, requires extensive collaborative and ethical research with service providers and advocacy networks.

Economic rights

Women's economic vulnerability

Women's already precarious economic status in the Pacific due to social norms that limit their control over economic resources and financial decision making, have been further impacted by serious shocks to the tourism, hospitality and informal sectors through sustained border closures and trading restrictions as a result of COVID-19. Women are estimated to carry 80 per cent of unpaid care work in households across the Pacific. The school closures announced in March this year in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu ran - for the most part - until May, further exacerbating the burden of unpaid care work on women and girls, given this is already largely understood in these contexts as "women's work".²

Women are heavily represented in the informal economy in vulnerable, or unstable work, with poor employment and workplace protections, poor access to training and professional development and a lack of social security.³ Most countries still lack legislation and workplace policies to support working mothers and many women lack access to capital to start a business, particularly in locations where women are unable to own land.⁴ Women's participation in the formal economy is most likely to occur through employment in the public sector, including as health workers and teachers, or in tourism.⁵ Women are highly represented in the nursing workforce across the Pacific and the impact of a pandemic for health workers will require monitoring as restrictions ease. Within the formal economy, the quality of women's formal employment is poor, as women are more likely to occupy low-level positions and lack representation in senior management,⁶ particularly at the sub-national level and in line agencies.⁷ With very limited provision by governments of family economic supports for childcare, education or single parent assistance in the region, women have to rely primarily on donor-funded programs for assistance in managing fiscal and social risks as parents.

Women's economic empowerment is therefore much more complex than simply enabling women to earn an income. Richard Eves' research suggests that women also need

² UN Women, *The COVID-19 Outbreak and Gender: Key Advocacy Points from Asia and the Pacific*, March 2020

³ International Labour Organisation [ILO] 2017. *Improving labour market outcomes in the Pacific: Policy Challenges and Priorities*. Suva, Fiji: ILO.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ International Women's Development Agency [IWDA], 2018. *Do No Harm Research Project Report: Women in Formal Employment Survey*. Melbourne: IWDA.

⁶ Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2015. *Women in the workforce. An unmet potential in Asia and the Pacific*. Manila, Philippines: ADB; Ibid (IWDA 2018); Ibid (ILO 2017).

⁷ Haley, N. 2015. *State of the Service: Women's Participation in the PNG Public Sector*. *DPA In Brief*, 60/2015; Haley, N. 2016. *Status of Women's Leadership in the Public Sector in Pacific Small Island States*, London: The Commonwealth Secretariat.

control over financial decision-making and freedom from pressure or controlling behaviour by husbands that results in economic dependency, harassment or intimidation.⁸ Many women in rural PNG, for example, are subject to economic control and economic exploitation and across many households women are alienated from decision-making about budgeting and finances, including decisions about their own earnings. Furthermore, women's agricultural and caring roles present a barrier to their participation in earning an income. If women's work to earn an income interferes or impinges on household responsibilities, then they may be subject to emotional or physical abuse at the hands of their husbands. In the case where women have savings, they are often pressured or threatened by their husbands to provide them with a share for discretionary expenditure on alcohol, marijuana, gambling or for sex services from other women.⁹

Gendered impacts of labour migration

While the Committee's 2015 report does not refer to the social and economic impacts of temporary labour migration on women and children in the Asia Pacific region, labour mobility has become an increasingly important livelihood strategy for Pacific households. In 2008, Australia introduced a temporary labour migration scheme for nine Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste called the Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot program (2008-2012) which was succeeded by the Australian Seasonal Worker Program (SWP). SWP is part of Australia's aid program and its primary objective is to contribute to economic development in participating countries by providing seasonal employment opportunities, remittances and opportunities for up-skilling, while providing Australian employers with a reliable seasonal labour force. SWP workers are employed in Australia's agricultural sector for up to nine months each year. Australia's SWP is modelled on the New Zealand Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, introduced in 2007, which is open to the same nine Pacific Island countries and provides seasonal work in New Zealand's horticulture and viticulture industries. More recently in 2018, Australia introduced the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS), which targets low and semi-skilled workers for jobs in rural and regional Australia with visas issued for up to three years. As with the SWP, the PLS' objective is to contribute to economic development in participating countries by providing waged employment and skills training in Australia.

In the 2018/19 season over 23,300 seasonal workers from the Pacific and Timor Leste participated in the Australian and New Zealand seasonal work schemes, and by December 2019 around 600 Pacific workers were engaged under the PLS. The numbers participating in all three schemes continue to increase, demonstrating the importance of these schemes to participating Pacific countries and to Australian and New Zealand industries.

For over a decade our research has examined the social and economic impacts of Australia and New Zealand's Pacific labour mobility programs on participating workers and their families, including women and children. For participating families, the opportunity to earn a regular source of waged income is highly valued. Money earned overseas makes a direct contribution to the economic security of participating households and supports improvements to living standards including improvements to housing, children's educational attainment, diet and health.

Participation in temporary labour migration schemes also impacts on the social dynamics of the family, as households adjust to the absence of a (usually male) worker. The

⁸ Eves n.d. *Naming violence: Forms of Economic Violence in Papua New Guinea*. See also IWDA, 2018. Do No Harm Research Project Report: Women in Formal Employment Survey. Melbourne: IWDA.

⁹ Ibid.

gendered nature of migration - who migrates (male or female) and who is left behind – is important. Women play a significant role, either directly as participants in labour mobility, or indirectly as they manage the household, finances and child caring duties while male family members are absent. Greater responsibilities for women at home provide new forms of economic and social empowerment on the one hand as women take over household duties that are traditionally performed by men, but they can also be an added strain as women assume a wider range of roles. The impacts on children of seasonal worker households are diverse, with positive impacts including higher rates of educational attainment, while negative impacts relate more to the regular, extended periods of absence of a parent every year. Increased participation in education can promote awareness of human rights. However, other social and cultural obligations associated with the burdens of additional workloads and care can undermine those rights.

The dual impacts of Cyclone Harold and COVID-19 on seasonal workers and their families have been multiple. Families that were expecting partners to return to assist with household needs are struggling with the extra workloads of the clean-up of Cyclone Harold and other and many family members have lost employment and now reliant on remittances from seasonal worker programs. Additionally many workers that are reliant on participating in these schemes cannot be deployed placing extra strain on financial expectation that has been argued to be a factor of domestic violence.

Our research points to four main lessons:

- 1) **Women’s participation in labour mobility must be encouraged, and potentially targeted.** Female participation rates in both the Australian and NZ seasonal work schemes are low. Barriers to greater participation of women include employers’ preferences for male workers to perform the physical jobs on the orchard/vineyard. Opportunities should be devised to encourage women into the schemes – in placements that go beyond traditionally gendered roles – while remaining respectful of social and cultural norms within Pacific countries. Any efforts to increase women’s participation in labour mobility must focus on safe and appropriate work and living arrangements, and suitable arrangements for dependents left behind.
- 2) **There is a significant need for support services for those who remain at home, usually women (and children) – both economic and psycho-social forms of support.** This includes the involvement of the worker’s family in pre-departure training so that family members are better prepared to cope with the worker’s absence, and have realistic expectations regarding the amount of money the worker is likely to earn and send home. Support for those remaining home e.g. to manage remittances and other household finances, training to support the development of small businesses, assistance with agricultural production, provision of support to manage their relationships, children. Increasingly reports have noted that female spouses of seasonal workers that receive remittances are often vulnerable due to the absence of a household member and have been targeted for their access to monetary and material resources.
- 3) **There is a need for more research on whether participation in labour mobility schemes influences workers’ understandings of human rights -** including, for example, the rights of women to participate freely and equally in politics and leadership - through cross-cultural engagements and if that information flows back into Pacific households and communities via social remittances.

- 4) **Further research is required on the impact of natural disasters and how labour mobility programs can assist in economic relief** and include the unintended negative consequences that arise from this. COVID-19 will change labour mobility arrangements where associated travel costs may increase, and women's already limited participation may drop further due to additional costs. Research will be required to assess needs of women and their families to continue their participation in the scheme. Financial burdens from not participating also contribute to a rise in domestic tensions; more research is needed to examine where and how to put in place support mechanisms for women and children in these situations. This is also pertinent in relation to natural disasters.

Civil and political rights

Women's representation in the parliaments of sovereign Pacific nations has not significantly increased since the Committee's 2015 report. As of June 2020, just 33 of the Pacific's 497 Members of Parliament (MPs) are women (or 6.6 per cent), and recent elections have not served to increase substantially women's participation. The Federated States of Micronesia, PNG and Vanuatu are now the only countries in the world to have legislatures solely comprised of men.¹⁰ In every independent state of the Pacific, the proportion of women's political representation remains under the global average of 25 per cent and the international targets set under the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW. Since the Committee's 2015 report, one woman has had the role of female head of government in the Pacific Islands. From January 2016 to January 2020, Dr Hilda Heine was the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, a first for the region. Also in 2016, Fiame Naomi Mata'afa became Samoa's first female Deputy Prime Minister. In 2020, Kiribati appointed its first female Speaker of Parliament, the long-serving parliamentarian Tangariki Reete.

In non-sovereign Pacific countries, women's political representation often exceeds the 30 per cent international targets: 44 per cent in New Caledonia, 52 per cent in French Polynesia, and 66 per cent in Guam. Women are also active in sub-national and local-level politics. These participation rates are in part impacted by the parity law imposed by France on its territories that require all political parties to register electoral lists that include equal numbers of women and men. 'Special measures', as defined in article 4 of CEDAW are also in use in Samoa, Bougainville and Vanuatu (in two municipal councils).¹¹ In contexts where women's representation is very low – or non-existent – special measures are an effective means of guaranteeing women's voice in political decision-making. These measures are often controversial, and some (most notably reserved seats systems) have been criticised as acting as ceilings for women's representation. The Samoan '10 per cent' law, however, represents a uniquely Pacific approach to special measures. In what can be called a 'safety net' system, the Samoan model sets a minimum threshold (10 per cent) of women's representation. The quota is only implemented if this threshold is not reached in a general election; if so, the highest-polling unsuccessful women candidates in the election take up additional seats in parliament to meet the threshold. The '10 per cent' law was first used in the 2016 general elections, and campaigners for greater women's representation in other Pacific countries have shown interest in the Samoan model.

As the Committee discussed in depth in 2015, the continued under-representation of women in formal political institutions across the Pacific remains a function of cultural and

¹⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2020. *Women in national parliaments*.

¹¹ Baker, K. 2019. *Pacific Women in Politics: Gender Quota Campaigns in the Pacific Islands*, University of Hawai'i Press.

structural barriers, including social norms that privilege men in decision-making and clientelist relationships between elected representatives and their constituencies which often assume women will not be able to deliver goods and services to the community as well as men. In the Pacific, political actors need legitimacy – to be viewed as credible leaders by their communities – and the personal links between political actors and their constituencies are very important. Our research has shown that these ideas of legitimacy are localised and gendered.¹² This means that support for aspiring women candidates needs to be flexible, targeted and tailored to be effective. It also means that understanding the dynamics of legitimate leadership in the Pacific is fundamental to improving the electoral chances of women.

Our research points to four key lessons learned in working to improve women's civil and political rights in the Pacific:

- 1) Because social norms play such a strong role in determining the legitimacy of political candidates, civil society actors (and donors) working in this space also need to demonstrate legitimacy and understanding of local context and cultural mores. In the lead up to the Vanuatu election in March 2020, for example, an international NGO was threatened with expulsion for its promotion of temporary special measures to increase women's representation in parliament. **Ensuring civil society actors and donors work with local influencers, in locally-appropriate ways, is critical.** Robust and inclusive governance arrangements that facilitate strong local ownership of support programs are necessary to both ensure approaches are targeted and contextually appropriate, but also to manage risks of perceptions of political interference.
- 2) Women's under-representation in formal political institutions is not mirrored in other institutions, including community- and faith-based organisations. There are opportunities to work with women and girls in these sectors to understand, and capitalise on, their source of legitimacy as leaders. Yet these types of leadership are often not seen as politically salient in the same way male leadership is, leading to the 'pipeline' gap that sees fewer women elected than men. **Given the localised nature of political legitimacy, a broader evidence base is required to understand the gendered dynamics of leadership in the region.**
- 3) While men are advantaged by the gendered system of political patronage, not all men systematically exclude women from decision-making. **There is a need to identify and work with those men who can make space for women leaders and who can channel women's voices into decision-making, be it at the community, provincial, national or regional level.**
- 4) While social norms and traditions of women's leadership vary significantly throughout the region, there are commonalities and shared experiences that can offer insight into how to improve women's civil and political rights. **Facilitating regional sharing – especially across sub-regional and Anglophone-Francophone divides – is an important role that development partners can play.**

¹² See, for example, Haley, N. and K. Zubrinich. 2019. [2017 Papua New Guinea General Elections: Election Observation Report](#), and Baker, K. and S. Palmieri. 2020. Widows and Wives in Pacific Politics: A Reliable Pathway for Women? [DPA In Brief, 1/2020](#).

Subsistence and cultural rights

Gendered impacts of climate change

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the vulnerabilities of the Pacific Islands region during times of crisis. Yet as Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum, Dame Meg Taylor, has recently pointed out, climate change remains the top priority for the region:

It is important to emphasise the interconnectivity between the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change...Just as our region consolidates its collective effort to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, we must also face the devastating damage in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga and loss of life caused by Cyclone Harold. This climate change exacerbated disaster is a stark reminder that notwithstanding the current threats and impacts of COVID-19, climate change remains the biggest threat facing humanity today. We must not lose sight of this reality.¹³

Climate change predictions over the next decade are expected to bring more intense rainfall events, changes to regional climate systems and more frequent El Niño patterns, which will increase frequency and duration of droughts and natural disasters. Sea level rise, as well as increases to air and sea temperatures, have already led to ocean acidification floods and drought.¹⁴ All these changes have significant impact on people's health, housing, livelihoods, security and access to services, and these impacts are gendered.

There is an increasing need to build climate ready infrastructure, as the cost of dealing with more frequent and intense natural disasters escalates and tourism revenue falls due to environmental degradation and the recent pandemic.¹⁵ The Pacific Blue Economy of fisheries and marine ecosystems is expected to destabilise, and exacerbate geopolitical tensions between Pacific states and distant water fishing nations.¹⁶ Climate forced migration and displacement has already started to occur and is likely to increase in the near future.¹⁷ In areas where peace is fragile, climate change is likely to exacerbate tensions and conflict. Climate change is anticipated to have a number of health impacts, including likely increases in insect-borne and waterborne diseases, malnutrition, and traumatic injuries. Furthermore there are a number of likely mental health impacts due to declining agricultural productivity or loss of customary land.¹⁸

¹³ Taylor, Meg (2020, 17 April). COVID-19 and climate change: we must rise to both crises. <https://www.forumsec.org/2020/04/17/covid-19-and-climate-change-we-must-rise-to-both-crises/>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Barnett, Jon and Campbell, John (2010). *Climate Change and Small Island States: Power, knowledge and the South Pacific*. London: Earthscan; Hauger, J. Scott (2015). Climate Change Challenges to Security in the Pacific Islands Region and Opportunities for Cooperation to Manage the Threat. In R. Azizian and C. Cramer (eds.) *Regionalism, Security and Cooperation in Oceania*. Hawaii: Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies pp. 147-160.

¹⁶ Climate Security Expert Network (2009). Climate Fragility Risk Factsheet: Pacific Islands Region, https://climate-security-expert-network.org/sites/climate-security-expert-network.com/files/documents/csen_climate_fragility_factsheet_-_pacific_islands_region_0.pdf

¹⁷ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2014). Climate Change and Migration Issues in the Pacific <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/migpractice/docs/261/Pacific.pdf>

¹⁸ World Health Organisation (2015). *Human health and climate change in Pacific Island countries*. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/208253>

Existing, structural and deeply entrenched gender inequalities across the Pacific exacerbate these impacts for women and girls.¹⁹ Women's vulnerabilities due to their under-representation in household, community and national decision-making; lack of rights to land ownership; restrictions on mobility due to safety, social norms and/or caring roles; family violence; disproportionate responsibilities for household care and food provision; much lower labour force participation than men; and over-representation in the informal economy and insecure work, will mean that women are more likely to experience the adverse impacts of climate change. Addressing this requires not only a commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but also efforts to address gender inequality over the long-term. While women's vulnerabilities are exacerbated and particularly visible in times of post-disaster, attention is required to address long-term structural inequalities that make women particularly vulnerable during peaceful times as well as times of crisis.²⁰

Much attention has been devoted to women's roles in disaster response and vulnerability to climate impacts, however women's inclusion in this agenda has been underpinned by the assumption that women are better at distributing resources at a community level and providing care for the most vulnerable. Rather than promoting women's rights, this instead sets up a scenario where women are at the service of disaster response rather than disaster response servicing women's needs. Women have strategic interests for transformative change as well as practical daily needs. This includes women's rights to be involved in decision-making and to be meaningfully involved in planning and decision-making to address the challenges posed by climate change.

Our research – and that of our colleagues in the region – points to the following lessons learned to redress gender inequalities exacerbated by climate change:

- 1) Climate change responses need to be inclusive of women and girls' voices and experience.** The 'militarisation' of climate security responses – sometimes through government, military, police, NGOs and aid agencies – has the potential to be implemented in a way that reinforces existing gender roles and exacerbate inequality. Meaningfully inclusive responses to climate change would not just invite women to take up a seat to have input to existing forums, but rather would 'redesign the table',²¹ starting from the viewpoint of women's experiences, and recognising that security is achieved through ensuring equitable access to economic security, property rights, education, training, health care and food sources throughout the Pacific. Inclusive processes take into account institutions where women already excel and mobilise – beyond the usual suspects of government, military, police, aid agencies and NGOs. This could be in churches, local communities, villages and women's groups. These groups need not only be included in design, discussions and implementation of responses to climate change, their work needs to be acknowledged, recognised and supported as an integral part of planning processes.
- 2) Women's access to land and participation in decision-making will have significant ramifications for populations that require relocation due to rising**

¹⁹ Carter, George. (2020, 9 June). Understanding the Pacific, Climate Change. Presentation to the Diplomatic Academy. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7P6ufdFiWk&feature=youtu.be>

²⁰ Bradshaw, Sarah. 2014. Engendering development and disasters. *Disasters*. 39(S1): S54-75; George, Nicole (2014). Promoting Women, Peace and Security in the Pacific Islands; hot conflict/slow violence.

²¹ Transcend Oceania and GPPAC (2020). And she persisted for peace: redesign the table. https://gppac.net/files/2020-02/GPPAC%20Pacific%20WPS2020%20And%20She%20Persisted_Redesign%20the%20Table%20AdvanceCopy.pdf

sea levels. The case study of the relocation of the Cataret Islands peoples to Bougainville demonstrates that in both matrilineal and patrilineal societies, patriarchal attitudes prevail and women's involvement in decision-making or business ventures can attract significant negative attention.²² In other case studies of community relocation, women have expressed that they have been completely excluded from decision-making.²³ Recognising Pacific Islander needs for 'migration with dignity' as espoused through Kiribati government policy, rather than deficit approaches such as 'climate refugees' is key to maintaining respectful relationships with Pacific Island nations.²⁴ Long-term work to shift social norms and promote women's leadership is key to improving women's involvement in decision-making in particularly critical times such as community relocation.

- 3) While Australia has made important steps to adopt a regional perspective and to acknowledge the need for regional cooperation in response to the security threat of climate change, stronger acknowledgement could be made of Australia's domestic policy and its impact on the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific.** Australia should 'Step-Up' alongside the Pacific region to set an example on carbon emissions reduction for the rest of the world. An important part of the Pacific regional climate response is to be a leader on the global stage to raise other countries' aspirations and commitment to reducing carbon emissions, particularly through investing in renewable energy.²⁵ The region has expectations that Australia will follow through on its commitment to its 'Pacific family', act consistently with other members of the region and the Boe and Kainaki declarations. This requires climate policy that sets an example for other nations of the world.²⁶

2. Who advances the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific?

Role of non-state actors

Non-government organisations (NGO) and networks of human rights defenders play a critical role in relentlessly pursuing gender equality and the human rights of women and girls. These organisations and networks work across the full gamut of issues covered in our submission. Key organisations that we have worked with include the Bougainville Women's Federation (Bougainville), Femili PNG, FemLINKPacific (Fiji), Fiji Women's Fund (Fiji), KUP Women for Peace (PNG), Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation (Bougainville), PacifikPolitik (Fiji), Urgent Action Fund (Fiji), West 'Are'Are Rokotanikeni Association (Solomon Islands), Wide Bay Conservation Association (PNG), Women's Rights Action Movement (Solomon Islands), and Voice for Change (PNG).

Specifically related to VAW advocacy, the recent evaluation of Australia's development assistance to end violence against women and girls in the Indo-Pacific region asserts that civil society organisations 'have been crucial in advancing understanding of women's and girls' rights, enabling their full participation in society, advocating strongly for an end to

²² George, Nicole (2014). Climate change and 'architectures of entitlement'. In Catarina Kinvall and Hellen Rydstrom (Eds.). *Climate Hazards, Disasters and Gender Ramifications*. Oxon: Routledge.

²³ Piggott-McKellar, Annah E., McNamara, Karen E., Nunn, Patrick D., Sekinini, Seci T. (2019). Moving people in a changing climate: lessons from two case studies in Fiji. *Social Sciences*. 8(5): 1-17.

²⁴ Carter, George. (2020, 9 June). Understanding the Pacific, Climate Change. Presentation to the Diplomatic Academy. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7P6ufdFiWk&feature=youtu.be>

²⁵ Carter, George. 2017, November 9. The Island COP: changing the negotiation climate with a 'Bula Spirit'. *Devpolicy Blog*. <https://devpolicy.org/the-island-cop-changing-the-negotiation-climate-20171109/>

²⁶ <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/09/16/the-pacific-should-persist-with-australia-on-climate-change/>

violence, and providing much-needed services'.²⁷ In rural areas there is usually no or intermittent access to the police and formal justice system. In the system, which can be an alien and difficult to navigate apparatus and process, there are few dedicated positions to support victims. It is NGO and faith based services, and local community networks that fill this significant gap. They are frequently involved in community education, training of justice professionals and practitioners, and in casework or case management with survivors. Research has demonstrated that specialist family and sexual violence services, networks of women practitioners and advocates, and non-state actors such as community women leaders contribute to improved access to justice, and to improved justice outcomes.

Role of government

Pacific Governments support human rights, *inter alia*, through enacting legislative and regulatory provisions encouraged through norm setting and accountability frameworks such as the Pacific Leaders' Declaration on Gender Equality (2012).²⁸ There is, in fact, no shortage of regional declarations and policies on gender equality. Political will and the resources to implement these declarations, however, have been both elusive and illusive. Women's units set up across most Pacific governments in the post 1995 Beijing World Conference for Women era have been poorly resourced and lacked the status required to achieve broad scale change. Furthermore, internationally driven processes to introduce policies and agreements, such as CEDAW, in some cases seem to have done some damage to local receptiveness towards gender policy or perceptions of what gender equality might mean for communities in many Pacific contexts.²⁹

The Vanuatu Skills Partnerships Better Balance Report³⁰ problematises the use of terms such as gender equality as 'it is also widely viewed as a concept and domain pertaining only to women'. This is corroborated by the 2016 Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) gender review which found that "successful approaches were informed by quality analysis of the local context, identifying entry points and working with partner organisations to conceptualise gender within the cultural, political and social environment"³¹:

*To influence and achieve lasting change, NGOs need to identify 'entry points' and gatekeepers for gender and work collaboratively with these key influencers. This analysis is critical to bring partners on the gender journey, enabling individuals in these organisations to become aware of their own assumptions and behaviours in the first instance. These processes take time and require the building of trust and legitimacy. Gender needs to be framed within the local context, connected to local issues of justice, fairness or safety to avoid the perception that 'gender' is a foreign concept or construct.*³²

²⁷ ODE, 2019, *Ending violence against women and girls: Evaluating a decade of Australia's development assistance*, DFAT, Canberra, p. 2.

²⁸ <https://www.forumsec.org/2012/08/30/pacific-leaders-gender-equality-declaration/>

²⁹ Howard, E., Apinelu, E., Neemia, T. and Towaki-Bue, J. 2019. Women's leadership: Bringing context to life. *Development Bulletin* 81:28-32; Rousseau, B. and D. Kenneth-Watson 2018. Supporting Coalition-based Reform in Vanuatu. *Research Paper 51*. Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program.

³⁰ Vanuatu Skills Partnership. 2019. [Better Balance Strategy](#).

³¹ Commonwealth of Australia, DFAT, 2016. [Australian NGO Cooperation Program \(ANCP\) Thematic Review – Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#), p. 9.

³² *Ibid*, p. 10.

Realistic approaches would engage with the political economy of gender equality³³ rather than the busy work of policy making or symbolic gestures that conform with international ideals such as stand alone women's departments. Lessons from success in passing the 2013 legislation for Temporary Special Measures at a municipal level in Vanuatu demonstrates that public servants are able to form the types of coalitions that can drive change in gender relations,³⁴ challenging the view that strategic reform only comes about through pressure on the State by civil society and women's groups. In this case, local high-level public servants drove reforms rather than donors, international NGOs or civil society groups. This has meant that they are seen as indigenous reforms, rather than be associated with external gender equality initiatives that are often not welcomed. Key success factors were seen as teams that "are strategically placed within the bureaucracy; plan[ning] before inviting wide discussion; creat[ing] networks within government and with international funders; and leav[ing] executive leaders to manage pressure from public and bureaucratic opinion."³⁵ This case also demonstrates the value of international scholarships and the development of an 'elite' through alumni networks, across tertiary and secondary school institutions in Australia and the Pacific.

3. Engagement of these groups with Australia's Pacific Step-Up

DPA welcomes the Pacific 'Step-Up', the commitment to a 'new chapter in relations with our Pacific family'³⁶ and the strategic focus on sovereignty, stability, security and prosperity of the Pacific. The engagement of groups with an interest in women and girls' human rights is critical to ensure the Step-Up does not lead to exclusion of women and girls interests or potentially disadvantage women and girls even further. This includes a number of aspects:

- Ensuring that stability and security are defined broadly and through consultation with women and girls rather than a sole focus on state and militarised responses to security.
- Recognising that security responses tend to have the perverse effect of increasing insecurity for women and girls and instead engage with community led solutions to creating security.
- Investigating the gendered impacts of seasonal workers schemes, both through documenting the experiences of women and men participating in the labour scheme, as well as the experiences for family in home communities.
- Recognising that Australian assistance on climate and disaster resilience risks being perceived as a token effort while Australian domestic policy on climate change does not align with the Boe and Kainaki II declarations and PIF member interests.
- Acknowledging the threats posed by climate change to national sovereignty in low lying states and working to develop migration pathways that provide for migration with dignity.

³³ Barbara, J. and Baker, K. 2020. Addressing collective action problems in Melanesia: the Northern Islands Market Vendors' Association in Vanuatu. *Development in Practice*. DOI: 10.1080/09614524.2020.1763918

³⁴ Barbara, J. and N. Haley 2014. Analytical Framework to Engage with Developmental Leadership in the Pacific. Pacific Leadership Program.

³⁵ Rousseau, B. and D. Kenneth-Watson 2018. Supporting Coalition-based Reform in Vanuatu. *Research Paper 51*. Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program, p. 5.

³⁶ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/stepping-up-australias-engagement-with-our-pacific-family.pdf>

- Recognising that climate change will exacerbate existing inequalities in women's property rights and the flow-on effects of this to women's ability to source and secure loans and participate in the formal economy.
- Ensuring that infrastructure finance includes a focus on improving the safety, mobility and freedom of movement for women, including women with disabilities, as this is a key constraint on women's ability to participate in economic and political life.

DPA also welcomes the 'Step Up' focus on 'how we engage' rather than merely what we do and notes the opportunities presented in the post-COVID environment in the Pacific by embracing the opportunity presented through travel restrictions to enable locally-led initiatives to drive change.

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

DPA supports the Australian Government's commitment to 'focus on the most vulnerable, including women and girls and people with disabilities and those living in poverty,' in its COVID-19 recovery agenda outlined in the Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response. Mitigating against the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 in the Pacific will require an evidence-based understanding of existing gendered inequalities, how these have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and consideration of how particular response measures are likely to impact on these dynamics. As indicated above, efforts to promote stability in the context of COVID-19 should account for the needs of, and be designed in consultation with, women and girls. Working closely with development and research partners with experience and knowledge of gender and social and economic inclusion issues in the region will be critical to ensuring that the most vulnerable benefit from Australia's efforts to support recovery in the region.

DPA has been concerned to improve both the evidence base, and the design, of ODA programs in support of gender equality across the Pacific. As outlined in Appendix 1, we have been involved in numerous projects over the past decade from which we have learned the following key lessons:

- **ODA programs are best built on robust evidence that understands the political economies in which they are to be implemented.³⁷ Critically, however, political economy analysis must not be divorced from gender analysis in policy or program design.** As an informant in the Developmental Leadership Program's Gender and Politics in Practice Research Project noted, "you can't do development in isolation from what is going on in broader society. Just working at one level isn't going to make any real change".³⁸ In addition to looking at stakeholder interests and incentives, institutional rules shaping decision-making and agenda setting (the 'politics' of development), ODA programs need to be developed on an understanding of:
 - Gender roles, norms, customs and attitudes in the Pacific;

³⁷ Davies 2004 'Is evidence-based government possible?' Jerry Lee Lecture, presented at the 4th Annual Campbell Collaboration Colloquium, Washington DC. p. 3.

³⁸ Derbyshire, H., Siow, O., Gibson, S., Hudson, D. and Roche, C. (2018) From Silos to Synergy: Learning from Politically Informed, Gender Aware Programs, Developmental Leadership Program. p. 7.

- Women and men, boys and girls' differential, and/or unequal, experience of an issue and the power relations between them;
 - Sex-disaggregated data analysis that identifies quantitative gender gaps; and
 - Men's and women's differential access to, influence over and barriers to resources, services and decision-making at all levels; and their different experiences and priorities.³⁹
- **ODA programs work best when the outcomes include a focus on relationship building.** DPA is the leading centre for multidisciplinary research and analysis on contemporary governance issues in the Pacific precisely because of our emphasis on relationship building. Building the capacity of Pacific researchers, and working in genuine partnership with Pacific researchers at an institutional, program and individual level, are core DPA objectives and part of its long-term commitment to the region. In our experience, relationships with Pacific partners and colleagues built over time and on trust, deliver stronger outcomes in terms of better understanding of the indigenous context and access to influencers for social and political change. Relationship building, then, should not simply be seen as a means to an end in program and policy making more broadly in the Pacific, but as an end in itself. Importantly, strong, trusting relationships are not built through short-term, transactional programs. They require the space and time to grow and thrive.
 - **ODA programs are best led by locals; in our regional context, this specifically means Pacific Islanders.** As Anna Gibert has recently argued, 'significant and lasting reform to institutions, social structures and inequalities simply does not happen unless driven and desired by local actors.'⁴⁰ And yet, very few donor-funded programs trust Pacific Islanders to manage ODA programs. One of the few exceptions in this space is the recently implemented Balance of Power program which works to see changes in the social norms that continue to de-legitimise women's political leadership in the region. The core team is exclusively composed of Pacific Islanders (women and men) spread across three countries: Fiji, Vanuatu and Tonga. DPA staff are proud to support the work of locally-led programs such as Balance of Power and the Vanuatu Skills Partnership.
 - **ODA programs are best when they are deliberately designed as adaptive and flexible, so that they can easily 'pivot' to meet new demands.** Programs that are heavily pre-determined in terms of their activities and deliverables have been the hardest to reshape in the aftermath of the 2020 pandemic. Again, DPA staff's experience in designing the Balance of Power program is illustrative: the program is intentionally adaptive, and leaves decisions about activities and partners to the core leadership team who have an intuitive understanding of their local contexts, including power bases and opportunities to build coalitions. Once developed, activities are subject to in-depth monitoring and evaluation, to ensure relevance and impact. Activities that are shown to have less resonance are easily tweaked or discontinued.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Gibert, A. 2020. Reframing International Development to Respond to COVID-19: Essential Features of Effective Programs in the New Normal [Developmental Leadership Program Blog](#)

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Yours Sincerely



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Appendix 1:

List of ODA and research projects with DPA involvement

Research	Years	Description
Pacific Research Program	2017-2021	<p>The Pacific Research Program (PRP) is managed by a consortium led by the ANU Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA) and including the ANU's Development Policy Centre and the Lowy Institute. Co-funded by DFAT and the consortium partners' parent bodies, the PRP is designed to be a globally pre-eminent centre of excellence for research on the Pacific that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Produces high-quality, policy-relevant research that is available, accessible and communicated to policymakers and program designers in Australia, the Pacific and from around the world; Plays a central role in fostering and facilitating a strong and vibrant Pacific-Australia-New Zealand-wide network of research on the Pacific; Is connected to Australia's broader engagement with the Pacific and fosters a greater knowledge and understanding of the Pacific among the Australian community; Demonstrates a high degree of effectiveness in contributing to evidence-based policymaking and program design primarily in Australia and also the Pacific and around the world. <p>The geographic scope of the PRP is the Pacific region as a whole, though Melanesia is an area of particular interest in line with Australia's geographic location and national interests.</p> <p>Gender, social change and inclusion is a priority research area for the PRP. It has a dedicated gender stream with several scholars undertaking gender research. PRP research continues to build the evidence base regarding gender inequalities in the region, especially in relation to women's political leadership and violence against women and girls. Beyond its research specifically focused on gender, gender remains a key cross-cutting thematic focus of the PRP's research as well as the conduct of its research. The PRP also involves a dedicated program of research on Pacific labour mobility, including a focus on gender.</p>
PNG Women in Leadership Support Program	2017-2021	<p>In early 2017, DPA commenced implementation of the Australian Government-funded PNG Women in Leadership Support Program, which it was invited to design in late 2016. The program, supported through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program, emerged from a design process informed by DPA research over the preceding decade on women's leadership and political participation in the Pacific. The five-year program has and will continue to provide training and support to women candidates across PNG contesting elections and the local and national level.</p>
The use and efficacy of family protection orders in PNG	2019-2020	<p>This study has expanded on the pilot study on the use and efficacy of family protection orders in Papua New Guinea (PNG) (see below) to include four additional sites – Arawa, Port Moresby, Popondetta and Mt Hagen. DPA is working in partnership with Femili PNG, as well as the PNG University of Technology and the University of PNG, to conduct the study. The study is funded in partnership by the Australian Government through the Pacific Research Program and the <i>Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development</i> program. The research findings will be reported in August 2020.</p>

<p>Women's Leadership Pathways (WLP) Research Project</p>	<p>2017-2020</p>	<p>The WLP was a multi-stakeholder, feminist, collaborative research project that aimed to generate evidence about women's experiences of leadership, and the enabling factors and obstacles facing women in filling or seeking leadership positions in economic, social, and political spheres in the Asia-Pacific, including Bougainville, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. The project was implemented by the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Staff of women's rights organisations in each of the countries conducted interviews, focus group discussions and administered a survey to collect data, with support from two international consultants. The research findings will be reported in August 2020.</p> <p>A DPA staff member was involved as technical research support throughout the course of the project.</p>
<p>The reporting, investigation and prosecution of family and sexual violence offences in PNG</p>	<p>2019</p>	<p>Funded by the Australian Government through the Justice Services and Stability for Development Program (JSS4D), this research was conducted between June and October 2019 by a small team from DPA, with the assistance of researchers based in PNG. The aim was to identify and analyse quantitative data that would indicate what has happened with the reporting, investigation and prosecution of family and sexual violence (FSV) offences in the past five years in three locations — Port Moresby, Lae and Arawa.</p> <p>In the three locations more than 50 stakeholders were consulted or interviewed, and data sourced from the PNG Magisterial Services and National Judicial Staff Services, the Office of Public Prosecutions, eleven different sections of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC), and five non-government organisation (NGO) services.</p> <p>The research findings are detailed in this report: Reporting, Investigating and Prosecuting Family and Sexual Violence Offences in Papua New Guinea.</p>
<p>Women's Leadership Initiative</p>	<p>2018-current</p>	<p>DPA is the research and learning partner for the Australia Awards Women's Leadership initiative (WLI), funded by the Australian Government. An important aspect of WLI is the use of the policy-relevant research undertaken by DPA to inform program learning and innovation; and contribute to the evidence base on coalition building and women's developmental leadership in the Pacific. DPA also provides expertise to support WLI's intensive training activities, as appropriate.</p>
<p>Balance of Power</p>	<p>2018-current</p>	<p>Balance of Power (BOP) is an innovative approach to supporting Pacific Island countries achieve their stated objectives of inclusive and effective leadership, funded by the Australian Government. Specifically, BOP aims to contribute to a 'better balance' in women's and men's leadership roles and opportunities. Building on significant research and lessons learned on what works and what doesn't in the Pacific context, the innovation is in three key parts: first, the investment aims to take a very different approach by interrogating, in local contexts, the deeply entrenched social norms that define and legitimise leadership – across multiple spaces and institutions; second, the investment is led and managed by highly skilled Pacific Islanders, acknowledging that social norm change is best articulated and driven by local actors; and third, the investment takes a 'thinking and working politically' approach, which among other things, seeks to convene, and understand the interests of, diverse stakeholders, with a focus on influencing and incentivising power-holders and norm-changers.</p> <p>A DPA staff member was involved in the original design of the program, and in implementation, acts as a research adviser.</p>

<p>The use and efficacy of family protection orders: Lae pilot study</p>	<p>2018</p>	<p>The pilot study on the use and efficacy of family protection orders in Lae was conducted primarily from March to August 2018 in the urban centre of Lae in PNG, with the support and advice of members of the Morobe Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee. Drawing on consultations and interviews with more than 50 stakeholders and interviews with 14 women survivors, the research aimed to determine the use and efficacy of family protection orders. The study drew on de-identified client data for a period of more than three years from Femili PNG (FPNG), a non-government organisation (NGO) that provides case management and support for survivors of family and sexual violence. In addition, the district court provided statistics on orders for 2017 and 2018, a sample of police prosecution files were reviewed and the research team observed proceedings at the district court.</p> <p>This research was been funded by the Australian Government through the <i>Pacific Research Program</i>. The findings of the pilot study were published in this report: Family Protection Orders: A key response to domestic and family violence.</p>
<p>Do No Harm: Understanding the Relationship between Women’s Economic Empowerment and Violence against Women in Melanesia</p>	<p>2014-2017</p>	<p>The research undertaken as part of the project, Do No Harm: Understanding the Relationship between Women’s Economic Empowerment and Violence against Women in Melanesia was a collaboration between DPA (then the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program (SSGM) and the International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) and funded by the Australian Government through the <i>Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development</i> program.</p> <p>The Do No Harm (DNH) research addresses the question of how to improve women’s economic agency and the security of their livelihoods without compromising their safety. In an effort to understand the realities women face as they attempt to overcome economic disadvantage, the DNH research gathered detailed accounts from women of their experiences as well as from men and community leaders. Field research was undertaken in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea with 485 interviews completed, including 238 with women and 135 in-depth key informant interviews.</p> <p>The findings of the research were published in a series of reports: Do No Harm: Understanding the Relationship between Understanding the Relationship between Women’s Economic Empowerment and Violence against Women in Melanesia Research Summary Report May 2018</p> <p>Do No Harm Research: Solomon Islands Do No Harm Research: Papua New Guinea Do No Harm Research: Bougainville</p>
<p>Improving women’s leadership, political participation and decision making in the Pacific</p>	<p>2013-2016</p>	<p>Funded by DFAT, this multifaceted research sought to better understand women’s participation in Melanesia and the Pacific more broadly and to identify the characteristics both personal and institutional, of successful women at the national, sub-national and local levels. The project was a collaborative one, involving 12 DPA (then SSGM) scholars, including three PhD candidates, and over 120 local partners in the Solomon Islands and Samoa election observations. The research delivered a more nuanced analysis of women’s political participation in the Pacific than that which existed previously and has generated timely and relevant gender knowledge informing policy engagement and programming choices. Research was published in briefing papers, discussion papers and academic journals, and communicated at conferences and workshops.</p>

Centre for Democratic Institutions	2013-2016	<p>From November 2013 – December 2016, the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI) was co-located with and operated by SSGM (now DPA), resulting in benefits to both SSGM and CDI, including a strengthened research-policy-programming nexus. Frequent and regular interaction between SSGM researchers and CDI program staff encouraged collaboration and provided opportunities for research to contribute to evidenced-based policy making and enhanced program design. CDI delivered a range of democratic capacity building and institutional strengthening programs in the Pacific region. CDI drew on SSGM's long-term country expertise on politics and democracy in the region to develop engagement programs that responded to local contexts and demands for support. Partnering with SSGM researchers, CDI emphasised political economy analysis to inform activity targeting and development, and a monitoring and evaluation program to enhance the impact of CDI activities.</p>
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