

Measuring gender equality outcomes of economic growth in the Pacific: working with communities to develop indicators that monitor change

The University of Western Sydney, Macquarie University, Fiji National University, the International Women's Development Agency, are undertaking an international collaborative study with NGO partners Union Aid Abroad (APHEDA) in the Solomon Islands, Live and Learn Environmental Education in Vanuatu and Women's Action for Change in Fiji. This research project will be conducted over a two-year period (2010-2011) in six communities (two in each of the three countries). The study is funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) under their Australian Research Development Awards (ADRA) scheme.

What is the purpose?

Economic development programs have the potential to create both positive and negative impacts on women and men's lives and on power relations between men and women. Measuring these impacts is essential to creating informed economic policy and programs that benefit both women and men. Whilst national indicators that measure gender equality in the formal sector exist, these provide only partial insight into the actual impacts of programs on women and men in the informal sector and in semi-subsistence communities in the Pacific. This project seeks to address this gap by developing culturally grounded, community level indicators to measure gender equality impacts of a variety of economic development programs in the Pacific. The aim is to enhance the effectiveness of government, donor, and NGOs to identify, support and promote inclusive, sustainable, empowering and equitable economies where women and men have equally valued opportunities and benefits.

Some of the questions the research will consider are:

- How is gender equality understood within local economies in the Pacific?
- What indicators will measure gender equality in rural/urban economies at the community level?
- What types of local economic opportunities are valued by women and men?
- How have interventions to support local-level economic opportunities for women influenced gender equality outcomes?
- How has gender equality changed under the influence of national economic growth policies?
- What mechanisms can be used by communities to regularly monitor changing gender equality outcomes in the local economy and provide information to policy-makers—including governments and development agencies?

What will the research process involve?

The research has three phases. The first phase involves community-level workshops with women and men in 2 target communities per country. These workshops will explore women and men's roles in different livelihood activities in the community, their perceptions of gender equality, and changes in relations between women and men in response to economic development initiatives over time. The findings will feed into a second phase that will involve developing a set of indicators that can be used at the community level to determine the differential impacts of economic initiatives on women and men and on their relations and status in the community. In the final phase, the Research Teams from Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu will trial the indicators and then jointly review and share their research findings and experiences. In addition to producing case study reports from each country, the Research Team will also produce a set of indicators for communities, NGOs and governments to use to assess the effectiveness and impact of their economic programs on women and men.

How will the research findings be used?

The research findings will provide new information about local economies, how economic development strategies differentially impact on women and men, and a monitoring tool to measure impacts on gender equality over time. The research will build the capacity of NGOs and governments to measure and monitor gender-sensitive outcomes of programs to inform government policy. The research findings are also expected to feed into NGO program planning, by promoting economic development programs that lead to sustainable positive gender outcomes at community level.

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