1. Contact Details

Name of individual or group making this submission: Pacific Women Leadership Dialogue Group established in August 2017.

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2. Title and Summary

Please provide the title and a summary of your submission including any key recommendations.

Please limit your response to no more than 150 words. (current word count 184)

Title: Increasing gender responsive regional policy development and implementation

Summary:
Currently development in the Pacific region is hindered by development policies that undermine sustainable development and contribute to increasing levels of inequality by not taking gender equality into account.

An existing Pacific network of senior gender and development experts with specialisations spanning multiple sectors offers to provide advisory services on commitments made under the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, The Blue Pacific, The Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development and other regional policy responses and international treaty and global commitments such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Gender Action Plan (UNFCCC GAP), Agenda 2030 and especially Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) being developed across a range of issues and sectors in support of responsible, inclusive, resilient and sustainable development in the Pacific.

This network of experts is available and prepared to i) regularly engage with, and provide advice to, Leaders, Members of Parliament, and government officials; and ii) facilitate mutual information-exchange with their own wider circle of informants across communities, civil society, government, the private sector and academia working
in support of sustainable development in the Pacific.

This can result in increased gender responsiveness of regional policy development and implementation, which will in turn improve policy effectiveness and accelerate achievement of regional development objectives, including Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, UNFCCC GAP, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPOA).

**Key Issues**

What is the key issue or challenge that you seek to highlight in this submission? In responding to this section, consider the following questions:

- **What is the issue or challenge, and what are its causes?**
- **Why has this issue not been resolved so far, from your perspective?**
- **Can this issue be addressed at the national level, for instance, by your national government or through your national development strategy, or does it require the collective and regional action of the Pacific Islands Forum member countries to be addressed?**

Please limit your response to no more than 750 words. Current count 820

**Key issue:** Gender blind development policies, implementation and resourcing leading to unsustainable development and growing inequity in the Pacific region.

**Causes:** (i) Low level of acceptance of women’s equality with high levels of violence and discrimination against women and unconscious bias against women in all aspects of society in the Pacific; (ii) low priority given by governments and regional organisations in the Pacific to gender equality resulting in weak follow through on national, regional and international gender equality commitments; (iii) weak governance and institutional mechanisms, capacity and consultative processes including with women’s civil society organisations, gender experts and academia at both regional and national levels, to adequately integrate gender dimensions into policy, programming and budgetary reforms.

Consequently, gender has not yet been meaningfully integrated into regional sectoral policies and programming in a meaningful way with the result being that we have unaddressed gender dimensions of human rights and human security including on all forms of sexual and gender based violence, on health including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), access to justice systems, safe cities, civil and political representation, education, labour, employment and economic security, information, communication and technology (ICT), transport, energy, climate change and effective ocean management and conservation, natural disasters, food security, water and sanitation and renewable energy among the major and persistent gender issues in the Pacific island region. Instead, there is a concern at the focus on gender being brought under the umbrella of social inclusion which means it is largely absent from regional policy spaces or paid lip service and does not specifically address the deeply gendered structural issues underpinning inequalities.

**These major and persistent issues** result in: low levels of participation of women at all levels of leadership and decision-making; high rates of sexual and gender based violence and anecdotal evidence of similarly high levels of sexual harassment in the workplace; significant underrepresentation of women in the formal economy with limited understanding of the broad economic benefits of increasing women’s economic contributions; lack of recognition of women’s unpaid care work, even greater impacts on at risk and marginalised groups of women and girls, and deep marginalisation of women in urban poor communities and rural and remote areas, as a result of a growing disconnect with central government and its services.
All of this, despite high levels of overseas development assistance being provided to the region and decades of work by women-led civil society groups, gender machineries, and many others.

Annual global and regional development reports which have been brought to the attention of Pacific Leaders and decision-making since the BPOA and more recently on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have consistently shown low levels of progress against gender equality indicators in the Pacific island region. These issues are by no means new to development discussions as is the critical need to strengthen data and information on gender inequality.

Continuing to ignore and not address gender inequality as a critical development issue will mean that we will not achieve the Sustainable Development Goals as a region and we will not fully achieve the vision set out in The Framework for Pacific Regionalism and its related current and future priority projects.

Addressing gender inequality requires understanding and acceptance as a critical development issue, leadership by governments and regional organisations in promoting, implementing and resourcing gender equality measures in all aspects of their work and being accountable to the people, parliaments and the region through well informed, inclusive regional dialogue and processes.

A Pacific network of senior gender and development experts (Pacific Gender Network) proposes to support regional efforts to better understand and address gender inequality from a Pacific perspective, based on Pacific knowledge and experiences of the issue across a range of development dimensions, themes and sectors at community, national and regional level and in line with evidence based practice.

At a very basic level this requires exposure to real situations of gender inequality drawn from national and community level experiences and understandings through sharing stories, experiences, research, discussion, analysis and debate and bringing this into both national but most importantly, regional policy fora.

At the national level, it will consider national commitments and progress on gender equality and will seek partnerships with government, private sector, non-government, community and academic institutions in carrying out its work.

At the regional level, its will be guided by regional policy discussions and outcomes being convened by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) as the premier Pacific regional policy setting institution in line with the Framework for Pacific Regionalism and Forum Leaders Communiques and Ministerial Agreements.

The work of the Pacific Gender Network is not intended to duplicate the efforts of the United Nations or other multi-lateral agencies, regional organisations and other development organisations/partners including non-governmental and international non-governmental organisations working in the Pacific but will provide Pacific-led thinking, understanding, knowledge and solutions, especially those of Pacific women, to address gender inequality and seek to work in partnership with all.

Through the Pacific Gender Network, Forum Island Countries Leaders, government officials and partners and stakeholders interested in the achievement of sustainable development in the Pacific will:

- have access to diverse, high quality, Pacific relevant technical skills, analysis, research and knowledge on gender equality issues;
- develop evidence based approaches and solutions to addressing gender inequality across a wide range of regional policy issues and challenges;
- participate in dialogues, symposiums, learning events and other knowledge sharing forums aimed at deepening understanding and application of gender responsive policy and program responses to development challenges in the Pacific island region.
3. Proposed Solutions

Do you have a proposed regional policy recommendation to the issues outlined in your response to Question (3) above? In responding to this section, consider the following questions:

- What is the proposed regional policy solution or recommendation?
- Does this policy solution require the oversight of Forum Leaders?
- How does the proposed regional policy solution address the issue(s) presented in section (3) above?
- In your view, who are the main beneficiaries of this proposed regional policy?
- Has a regional policy initiative of this kind been carried out previously?
- Are there risks in implementing this regional policy initiative?

Please limit your response to no more than 750 words. Current count 1,149

The Pacific Gender Network will provide the region with an independent, non-political, Pacific led “sounding board” to examine, debate, develop, propose and test approaches to addressing gender inequality in the Pacific island region.

This is the first time that a Pacific Gender Network has been proposed for consideration of Pacific Island Leaders and countries. It proposes to operate as an independent, not-for-profit entity to encourage and support Pacific islanders to participate in efforts to better understand and address gender equality.

Background

Most development efforts in support of achieving gender equality in the Pacific have been led and funded by development partners. The same is true for developments in other sectors, such as fisheries, agriculture, climate change and natural resource development and management, to name a few. Pacific island countries are among the highest recipients of official development assistance per capita in the world. This high level of dependency on aid means that it is largely directed and delivered by the Governments that provide it without genuine consideration of the understandings and perspectives of people and societies who need it and receive it. More often it is delivered through nationals and organisations of donor countries or their experts with limited involvement of local experiences and expertise. The work of Pacific women themselves is often not included in this work to transform gender inequalities and this is changing over time. Recently, the Government of Australia and the European Union – two of the region’s largest aid donors - prioritised the achievement of gender equality in their foreign aid policies and increased levels of aid to the Pacific to address this issue. This has been welcomed by countries and the region as it is the first time that any donor has provided such high levels of overseas development assistance towards the achievement of gender equality in the region. There are two related issues here:

(i) The need for governments and local organisations and actors to direct resources towards addressing gender inequality and become less dependent on the support of aid donors; and
(ii) The need for governments and local organisations and actors to take ownership and lead efforts to address gender inequality using local women-led expertise, knowledge, experience and understanding of the issues.

The Pacific Women Leadership Dialogue Group¹ was convened to address the growing frustration of Pacific island women working in human rights and development at the slow pace of regional processes in addressing gender equality. They met with the PIFS Secretariat Secretary General (SG) on August 4th, 2017 to identify strategies to advance the achievement of gender equality and human rights for all women in the Pacific region. The dialogue focused on how

¹ See attachment 1 for information on the Pacific Women’s Leadership Dialogue Group and Profiles. The dialogue is part of the Pacific Women Leadership dialogue series, which began in 2014 to bring together women leaders in different roles and with different responsibilities to share their experience as leaders and identify ways to improve women’s leadership and decision-making to progress gender equality in the region.
women’s civil society and social movements can engage with different levels of leadership to progress gender equality and women’s human rights in the region. It acknowledged the increased momentum and activity of women’s civil society organizations and their contributions at international, regional and national level. Preparation for the event included the development of an issues paper\textsuperscript{2}, which provided a summary of key gender equality issues in the region, as background and context to discussions. In a follow-on meeting held with the PIFS SG, November 2017, representatives of the Dialogue Group discussed opportunities for working with PIFS to progress the regional gender equality agenda.

They included: (a) contribute to regional policy discussions through making a submission through the Revised Framework for Regionalism public submission process; (b) seek opportunities to share gender analysis on topics of interest through the Forum Economic Ministers Meeting agenda with a suggested area of analysis being connecting improved financial and social inclusion for women to leadership; (c) support efforts to ensure that the Green Climate Fund - Pacific regional resilience fund being set up by PIFS for countries is gender responsive as currently it has no gender component; and (d) through ongoing contact with PIFS support efforts to fill research gaps and expertise needs, for example in the areas of security sector governance and gendered economic analysis.

It’s proposed that this kind of engagement and support can be provided through the Pacific Gender Network. In doing so, it will contribute to building capacity, ownership and leadership of a progressive and transformative gender equality agenda for the region.

**Connections with Pacific Forum Leaders and government officials and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat**

The Pacific Gender Network does not require the oversight of Forum Leaders but needs participation of Forum Leaders, Ministers and government officials on an ongoing basis. It will work closely with PIFS to identify issues and topics for the focus of its work, e.g. inequality in the Pacific, SDG achievement in the Pacific, climate resilience, engagement with the Forum Foreign Ministers and Officials linked to the regional peace and security agenda / framework. It understands that through this working relationship it will be connected to members of PIFS and CROP agencies and working mechanisms, e.g. thematic/sectoral working groups.

**Connections with ongoing efforts to address gender inequalities in the region.**

The Pacific Gender Network through PIFS and its working groups – in particular, the CROP Gender and SDG Working Groups - will connect with other partners working on gender in the region. It will also seek to develop wider partnerships through its members and their connections with national, regional and international organisations working in support of gender equality in the Pacific and in other regions, e.g. the Caribbean.

The benefits of this proposal outweigh the risks as there is a critical need to step up focus and progress on gender equality in the Pacific.

\textsuperscript{2} Pacific Women’s Leadership Dialogue Issues paper
4. Attachments


Pacific Women Leadership Dialogue with PIFS Secretary General, August 2017 – Concept Note

END OF SUBMISSION TEMPLATE

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR SUBMITTERS:

Public Accessibility of Submissions

All submissions, inclusive of all attachments, will be uploaded to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat website and will be made publicly available. Contact details will be removed prior to upload.

Guidelines and Contact Details

For further information on completing this template, consult the Regional Policy Consultation – Guidance Note or contact the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat:

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