



**Australia's Inquiry into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific**  
***Submission by Fiji Women's Fund and Urgent Action Fund Asia and the Pacific***  
**July 2020**

The Fiji Women's Fund (FWF) and Urgent Action Fund Asia and the Pacific (UAF A&P), are two women's funds that are based and work in Asia and the Pacific regions. Women's Funds are transformative and catalytic institutions that both mobilise and disburse flexible funding to feminist movement building across the world. They are public fundraising foundations that work to realise the power of grassroots women, girls and gender non-conforming people around the world by providing them with financial and other resources to realise their vision of social justice<sup>1</sup>.

Our submission is based on our myriad experiences of working with women and gender non-conforming groups, networks and organisations who work in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Human rights of women and gender non-conforming<sup>2</sup> people are violated and denigrated globally, however, the Pacific faces a range of intersecting challenges that make access to solutions much more complex, often rendering them all but invisible to the rest of the world. While funders are increasing their funding for gender equality and women's empowerment globally, funding disbursements by OECD DAC members have stagnated over recent years. Interestingly, other global north funders are being quite targeted about their regional priorities in directing aid money for feminist organising.

Less than 1% of grant funding is directed to women's organisations in the region<sup>3</sup> while no data is available for trans led organisations.

Australia's role as the major donor supporting gender equality and women's empowerment with the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*) Program is critical. There is meaningful value in the *Pacific Women's* work across multiple sectors and myriad stakeholders and we acknowledge the role of *Pacific Women* in establishing and funding the Fiji Women's Fund as a mechanism to reach a greater number and range of women's organisations in Fiji. However, there are also significant challenges in reaching the most marginalised communities and women's groups, networks and organisations, whilst at the same time meeting donor requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.prospera-inwf.org/#!/-member-funds/>

<sup>2</sup> \*includes the range of gender identities

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jul/02/gender-equality-support-1bn-boost-how-to-spend-it>

The absence of an institutional arrangement that guarantees the flow of resources to women and trans-led feminist organising in the Pacific is an obstacle to building strong movements that can ensure rights for the most affected and vulnerable communities.

There is a dire need for accessible, flexible core funding for strengthening and sustaining feminist, women and trans-led organising in Asia and the Pacific.

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

A most recent study commissioned by UAF A&P and FWF entitled *Where is the Money for Women and Girls in the Pacific: Mapping Funding Gaps, Opportunities and Trends*<sup>4</sup> outlines intersecting social and geographical challenges that Pacific women face:

- 2 out of 3 women and girls experience violence in their lifetime – twice the global average
- Women and girls with disabilities are more likely to experience sexual or physical violence than those without disabilities<sup>5</sup>
- Women and girls are severely affected by extreme weather events, increasing economic insecurity and physical vulnerability
- Lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people face criminalising laws and threats to their dignity from institutions and individuals
- Basic telecommunication, information and communication technologies within the region across hundreds of islands as well as communication beyond the Pacific is difficult
- Service provision for ending violence against women and girls is challenging due to the geography and expensive across the Pacific islands
- Obtaining working capital or technical assistance for women-led businesses is hampered when living outside major cities

It is within these contexts that women's rights organisations in the areas of service provision and advocacy have been working for countless years. The changes in policy and legislation across the Pacific in the areas of domestic violence and family law or protection are largely attributed to women's rights organisations. Key service provision organisations such as Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Vanuatu Crisis Centre, Women and Children Crisis Centre in Tonga, Kiribati Women and Children Support Centre, Samoa Victim Support Group, Solomon Islands Family Support Centre work in "close collaboration with government, civil society organisations, communities and other partners to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and girls and increase access to quality response services for survivors, especially during emergencies"<sup>6</sup>.

Advocacy organisations are central in ensuring that duty bearers are accountable in respecting, promoting, fulfilling the rights holders. From changing laws and policies to conducting trainings and media campaigns, women's rights organisations play a pivotal role. The Pacific has a vibrant civil society. These include the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Diverse Voices for Equality, femLINK Pacific, Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation,

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<sup>4</sup> [https://fijiwomensfund.org/where\\_is\\_the\\_money/](https://fijiwomensfund.org/where_is_the_money/)

<sup>5</sup> UNESCAP Disability in Asia and the Pacific: The Facts

<sup>6</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/06/feature-pacific-crisis-centres-respond-to-covid-19-amid-natural-disasters>

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#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Amplify the voices and participation of Pacific Women’s Organisations (PWO) and Disabled People’s Organisations (DPO) in setting policy and funding decisions. PWOs and DPOs are uniquely placed to connect with the millions of women living across the region and help them build more secure and sustainable lives for themselves and their children. However, PWOs need support and resources to do this in a flexible manner, that allows them to strengthen their voice and leadership in their community, country and region.
2. Enhance Australia’s engagement with civil society by taking a collaborative approach to reviewing existing Australia’s Civil Society Engagement Strategies in each of the Pacific countries. It is critical that civil society organisations including PWOs and DPOs are part of the co-development, implementation and review of the strategy.
3. Invest in understanding the context in each Pacific country by undertaking civil society analysis that provides contextual background, identification of key players, key challenges and opportunities to progressing the full realisation of women’s and girls’ human rights.
4. Support the collaboration of UN agencies, bilateral governments, private sector and other agencies with PWOs and DPOs to take a coordinated approach.

## **2. Elevating the modalities of Australia’s development cooperation through Women’s Funds**

As a model, Women’s Funds support women, girls, and trans rights organisations to create meaningful, lasting change in their societies. Government investments into Women’s Funds can play a key role in catalysing both direct and additional investment from other sectors – for example, the Dutch government led *Leading from the South initiative*, which put resources in the hands of four women’s funds based in the global south, enabling critical resourcing of feminist movement building and advocacy initiatives, as well as the most recent investment of the Canadian Government of CAD 300 million into the Equality Fund<sup>7</sup>, that has already generated an additional CAD 100 million from philanthropic groups.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Modernise Australia’s development cooperation and aid models by exploring and investing in building and strengthening feminist resource architecture of the Asia and Pacific region, through funding new catalytic models such as Women’s Funds across Asia and the Pacific, including national and regional institutions in the region.

- a. Resource women’s funds to support grassroots organising, as well as national, regional and international efforts to ensure women, girls and trans people are able to influence the building, implementation and realisation of human rights agendas at global, regional, national and local levels.
- b. Invest in national and regional women’s funds to unlock their ability to find new sources of funding for feminist organising for grass-roots mobilisation and advocacy for social justice at all levels

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<sup>7</sup> <https://equalityfund.ca/>

- c. Collaborate with other funders to support direct funding for women, girls and trans organising.
- d. Link investment programming with resource focused organisations like Women's Funds to enable better collaborations between business and human rights work.

### **3. Improve transparency of funding data for more informed and inclusive dialogues with Pacific Women's Organisations and Disabled People's Organisations**

It is challenging for Pacific Women's Organisations (PWOs) and Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) in the Pacific to obtain data that presents a picture of total funding for gender equality and women's empowerment activities, including funds disbursed to women's organisations and DPOs in the Pacific region in the previous reporting year, in a readily accessible format.<sup>8</sup>

Some funders disburse large tranches of gender equality funds to International NGOs (INGOs) or Pacific Regional Organisations. However, there is a lack of transparent reporting for the previous reporting year on the number and size of grants reaching women's organisations in the Pacific. While the Australian Government reports annually to the OECD DAC in relation to contributions to women's equality organisations and institutions, it is very difficult for PWOs and DPOs to track these declared funding commitments with the funds that are actually transferred each year to PWOs and DPOs.

The Australian Government agencies are required to present their annual reports to Parliament within three months of the end of the reporting year. As the largest government donor in the Pacific for gender equality and women's empowerment activities, Australia could also present summary data for the Pacific within 6 months of the end of the reporting year that would also include data provided under the Australian NGO Cooperation Program.<sup>9</sup>

Despite gender being one of the Australian Aid program's six aid investment priority areas and one of 10 targets set by the Australian government, gender equality and women's empowerment does not appear as one of the twelve sectors highlighted on the opening page of the Lowy Institute Pacific Aid. The Pacific Aid Map was established with funding from the Australian Government.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- I. Australian Government makes a commitment to publishing the data below on their websites within six months of the close of the last financial reporting year:
  - a. Total gross funding disbursements directed to the Pacific region that target gender equality and women's empowerment as a significant or principal objective (using the OECD DAC criteria)
  - b. Total gross funding disbursements that reach PWOs
  - c. Total gross funding disbursements that reach Pacific DPOs

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<sup>8</sup> [https://fijiwomensfund.org/where\\_is\\_the\\_money/](https://fijiwomensfund.org/where_is_the_money/)

<sup>9</sup> The Australian financial reporting cycle is from July 1 to June 30. Australian NGOs that receive funding from the Australian NGO Cooperation Program, including those that are implementing partners in the Pacific, must provide their reports to DFAT by September following the end of the reporting year. As a significant proportion of aid to the Pacific is channelled through Australian NGOs, discussions with the DFAT ODA Reporting & Statistics Section highlighted that the Australian government would be able to produce a summary report on its gender equality and women's empowerment activities in the Pacific within six months of the reporting cycle.

- d. The proportion of funds earmarked for women's organisations and DPOs that are being disbursed to (i) INGOs, international organisations and managing contractors and (ii) PWOs and DPOs, as well as the names of these organisations.

These data sets are currently sent by donors each year to the OECD DAC. However, it is recommended that in future this data be presented on donor websites in an accessible format that facilitates communication and dialogue with PWOs and DPOs.

- II. Consider collaborating with leaders from women's CSOs and DPOs to create an infographic that presents annual and 10-year trend data on funding of women's organisations and DPOs in the Pacific and other data that may be beneficial for their working relationship.
- III. Consider Implementing the 10 Recommendations Put Forward In the 2016 OECD Report: *Donor Support to Southern Women's Rights Organisations OECD Findings*<sup>10</sup>

## About Us

### Fiji Women's Fund (FWF)

The Fiji Women's Fund is an initiative of the Australian Government's Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*) Program. The Fiji Women's Fund commits up to AU\$10.5 million from 2017 to 2022 for grants and capacity development support to women's groups, networks, and organisations in Fiji to expand and enhance their work on women's empowerment and gender equality. [www.fijiwomensfund.org.fj](http://www.fijiwomensfund.org.fj)

### Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights, Asia and Pacific (UAF A&P)

Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights Asia and Pacific supports the resilience of women and non-binary human rights defenders by strengthening and sustaining webs of security and care. Our strategies are multifaceted and linked to a transformative agenda of achieving social justice, building a solidarity economy and re-imagining cultures, including the culture of giving in Asia and the Pacific. [www.uafapnp.org](http://www.uafapnp.org)

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/OECD-report-on-womens-rights-organisations.pdf>