

**Rivers and Coconuts:  
Conceptualising and measuring  
gender equality in semi-subsistent  
communities in Melanesia**

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*When women benefit, the whole community benefits.*

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## Partners featured in this publication

**IWDA recognises partnership and collaboration as fundamental to development effectiveness. As we work with partners, we build our capabilities and strengths to advocate for gender equality. Together we create space for women's voices to be heard and amplify those voices through networking, advocacy and research.**

**Women's Action for Change (WAC)** in Fiji is a grassroots feminist organisation committed to the pursuit of equality and social justice for all. Founded in 1993, WAC uses theatre and workshops to inform and explore sensitive topics including violence against women. Participants in WAC's skill-sharing/training, financial mentoring and empowerment programs include women who are single parents or the sole income earners, survivors of domestic violence and abuse, sex workers, people with diverse gender and sexual identity, children and young people at risk of harm or entering the criminal justice system, prisoners and ex-prisoners and their families.

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**Union Aid Abroad (APHEDA)** is the humanitarian aid agency of the Australian Council of Trade Unions. In Solomon Islands, APHEDA is focused on sustainable livelihoods, including in urban areas and strengthening enterprise development skills, vocational skills and financial literacy (including through the network of Community Learning Centres that it supports). IWDA and APHEDA SI worked in partnership in Solomon Islands from 2004 to 2009, and continue to work collaboratively through the Solomon Islands NGO Partnership Agreement.

**Live and Learn Environmental Education (LLEE)** started in 1992 as a group of volunteers promoting environmental education, and has since grown to operate in eight countries. LLEE specialises in community-focused participatory education to promote sustainable livelihood development and conservation of environmental resources in some of the most vulnerable communities and biologically diverse regions in Asia and the Pacific. IWDA and LLEE have worked together in Solomon Islands since 2004, focusing on gender-responsive natural resource management since 2009.

## Summary

**This issue of *Gender Matters* presents research on women's and men's economic contributions and their experiences of gender relations in rural and urban settlements in Solomon Islands and Fiji, and their aspirations for change. The research explores the different ways that women and men engage in economic activity and what this means for gender equality. The aim of the research was to formulate indicators that reflect local conceptualisations of gender equality and economy, which can be used to track change in communities that mostly engage in informal and non-cash economic activities.**

Subsistence agriculture, gifting, barter and voluntary activities underpin economies in Melanesia. In many rural and some urban contexts, cash incomes supplement rather than sustain families and communities. Women undertake the majority of farming for household consumption and many of the community-based voluntary activities that build interdependencies between families and enable communities to function by sharing limited resources. In such contexts, national-level indicators of economy and gender equality (for example gender wage gap and workforce participation rates) simply cannot accurately represent how women and men engage in and are affected by economic activity. It is these measures, however, that dominate development planning and measurement processes in the Pacific. The use of these statistics in isolation results in a partial picture of community-level economic activity, a limited understanding of the impacts of economic change and a failure to recognise the potential trade-offs between individual prosperity and community sustainability and resilience.

While helpful in multi-country comparisons, such indicators provide limited insight into the lives of the majority of people in the Pacific (particularly in Melanesia) given their limited engagement in the formal sector. Equally, a focus on increasing opportunities for women and men in the formal economy without understanding their existing economic contributions, constraints and aspirations is destined to be sub-optimal. Instead, we need to understand the interactions between different kinds of work and the value of such work for communities

if we are to assess how economic change is affecting women, men, relationships and gender equality. The research findings coalesce around four key themes: Women Come Up, Women's Collective Action, Household Togetherness, and Leadership, Say and Role Modelling. **Section 1** of the paper introduces the diverse economies approach that foregrounds all the unpaid work, non-cash exchanges (barter and gifting) and other forms of labour that contribute to sustaining lives and creating wellbeing.

**Section 2**, introduces the four gender equality themes, illustrated with the perspectives of women and men that informed them. Drawing from these four themes, the research team developed a suite of community-level gender equality and diverse economy indicators. The team also designed a number of participatory tools and a survey for users to collect qualitative and quantitative data against each indicator. These tools were developed in recognition that whilst indicators have been developed by development agencies for specific contexts or programs<sup>1</sup> and more recently to explore gender issues in the informal sector as well as the formal sector<sup>2</sup>, rarely are both indicators and associated tools produced in tandem. These indicators are introduced in **Section 3** and the centre pages highlight two of the tools developed to support dialogue with communities about gender equality (the River of Change) and map who does what in their community's economy (the Floating Coconut). The final part of the paper, **Section 4**, suggests some next steps and reflects on wider potential implications of measuring and valuing subsistence and unpaid household and care work alongside the 'formal' economy.

1. Eg. Hunt et al, 2009 and CARE, 2010.

2. Eg. ICRW 2012, Commission on Women and Development, 2007.

3. This approach draws on the work of Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham (see Gibson-Graham, J.K. (2006) *A Postcapitalist Politics*, Minnesota Press, Minneapolis).

# 1. Conceptualising a gendered diverse economy in Melanesia

**In the Pacific, the economy of each country is different, reflecting the unique combination of natural environmental heritage, colonial history and development pathways since independence. Common across all Pacific economies, however, is people's strong adherence to semi-subsistence lifestyles. This is particularly so in rural areas where families access land through systems of customary tenure, grow most of their own food and satisfy many other requirements from farming, fishing or harvesting, with far less reliance on cash income than in other parts of the world.**

**Given that on average almost 64% of people in Pacific Island countries live in rural areas (compared with a world average of 50% and a Global South average of almost 56%)<sup>4</sup>, semi-subsistent lifestyles contribute directly to a large proportion of Pacific people's material existence. Such lifestyles are also characterised by a distinct set of social and cultural practices that contribute to community and household wellbeing. In many communities, for example, there are established practices of reciprocity, sharing and giving that provide resilient support networks that buffer households in times of hardship and provide an ongoing measure of social security.**

Many aspects of Pacific economies are changing, and this is impacting on the nature of rural and urban life. Understanding how these changes affect women's and men's lives makes it possible to minimise and manage negative impacts and maximise positive impacts so that economic development benefits both women and men and advances gender equality. To track how economic change affects women and men, and the implications of economic development for gender equality, we need to use an understanding of economy that includes all kinds of economic activity at an individual and collective level. This includes all those things people do to ensure that households, families and individuals have food to eat, adequate shelter and can enjoy a good life, such as making food and shelter; sharing assets, resources and labour; raising animals for slaughter; working for cash to buy goods and services; running a small business; or being employed by a company that produces commodities for sale in national or global markets. An economy also requires many services that coordinate the productive work of people and business, including ways of managing money and property and ways of redistributing wealth.

In Melanesia, cash incomes often supplement rather than sustain families and communities. Land and other resources are often collectively managed and subsistent, reciprocal and voluntary labour bind communities

together and can also provide a social safety net in times of hardship. Dominant understandings of economy often fail to recognise the informal sector work, subsistence agriculture, gifting, labour exchange, barter and voluntary activities that underpin Melanesian economies. Focusing only on the development and measurement of the 'formal economy' (i.e. wage labour in formalised workplaces) presents a risk to governments in the region. It can result in an undervaluing of community-level economic activity and a lack of understanding of the potential trade-offs between individual and collective development and ways in which increased access to cash income can impact on collective identity and community resilience. It also represents a missed opportunity to maximise the existing social, cultural and economic strengths and capacities of communities.

While all community members undertake subsistence and voluntary labour, women undertake the majority of farming for household consumption. Most women earn cash by marketing home-cooked food, handmade crafts or agricultural produce (that they grow or on-sell). Women also engage in many of the community-based voluntary activities that build interdependencies between families and enable communities to function with shared and limited resources. The picture below shows economic activities undertaken by people in a squatter community in Solomon Islands where there is limited access to the formal market economy. It captures the variety of things that women (on the left hand side) and men (on the right hand side) do that contribute to their livelihoods and make up that community's economy.

A gendered understanding of economy also needs to incorporate an analysis of unpaid household and care work. Feminist scholars have long argued that this work be counted in systems of national accounting. When women's caring, household and subsistence agricultural work is not formally considered 'work' but just part of what women do, it impacts its visibility and value and leads to an underestimation of the amount of time such work involves. Research routinely shows that when both paid and unpaid household and care work is counted, women work

more hours overall than men<sup>5</sup>. Importantly, unpaid work responsibilities can significantly limit women's participation in paid work, training or education, and leisure time because of the impact on mobility, flexibility and time<sup>6</sup>.

Research in the Pacific shows that women's work outside the home has become increasingly important in changing economic times, however, women continue to do most of the housework, parenting and caring work, resulting in inequitable work burdens relative to men<sup>7</sup>.

The few time-use studies in the Pacific confirm that women have a greater workload than men when productive work and unpaid household and care work are combined, and less discretionary time<sup>8</sup>.

Chant's research<sup>9</sup> confirms that for many women, in different regions, expanded economic opportunities and work outside the home results in a 'feminisation of responsibility' for cash work and unpaid subsistence, care, and house work. When men struggle to find paid work in a changing economy and could potentially take on more household and care responsibilities, traditional gender roles and women's lower status will often combine in ways that result in men having reduced responsibility for earning income but little change in their contribution to household and care work. Indeed, expanded leisure time may provide additional opportunities for resource-depleting activities such as drinking, smoking and gambling that further increase the difficulties women face in meeting their responsibilities for the family's day to day needs.

Conversations at workshops convened by IWDA with male and female gender advocates in Solomon Islands in 2012, as part of a wider exploration of gender and culture, highlighted the social pressures on men to remain within cultural gender norms, particularly regarding responsibility for domestic tasks:

**In assigning roles in the family, when it is to do with extended family it's difficult to change because it's a disgrace to them. Even when men feel okay about taking on these tasks they will be shamed by other men in the community — "your wife is so lazy, you gave out this big bride price so why is she this way?"**

Solomon Islands woman

**My boss is female — I have respect for her... I am so respectful of all the ladies in the office but when I go home the women do everything for me — that is their role. I'm a bit scared because of my culture — I am living with relatives, and because men don't normally do this, I don't have the courage to do the housework.**

Solomon Islands man

These insights suggest that shifting understandings about the value of unpaid work, its contribution to sustaining families and communities, the amount of work done overall and the relationships between different kinds work is key to enabling men and women to share responsibilities in a way that is more equitable and maximises individual and community benefit.

## The Diverse Economy

**Formal economic activities:** wage work, producing goods or services for sale in a registered company, government job or non-government organisation.

**Informal economic activities:** paid domestic work, making, selling and on-selling products or services in self-employed or family businesses.

**Non-cash economic activities:** unpaid work, voluntary work, community work, household duties (gardening, caring for children and elderly, housework), reciprocal labour (I help you work in your garden, you help me with my work), family sharing and redistribution, church sharing and giving, community sharing.

4. Feeny 2010 based on World Bank statistics.

5. Waring 1988, Young 1992, Tsukada and Silva 2009.

6. See for example Tsukada and Silva 2009.

7. Fairburn Dunlop 1994; Pollard 2000.

8. See Mohamed, 2009 for a review.

9. 2007, 2010.

## Participatory research in action

In 2009, IWDA, the University of Western Sydney, Macquarie University, Fiji Institute of Technology (now Fiji National University), Women's Action for Change in Fiji, and Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA and Live and Learn Environmental Education Solomon Islands began working on a research project to better understand the gendered impacts of Pacific economic development initiatives on communities and work with communities to develop indicators to monitor change.

Staff from partner organisations were involved in a two-day methods training before undertaking participatory research in two urban communities in Honiara in July 2010, two urban communities

in Suva in October 2010, and two rural communities in Western Province in Solomon Islands in July 2011.

The teams collaboratively analysed the results and shared these at feedback workshops for NGOs, academics, government agencies and community members. The insights into the lived experiences of women and men, young and old with respect to gender relations informed the development of a resource kit to assist NGOs, governments and researchers to monitor change in the local economy and in gender equality in the context of broader change processes.



Economic activities undertaken in a squatter community in Solomon Islands. Orange notes = women's economic activities, yellow notes = men's economic activities. Photo: Claire Rowland

## 2. Four themes of gender equality: Melanesian grassroots perspectives

This section reports on research findings that reflect the views of women and men at the 'grassroots', in both rural and urban settings, about what is important to them in gender relations. The findings are categorised into four inter-related gender equality domains at individual, family/household and community scales. We also present what women and men see as some of the constraints to achieving outcomes they value, personally and in their relationships with each other, and the changes they would like to see that would enable positive gender relations.

### (i) Women 'come up': Melanesian women as individuals

**Women are disadvantaged in many ways relative to men in Melanesia and this affects their ability to participate in and benefit from economic activities. Essential to gender equality is the ability of women to stand alongside men, to 'come up' (or in Solomon Islands Pidgin 'Kam Ap') in their family and community. Our research findings indicate that an individual woman improving her status has three main pathways:**

- She gains confidence and realises her own value.
- She obtains access to and control of economic opportunities, training, markets and resources to expand her influence.
- She enhances her capacity to earn and control personal income and resources.

In practice, these three pathways are not easily distinguished; rather, they are part of intertwined processes of change. Gaining confidence, for example, can be an outcome of women having the opportunity to access training to develop new skills. When women have both the confidence and the opportunity to actively apply these skills, this can elevate their standing in their households and communities, further building confidence. Applying their skills could be in the informal sector or engaging in voluntary, unpaid work in their communities; enhancing women's status is not dependent on gaining opportunities to engage in formal sector work.

**Three months ago I attended literacy training. I gained new skills and started teaching women adults how to read and write. They got more involved in the church because they could read the bible and it built relationships with women in my neighbourhood. Then, I started to teach children at home. I was happy I was able to do this and I gained more confidence.**

Young woman, urban Solomon Islands

**In 2007 I learned how to make cakes. I learned the skills from my mum. In 2008, I started to make cakes myself. I used my family's equipment — I was taking over from my mum. I sold the cakes in the community and from what I sold I met the costs of my sister's school fees — my mother no longer needs to do this. Now I can make decisions about the money because I earned it. I can slowly buy things for my business. With my skills I can now assist in buying food for the family and the school fees.**

Young woman, urban Solomon Islands

Our research found that for many women in Melanesia, being able to generate and control an independent cash income stream through their work in the formal or informal sector is very important. When men are the primary breadwinners, they tend to have more influence over decision making about household expenditure than women.

**Women can make suggestions about how to use money — but ultimately it comes back to men to decide how the money is spent. So suggestions cannot have effect.**

Married man, urban Solomon Islands

**It is a common story [that women do not get cash from their husbands]. The husband does the shopping and then doesn't give the wife the money. They do not help their wife meet other expenses.**

Married man, urban Fiji

The fact that men do not always share decision making about the income that they earn and do not give their wives income for their personal needs is a strong driver for women wanting to earn their own income.

**My husband doesn't give me money [other than for food shopping] so I started my own business. Now I am surviving on my own, I don't need to depend on my husband's wages.**

Married woman, urban Fiji

**We women don't normally buy things for ourselves, because the market is small money. Often [if we have any spare money] we buy things for our children because we think of our family and children so we only buy things that we aim for and not spend money on ourselves. Sometimes our husbands give us money to buy clothes.**

Married woman, rural Solomon Islands

Opportunities to earn income provide scope for women to have an increased role in decision-making and reduce their dependence on their husbands.

**I control the money I make from selling garden produce because I do most of the work and also do most of the marketing by myself.**

Young woman, rural Solomon Islands

However, violence and manipulation in the household remains a barrier to women gaining complete control over income they earn. Women reported their money being stolen, taken by force and misused by their husbands on a regular basis, with some hiding their money and lying to their husbands about their earnings in order to prevent this outcome. Addressing family dynamics and social norms that tolerate this behaviour is essential to ensuring women gain greater control over their income.

**Sometimes men ask for some of their wife's money. If women make money and don't share it, men can beat them.**

Older man, rural Solomon Islands

**When I go and sell my cake at the market, I don't normally tell my husband how much I have earned. Instead I lie to him and hide the money in my purse in the house. This is because my husband smokes and drinks. I need to hide my money so that we have enough to buy basic items. Sometimes my son finds out where my purse is hidden and tells his dad, and when that happens he takes money from my purse for smokes.**

Older woman, rural Solomon Islands

Access to income can enable some women to free themselves of some repetitive 'chores', using the time to increase their income-generating activities, complete other work with less pressure, pursue leisure activities, build their networks and/or participate in training and development. The ability to hire other community members also improves the standing of these women in the community because they are creating jobs for other families.

**In 2010, [NGO name] came and I attended training on how to grow cabbages. During the training, they taught me how to mix the soil, how to create a nursery, transplanting nursery to the disposable cups and how to manage/keep the plants for insects and fungus. After that I had more healthy vegetables and I knew how to continuously plant, transplant seedlings and sell the mature ones. I got more money for food for the family as well as bus fare to travel to town. I even employed some men to work in the garden to lessen my work. This meant that I had more time to spend with my friends, do washing and attend trainings. I did not realise it, but I had become a boss mere (woman). People come to me when they need money because they know I can give them work.**

Young woman, urban Solomon Islands

Many challenges remain for women to 'come up'. Women may be able to earn an independent income, for example, but the subsequent benefits can be limited by a lack of markets and difficulties getting to markets, less earnings than men for work of the same value, and high costs of running their small businesses — all of which translate into small profits or little surplus money. Gender stereotypes can restrict women's access to work opportunities beyond their reproductive work. In this regard, women's efforts to 'come up' can also be hindered by unsupportive husbands and families. One way that women in Melanesia seek to overcome these disadvantages is by working together.

## (ii) Women's Collective Action: Relationships between Melanesian women in communities

**Women and men in Melanesia have very separate roles and responsibilities. Women often have overwhelming responsibility for the day-to-day needs of the household, but limited time, mobility, resources, and economic opportunities to fulfil the expectations that go with this. To improve their access to new economic opportunities, while ensuring they meet their responsibilities to the household, women often turn to other women for assistance.**

Most women's collective action groups take the form of community-based organisations and church-based groups. These groups are a means for women to expand their influence, particularly in contexts where roles and responsibilities are highly gender-segregated. Schevyens (2003) and Pollard (2003) discuss the positive role of women's Church groups in the Pacific as a source of support and solidarity that builds women's status and influence beyond welfare and 'traditional' concerns of women to incorporate economic development, human rights and environmental stewardship.

NGOs also initiate opportunities for women to come together and collectively organise. Activities include fundraising and purchasing assets for collective use; developing and implementing programs/activities to maximise household livelihoods; providing assistance to each other on an individual and group basis; representing the community in conferences and workshops; and providing support for the community's more vulnerable female members. Such experiences can enable women to build networks and a sense of solidarity.

**When [NGO name] comes and organises this kind of workshop, the women are able to recognise other women listen and understand other women's problems and that they are not the only women facing the problem and there are other women in the community that also have problems.**

Woman, urban Fiji

Women's expressed need for women-only collective action groups in our research, and the widespread existence of these groups in Melanesia, can be interpreted in part as a consequence of the 'silo-ing' of roles and responsibilities between men and women within the household and broader community. Quite simply, women cannot rely on their male partners to support them to fulfil the demands of their gendered roles. Women's groups may also be partly explained as a way for women to seek opportunities for voice and influence beyond the household given their (generally) more limited influence in decision-making at the household level.

In Melanesia, women assist other women to get by or to improve their family's situation by gifting labour, goods or skills, and in the process also advancing their own standing in the community, given the value attributed to community building through women's solidarity and support networks. Exchange relationships therefore feature strongly in women's economic activities. Commonly, women grow or produce food that they barter to acquire other produce and basic items. Bartering assists women to fulfil their gendered role of providing for their family's basic needs and can be crucial for managing food insecurity. It can also provide an important safety net mechanism for poorer community members, in particular female-headed households.

Many women's groups also exchange and share skills within the group, expanding the skill sets of all members. Exchange and gifting relationships also enable women to expand their networks and friendship circles and gain confidence and respect from other women in the community.

**I made good friends with other women in the community through learning to weave mats by sharing patterns or techniques on how to weave with other women.**

Young mother, rural Solomon Islands

**An old lady made a woven basket and some women came and asked her to teach them how to do it. So the old lady taught them how to do the weaving. After talking about the new skill they'd learned, the women decided to organise and form their own women's club so that they can learn and share the skills together.**

Older woman, rural Solomon Islands

Our research shows that women's collective action groups enable women to minimise costs and labour inputs in producing and marketing products. In rural areas, reciprocal labour arrangements assist women to build their garden size and share marketing costs. Women also pool funds and labour to purchase resources, pay for transport and sell their goods at local markets.

**When women's husbands do not have time for gardening and the women want bigger gardens, they take turns to work in each other's gardens. We also pool funds to pay for fuel and boat hire to take our produce to [name of] market. This is especially helpful for households headed by older people and by widows and single mothers who do not have men to assist in developing their gardens, or time to go and sell produce in the market.**

Older woman, rural Solomon Islands

Women also look beyond their household for assistance in increasing the productivity and income potential of their gardens. While their male partner may assist in establishing a garden by doing the work that requires physical strength (such as digging and earth moving), they do not usually engage in day-to-day, time-consuming maintenance activities such as planting, weeding, and harvesting unless they are paid (in-kind or with cash). In some urban areas with land, women hire neighbouring men (and sometimes women) to assist in garden maintenance, paying with profits and produce from their own garden or other small business activities, as well as with cigarettes and other goods. In rural Solomon Islands, where cash incomes are less accessible, and stronger women's networks are evident, women work together to achieve their goals for garden productivity.

**Working together as a group is so important. If you work by yourself you cannot have a big garden, but [through] women working together you can get a big garden. A bigger garden means enough food to eat and to sell as well.**

Older woman, rural Solomon Islands

Women's collective action groups offer a means for women to redress workload burdens and share responsibility for ensuring subsistence food needs and surplus garden produce to sell. They also provide a way for women whose husbands or male partners are not contributing optimally to household needs, to access labour inputs and other human resources.

Collective action groups, then, provide women opportunities to experience new roles, build skills and knowledge through skill sharing and transfer, pool resources, increase personal productivity, and access network solidarity that leads to increased confidence to speak out in front of other women, and ultimately in front of audiences of both women and men.

**Before we used to get angry because we didn't feel that we had something to say, so when people talked to us we would run away and hide, and get angry at other women who could talk. We were easily embarrassed. But now we have joined the [name of women's] network group we have been able to talk in front of people and not hide or run away when people come to talk to us.**

Older woman, rural Solomon Islands

**Before [name] joined the [name of women's network], she used to be very shy. When she became a Network member she started to meet other women, share knowledge and attend meetings and training activities. She started learning from other women in the network. In meetings, the women took turns to chair. At first [name] was too shy to chair the meeting, but over time her confidence grew. Now she has taken a leadership role in the Network and is a very active member.**

Older woman, rural Solomon Islands

Women's collective action groups can be a conduit for women to change their context at the household and community level so that they have greater voice, influence and opportunities for leadership. Congenial relations between women are a pre-requisite for this. Women in our research identified poor relationships between women, manifest in behaviours such as gossiping, as a threat to women's solidarity. Women expressed concern about potentially being undermined by other women when they step up to take on leadership roles in the community.

**If some women were to do this work [planning], other women folk might gossip about them and spread false news, they would be jealous.**

Older women's group, rural Solomon Islands

The main message of a young women's drama visioning for positive gender relations in the future, was the need for women's networks to avoid gossip and to solve conflict in a constructive way to prevent psychological violence.

**Young women acted out the way in which sometimes "women like to talk about each other and cause violence [between women], instead of coming together and helping each other."**

Young women's drama, rural Solomon Islands

Participation in collective action groups is a source of pride and status for many women and has many benefits. Women expressed concerns about men exerting influence in women's organisations, and consequently women worked to maintain 'women-only' spaces.

**We fear if men have membership, because they are quite strong, so they might accidentally take over responsibility and then mismanage money. Women are trying to prove themselves first.**

Woman, rural Solomon Islands

In most cases, however, the influence of women-only groups is limited to their members rather than broader community structures or processes.

## (iii) 'Household Togetherness': Relationships between Melanesian women and men in households

**Women are disadvantaged when there is not enough sharing of workload and income in the household. Families are better able to improve their wellbeing if both women and men contribute to household livelihoods and responsibilities in ways that promote trust and caring relationships.**

In general, our research shows that women think they do more household work than men, and this is similar to Pollard's assessment in 2000, suggesting limited change. Women believe that men work less frequently than women and that men have more free time (by implication because they have a lesser workload than women). While women are socialised from an early age to work very hard and to have pride in the contributions they make to their households, as Pollard<sup>10</sup> notes, this does not come without physical and mental health costs. This is an even more serious issue for women if their male partner or husband fails to do enough to fulfil his gendered role. This exacerbates women's workload and disproportionate burden in maintaining their households. Our research shows that women's significant and unequal workload partly stems from men's limited engagement in housework and parenting, which is consistent with findings elsewhere<sup>11</sup>. Tsukada and Silva<sup>12</sup>, writing about rural Ghana, show that gender inequality in workloads begins early in childhood, affecting the time girls can give to study, even when there is apparent gender equality in school attendance.

Mothers and grandmothers who have primary responsibility for child-rearing, desire men to do more and be more proactive role models for children. Men assist occasionally in household tasks perceived to be 'women's work' (such as cooking and cleaning), for example, when their wife or daughters are unwell. Young women want

their brothers and fathers to assist more with household tasks like cooking. Young urban women in Fiji stated that they felt 'taken for granted' but that they have little recourse to change their situation because they are largely excluded from household decision-making processes. Similarly, young rural women in Solomon Islands desire a more equitable division of labour in the household, as acted out in a role play about future visions for positive gender relations.

**A young girl is allocated a number of daily cleaning and household tasks considered to be 'women's work'. Meanwhile, her parents encourage her brother to go and play soccer. After an NGO awareness program on the importance of working together as a family, the father and the son decide to share the chores with the mother and daughter and they encourage mother and daughter to rest when they're tired.**

Young women's role play, rural Solomon Islands

Having an independent income can be a catalyst for young unmarried women to assert themselves with respect to doing household tasks. A young urban woman described how her well-paid job in the formal sector meant that she did not have to fulfil her traditional gendered role of doing most of the housework.

**When I got work as a telemarketer in a firm, making calls to Australia and New Zealand, I found out that money can even buy friends and that I didn't have to listen to anyone anymore, including my family. I could make my own decisions. I didn't worry too much about my family because I was earning a lot of money. Now I have stopped working I have to listen to my Dad and do the household work again. Now he won't give me pocket money unless I do what he asks.**

Young unmarried woman, urban Fiji

A division of labour based on traditionally-ascribed gender roles curtails many women from expanding their knowledge and skills, life experience and opportunities. Women's unequal work burden reduces the time they have to engage in other pursuits, including generating cash income and attending training. A husband's support is often essential if women with children are to engage in training or group activities outside the household, start businesses that require capital and foster a family environment where women are respected.

Women spoke of urging their husbands to undertake more caring work so that they have more time to attend and participate in activities outside the household.

**Husbands do allow their wives to attend workshops, but sometimes they fight with each other first. This is because husbands are lazy to look after small children.**

Older woman, rural Solomon Islands

Women also desire moral and financial support from their husbands to invest in their businesses, develop their skills and contribute to their households beyond their reproductive work. This was the underlying message of a women's role play on visioning positive gender relations in the future.

**A woman asks her husband if she can buy a sewing machine to start sewing clothes to sell. He says "yes good wife, what a good idea". They go to the shop and select a sewing machine together. The wife suggests one and her husband says "yes good wife! That looks like a really good one, we'll buy that". He gives her his money to buy the machine. When they return home, [NGO name] staff came to visit to tell them about a sewing machine repair course. The husband says "good wife, this is a very good opportunity and very important for you to go. I really think you should go". The wife replies that she will go and both husband and wife are happy.**

Older women's role play, urban Solomon Islands

A lack of communication, trust, and shared spending priorities existed in a number of families involved in the research. In a number of cases men were charged with misuse of family and personal finances and for taking limited responsibility for their family's wellbeing. Poor economic outcomes for families, family breakdown, and the overburdening of women attempting to address household needs with limited resources were frequent outcomes of men's limited responsibility in a family context.

**[Drug and alcohol consumption] causes a big problem in the family, especially beer because money is spent on that rather than basic household needs. It leads to family breakdown, '0 twos' [second wives], marriage breakdown, as well as affecting the siblings.**

Older man, rural Solomon Islands

**It is good if the women can control money. Now they do not have control of their money, the husband always drinks kwaso [local brew] and comes in drunk and takes their savings.**

Young woman, urban Solomon Islands

Regarding inter-personal relations, both women and men expressed a desire for more and better communication in the home. A basic aspiration among women was for their husbands and other family members to listen to them.

**A wife requests the kids do something and the kids don't do it. The husband backs up the wife, and the kids behave. This skit was about women not being listened to in the home, her decisions not being valued and consequently the children disrespecting their mother too.**

Older women's role play, urban Fiji

The idea of 'togetherness' was simply expressed through a women's role play in an urban field site where husband and wife demonstrate their love for each other through a shared, routine daily experience.

**A woman is at home with her kids. Her husband wakes up and she has his breakfast ready on the table. He greets her nicely, with respectful, loving words and a hug. She greets him in the same way. They eat together as a family.**

Older women's role play, urban Fiji

For some married couples 'togetherness' became achievable after the male partner started doing more 'women's work'.

**After we built the house, I started to do domestic work at home, help with cleaning when I was home. My wife started to respect me more and I started to respect my wife more because I started to understand what her work involved. I began to recognise that my wife had more responsibilities than me. We started to have an open and healthier relationship.**

Older man, urban Fiji

## (iv) Leadership, Say and Role Modelling: Melanesian women and men in communities

**To make sustained progress towards gender equality, change is needed at community level as well as at individual and household levels. Our research highlighted two areas that hinder gender equality at the community level. Firstly, opportunities to have a say in what happens in their community and to contribute to decision making and planning tend to be less readily available to women than to men. Secondly, it is important for older men in the community to act as positive role models for younger men who can be the cause of anti-social and violent behaviour and to take responsibility for reining in such behaviours. Young men need to be supported to contribute to the household and the community and to treat women with dignity and respect.**

Community organisations, groups and committees can exert considerable influence over matters such as planning infrastructure, allocating funds to community projects, and making decisions about the community's future. However, these entities currently tend to offer limited opportunities for women. There are a range of leadership positions in most communities, including appointed community leaders, youth leaders, church leaders and representatives appointed or elected to community-based programs led by external agencies such as NGOs. While some women and men think that men's and women's groups should remain separate, others (especially women) express a desire for more opportunities to be involved in the leadership structures and decision-making processes of mixed-sex community groups and committees.

At present, men tend to occupy most appointed community leadership roles in community groups and organisations in Melanesia that are open to both sexes. Older men have considerably more opportunities than younger men to participate in leadership roles (as do older women over younger women). Men also tend to dominate formal leadership roles that control community resources. Consequently, men in these groups are more likely than women to be decision-makers who determine such things as access to, and allocation of, church resources, how collectively 'owned' natural resources (ie. land) is to be managed<sup>13</sup>, links with NGO and government representatives; and the selection of future leaders for and representatives of the community. Women involved in such groups can become frustrated at being unable to influence decision-making processes on collective assets, infrastructure and finance in their community.

**Although I was in the reconciliation committee, I was only there to sign the cheque. When the money came into the committee I couldn't say anything about how it should be used; only men were involved in distributing the money.**

Married woman, urban Fiji

**Women want to be involved in planning in the community, church and in the family. Now men are stronger and do the planning, and they undermine women by telling them they don't know anything.**

Woman, rural Solomon Islands

Societal norms which dictate gender roles constrain women's effective contributions, even when they are able to take up roles usually held by men. Consequently, at this time, many women see women-only groups as a more conducive pathway for exercising leadership, even if the community-wide influence of those groups is more limited.

A barrier to women's involvement or influence in collective decision-making processes (outside of 'women-only' groups) are the restrictive gender norms that lead to and perpetuate siloed workloads/roles and the perspective that certain decisions are the sole responsibility of men, or women. Women who get involved in non-traditional decision-making roles may fear derision from other women and from men because this limits their time for household responsibilities. Some women must juggle increased workloads due to lack of support from family members when they attend meetings or training. Where women do have access to leadership roles, ongoing expectations that they also exclusively fulfil traditional gender roles can place strain on women and their families.

13. Asker, 2009.

**There were personal costs for [name]. Juggling home responsibilities with her new role was difficult. The demands of the role meant she often spent more time doing her voluntary work than with her family, even on a Sunday, which is considered a family day. As a woman she was expected to be at home, looking after the family. When she wasn't at home to cook meals, her husband and kids would not eat properly. It is a precious thing to have a mother at home.**

Older woman, urban Fiji

Finding ways to loosen the boundaries between women's and men's traditional gendered roles is also important with respect to societal expectations of young men. Young men's engagement in anti-social and illegal economic activities is a significant issue in many Melanesian communities, with economic and gendered consequences. Some young men engage in smoking, drinking and gambling, 'partying' and drug taking (marijuana) in the transition between leaving school and adulthood. While many women and men disapprove of these behaviours, they also see it as 'natural' to young men. Young men spoke of the risk-taking behaviours as if they were a rite of passage. However, both women and men see senior men or elders as having a key role in addressing younger men's unsociable and risk-taking behaviour that ultimately adversely affects the community as whole, often with particular impacts on women.

**Elders should do things as a good role model [in relation to drinking and smoking] in the community. Right now, older people don't always provide a good role model for young men.**

Young man, rural Solomon Islands

The causal factors of such behaviours are complex and often context specific. Young men in rural areas linked young men's negative behaviour to the less than ideal role modelling of their parents, in particular their fathers. In some places, young men do not have group-based activities to engage in other than those that encourage risk-taking. Women and men (including male elders) see a role for male elders to guide young men and boys to engage in productive, pro-social activities.

Most people therefore see male seniors and elders as needing to take some responsibility for the social issues arising from young men's adverse behaviours and intervene to curb negative masculinities that can begin to emerge in early adolescence. Having male elders challenge gender roles that restrict young men's role in households is also important for enabling gender-equitable economic contributions. Boys'

and young men's limited contribution in households due to prescribed gender roles, combined with the tendency of some boys and men not to contribute as they are expected to, means they have more discretionary time to engage in anti-social activities.

**Most of the young boys in the village now attend secondary school and then finish and come back and do nothing. They are the ones who cause problems in the village because they are involved in drugs.**

Older man, rural Solomon Islands

Access to cash income or cash reserves can heighten the risk of engaging in negative behaviours and have flow-on impacts on household economies as cash is diverted from family use to young men's leisure pursuits. A non-contributing household member also reduces women's discretionary time by increasing their labour burden. Misappropriation of family finances can reduce the overall economic capacity of the household.

**I started to smoke when I was in form one at high school. I spent all the money I got from my parents (other than school fees) on tobacco. I was expelled from school for one month for my behaviour and admitted to hospital. When I went back to school my teachers talked me out of smoking and since then I stopped smoking.**

Young man, rural Solomon Islands

The impacts on young men themselves are also considerable. They include a growing sense of apathy and inability to contribute, difficulty getting paid work (especially formal sector jobs) because of their 'bad' reputation, a loss of respect and voice in the family and community, negative health impacts, restricted funds/resources/goods for daily needs, family breakdown, and risk of gaol. Young men also acknowledge the negative impact their behaviours have on those around them.

**A group of boys stayed together in one house and started to smoke marijuana. When they ran out they would paddle [in their boats] to buy marijuana from other villages. They felt lazy to work in their gardens and so couldn't support their families. This also resulted in a lack of respect towards family.**

Young man, rural Solomon Islands



Women's group (and male facilitator) recording their economic activities at a participatory workshop, urban Fiji. Photo: Claire Rowland

In some places, some young men also engage in crime, sexual violence, domestic and public violence, often in association with alcohol and drug abuse. These behaviours affect the community as a whole, but have particular implications for women, including public safety concerns (rape, violence, or stalking and sexual harassment – locally expressed as 'creeping') and domestic violence. They also reduce women's mobility and their capacity to manage workloads (especially in the case of widespread public violence).

**Three years ago, young people in this place were disorganised, all they participated in were games like soccer and rugby. When night fell, and sometimes even during the day, the young men would go around in groups getting involved in crimes like stealing, drinking the local brew, and smoking marijuana. They sold marijuana and also brewed the local beer to drink and to sell. At night they would act like 'night flight birds' (making sudden sounds, and then running away), and 'flying foxes' (climbing banana trees and eating the bananas). If they meet people on the road, they would fight them. They were also involved in rapes as well.**

Young man, urban Solomon Islands

## A sample of community-based indicators of gender equality and economy

**The research team developed indicators for building a diverse economy profile and for each of the four gender equality themes. Each indicator is linked to a specific data collection tool. By way of example, the indicators for 'Women's Collective Action' and 'Leadership, Say and Role Modelling' are listed below<sup>14</sup>:**

### Indicators for Women's Collective Action

- 3.1 Percentage of women sharing the costs of doing business with other women
- 3.2 Types of business expenses shared by women
- 3.3 Frequency of women supporting other women in the community
- 3.4 Frequency of women pulling each other down in the community
- 3.5 Number and type of women's groups in the community
- 3.6 Number of members in each women's group
- 3.7 Approaches used by women to resolve conflict between women

### Indicators for Leadership, Say and Role Modelling

- 5.1 Percentage of women and men who feel safe walking in their community after dark
- 5.2 Women's and men's levels of satisfaction with male community leaders' actions to improve safety in the community
- 5.3 Women's and men's views on the frequency of men's support to women in leadership roles usually held by men
- 5.4 Number of women in leadership roles usually held by men
- 5.5 Number of fathers/male guardians that young men consider to be positive role models
- 5.6 Percentage of male elders that young men consider to model positive behaviour to young men in the community

14. The full list of indicators is in the manual of indicators and tools available for download at [melanesianeconomies.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/gendered-impact-manual-final-141112.pdf](https://melanesianeconomies.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/gendered-impact-manual-final-141112.pdf)



### 3. From research to practice: Indicators and tools of gender equality and economy for monitoring and planning

**The four themes of gender equality identified through the research laid the foundations for developing a suite of community-based indicators to track change in gender equality linked to economic development. These can be collected using qualitative and quantitative tools. (Both the indicators and tools are described in detail in *Tracking change in gender and economy: Toolkit for NGOs, government and researchers in Melanesia*. The indicators allow for comparing the attitudes and practices of women and men between communities and/or over time. They can be used for planning community-based economic development programs that aim to increase economic opportunities for both women and men while also fostering more equal relationships between them. Users can adapt the materials to meet their particular needs and priorities.**

Communicating the meaning of concepts of 'economy' and 'gender' and 'gender equality' in development practice in a way that makes sense for communities in the Pacific and elsewhere can be challenging. We have therefore developed visual tools using images produced in Solomon Islands to help to overcome these challenges. Visual tools also support active engagement in settings where formal literacy is low. The metaphor of a river visually depicts the four gender equality themes and highlights

the dynamic nature of economic and social change and the changing relations between women and men. It also helps to simply communicate the idea of tracking change in gender equality. Taking a water sample from one of the tributaries of the river provides information about the quality of the water, i.e. information about what men and women are doing or thinking at a point in time. Collecting water samples (information about a number of different indicators) at different times builds up a picture of how things are changing, in one tributary or across the river system as a whole.

In conjunction with visual tools, we formulated some guiding questions that relate to each of the four domains of gender equality and additional questions for the diverse economy. These questions can assist development practitioners to discuss the priorities in their program areas that relate to gender and economic development. They are also designed to assist users in planning what aspects of gender equality are important to monitor over time. After determining this, users can adapt the survey questionnaire and/or participatory activities to collect relevant indicators to monitor change at yearly or two-to-three yearly intervals. A data package on the CD accompanying the manual provides instructions on how to collate, store, analyse and report results, including simply presenting data in graphical form.

### Resource kit for tracking the impacts of economic change for women, men and their relationships in Melanesian communities

**The research outlined in this paper informed development of resources designed for use by NGOs, governments and researchers:**

**A 'river of change' (A1) poster** presenting four domains that are important for promoting gender equality and economic opportunity in semi-subsistent communities in Melanesia. It can be used to:

- Support discussion about integrating gender equality in economic programs;
- Raise awareness with community members; Decide what gender equality issues to prioritise; and
- Brainstorm ways to measure gender equality in a particular community.

The front of the poster features in the centre pages of this issue; the double-sided version in the kit includes information about each of the four themes and guidance on how to use the poster.

**A 'floating coconut' (A1) poster** illustrating the diverse economic activity in semi-subsistent communities in Melanesia, with 'formal' sector work above the waterline and informal activities (seemingly less visible) below the waterline. This tool can be used to build a comprehensive picture of how women and men contribute economically and explore issues such as;

- What constitutes the economy, valuing the full range of contributions that women and men, young and old make to ensure well-functioning households and communities;
- Whether some economic activities may be undermining community wellbeing because of their impact on relationships or other work;

- What work is done by women and men, girls and boys (the gendered division of labour) and the potential for some jobs to be done by both women and men, so that opportunities and overall workload might be fairly shared; and
- How economic change is affecting women and men.

The front of the poster features in this issue; the double-sided poster in the kit also includes information about the diverse economy and guidance on using the poster for awareness-raising, planning and monitoring.

**Flash cards for three participatory monitoring tools** to test the strength and flow of the 'river of change'. These support the participatory approaches described in the manual of indicators and tools to track change, to actively involve male and female community members in discussing and assessing change in gender relations linked to economic activity.

**A manual of indicators and tools** for tracking change in the economy and gender relations at individual, household and community levels. The manual includes instructions on how to gather survey data and group-based data (narratives and participatory statistics) in relation to community-based indicators of gender equality and economy. It also includes a CD with a data management file to enter, store and analyse the various types of data and generate results against the indicators.

# 4. Concluding reflections and future directions

**Tracking changes in women's and men's economic activities in both the formal and informal sectors is crucial for understanding shifts in gender equality with respect to gender roles, responsibilities and opportunities. This research with women and men in semi-subsistent communities in Melanesia establishes both the rationale and the tools for working across traditional divides of informal/formal, household/workplace, paid/unpaid. It enables a holistic understanding of how women and men are sustaining their families and communities, interdependencies between work in different parts of the economy and how this effects on gender equality.**

The vast majority of women and men in Melanesia who follow semi-subsistent lifestyles and engage largely in labour and exchange in the informal sector. Funding and technical support from NGOs and governments will be needed to establish the infrastructure, systems and human resources that enables the routine collection of data on economy and gender equality that are relevant to their lives. The indicators and tools developed through this research provide a starting point for building a better evidence base about gendered economic activity and change in semi-subsistent communities in Melanesia. How are women's and men's economic engagements changing over time? What impact is this having on gender equality? How is this related to particular developments, policies or program interventions or broader change processes? The focus on collecting both qualitative and quantitative data and on participatory processes is consistent with insights from recent research on strengthening monitoring and evaluation for women's rights<sup>15</sup>, and on the value of participatory statistics more generally<sup>16</sup>.

To date, the materials produced from this research have had limited testing in the field. A useful next step would be to assess their practical value and utility in tracking change in gender equality and economy. It would also be useful to undertake evaluative research both within Melanesia and in other areas of the Pacific and neighbouring regions in communities that engage largely in economies activities in the informal sector. Key research questions include:

- To what extent have local agencies adapted the tools for local use, and if so, how?
- How relevant are the indicators for the program priorities of users and for tracking change related to those programs?
- To what extent has the manual and tools 'de-mystified' data collection?
- To what extent are the community-based indicators of gender equality developed through this project more widely applicable within Pacific Island countries?

We also think there would be significant value in developing an online platform to share information and foster dialogue on the progress and challenges of developing contextually appropriate indicators and tools, and tracking change in gender equality and economy, in Melanesia and beyond. Wider use of a common suite of indicators and sharing the resulting data offers the prospect of progressively developing a richer picture of gender equality and economy in Melanesia. This would enable policy makers, development actors and gender equality advocates alike to move beyond the current limitations of both national statistics and program-level data. It would also enable more informed comparison of programs and outcomes.

A key message of the research in this issue of Gender Matters is that what we measure matters. The implications of recognising and measuring the diverse economy are potentially wide ranging. Conceptualising the economy in a way that makes visible and values unpaid and non-cash work has the potential to influence wider debates about economic development priorities. Measuring the contribution of diverse economic activities, including subsistence, household and care work may change views about the relative benefits of encouraging women and men to shift from the informal sector into what are often perceived to be other more 'productive' activities. Identifying opportunities to enhance productivity across the diverse economy may enable some women and men in Melanesia to stay in communities rather than move to urban centres.

**We need to find ways forward that don't privilege the 'formal' economy and undermine the diverse, productive work that happens in local communities. Reimagining economies is part of the work required to build a future that is equitable and sustainable.**



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## **About IWDA**

International Women's Development Agency is the only Australian development agency entirely focused on gender equality and women's rights in Asia and the Pacific.

IWDA's vision is for a just, equitable and sustainable world where women enjoy the full range of human rights, where women and men interact with dignity and respect, and where women have an effective voice in economic, cultural, civil and political structures.

IWDA works in partnership with women's groups and through advocacy to create empowering and transformative change for women.

IWDA is deeply connected with the global women's movement and the feminist history that informed the foundation of our organisation in 1985. IWDA has consistently worked to catalyse and accelerate change in our region through local, national and international partnerships, alliances and networks.

As a secular, not for profit agency, IWDA works within a Gender and Development framework, seeking to promote respectful relationships between men and women at all levels of society. It promotes the rights of women as enshrined in key international conventions and resolutions.

## **About *Gender Matters***

*Gender Matters* is a new publication series intended to inform and support the Australian international development community's work towards women's empowerment and gender equality. It will document issues and links emerging across IWDA's development and research programs with partners, focus on innovative theory and practice, encourage dialogue and research about uncertainties and gaps, and share learning that can inform future development initiatives. The series will be informed by and link to academic thinking and debates but does not aim to be formally academic in approach or tone.

## **Disclaimer**

*Gender Matters* explores issues that IWDA believes are important for the development sector to consider and discuss. The authors take responsibility for any errors and gaps.

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