



IN BRIEF



WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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What's the Issue?

Historically, gender norms, behaviours and social relations have played a big part in disadvantaging women economically. Institutions, systems and structures often restrict women's economic opportunities, while gender roles and status can limit women's voices and choices when it comes to household and community decisions.

Participating in economic activities allows women to effect positive changes in their own lives, and communities, contributing to positive effects for the whole nation. Advancing women's economic empowerment underpins the success of all the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Pacific Islands countries are geographically dispersed across the largest EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) in the world. Far from international markets, with high costs of transport and geographic isolation, economic growth in the region has been uneven. Pacific populations are mainly rural and rely largely on subsistence activities; women especially are heavily involved in informal economic activities. Women perform a greater share of food growing and in-shore fishing activities, unpaid care and domestic work, and women dominate small-scale market operations. Between 75% and 90% of all market vendors in the Pacific are women; hours are long, profits are often low, and working conditions difficult. Earnings make up a significant portion of the incomes of many poor households. Despite this, women are so often excluded from market governance and decision-making.

Moreover, the region is particularly vulnerable to the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, as well as other aspects of climate change, making food security a growing concern.

Our Solutions

UN Women recognizes that, in order to advance women's economic empowerment, our work must address the intersections between women's economic empowerment, safety and discrimination, leadership and participation, disaster preparedness and livelihoods.

Marketplaces are a critical space in which these interrelated factors come into play. UN Women works towards improving working conditions for women market vendors in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, with its Markets for Change (M4C) Project.

M4C works to ensure that marketplaces in rural and urban areas of Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The project supports the creation and strengthening of representative marketplace groups, which in turn enhances the roles and influence of women market vendors. The project also focuses on boosting financial literacy amongst vendors and market vendor associations, and is supporting greater access to financial services, improved agricultural skills and, in some cases, more secure agricultural production.

M4C works to strengthen the accountability and capacity of market management and municipal and provincial governments through the provision of training and technical support, laying the groundwork for local government to employ gender-responsive policies, procedures and decision-making processes that are receptive to the needs of market vendors, especially women.

The project also has an infrastructure component, which focuses on improving onsite services at the design and construction phases to ensure that marketplaces are safe and more resilient to environmental shocks such as extreme weather events.



How We Make a Difference

Recent successes from M4C:

Early achievements from the first three years of project implementation:

- 19 market vendor associations (MVAs) have been established or strengthened across three countries.
- MVAs now have over 7,500 registered members, 70% of whom are women.
- 13 out of 19 project-supported MVAs have over 50% women in leadership positions.
- Ten out of the 19 project-supported MVAs are headed by a woman.
- In all three countries:
 - Local governments and councils have started to hold regular consultations with MVAs, including MVAs in key local government consultations, including infrastructure improvements, budgets and development of by-laws and ordinances.
 - MVAs have started to provide services to members in key areas, such as linking their members to health services, savings clubs, banking and financial services, training and other forms of support.
 - Training in financial literacy and business practices have so far been provided to over 2,500 women market vendors.
 - Vendors have also received agricultural training to help improve farm yields. Over 1000 women out of a total of 1,790 vendor farmers trained have received training on improving productivity and income.

PROGRAMME AT A GLANCE

Women's Economic Empowerment Programme

Timeframe: 2018 - 2022

Key Project: Markets for Change (2014 - 2021)

Markets for Change is a multi-country initiative principally funded by the Australian Government as part of the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative. Since 2018 the project partnership has expanded to include funding support from the Government of Canada. It is implemented in partnership with national and local government counterparts, and project and donor partners. The United Nations Development Programme is responsible for implementing project Outcome 2, which seeks to improve the socio-economic security of women market vendors.

Countries: Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu

Key Partners: Market vendors, government departments, local councils

Focus areas: Representative marketplace groups, socio-economic security of market vendors, local government and market management, physical infrastructure and operating systems

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The Multi-Country Office headquartered in Fiji covers Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu