

ABOUT BALANCE OF POWER

Balance of Power (BOP) is an innovative approach to supporting Pacific Island countries achieve their objectives of inclusive and effective leadership in line with national policy frameworks.

Specifically, BOP aims to contribute to a 'better balance' in women's and men's leadership roles and opportunities.

Building on lessons learned on what works and what doesn't in the Pacific context, the innovation is in three key parts:

- BOP takes a very different approach by interrogating, in local contexts, the deeply entrenched social norms that define and legitimise leadership – across multiple spaces and institutions;
- BOP is led and managed by highly skilled Pacific Islanders, acknowledging that social norm change is best articulated and driven by local actors; and
- BOP takes a 'thinking and working politically' approach, which seeks to convene, and understand the interests of, diverse stakeholders, with a focus on influencing and incentivising power-holders and norm-changers.

The first phase of BOP will initially focus on **Vanuatu** and **Tonga**. Small country offices have been established in Port Vila and Nuku'alofa, supported by the regional head office in Suva. The time-frame for this first phase is 2019 to 2024.

BOP is financed through the Australian Government. Its aims and ways of working support the Australian Government's broader *Partnerships for Recovery* objectives in the Pacific.



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What is BOP doing?

BOP seeks to shift the attitudes and norms that prevent women from contributing to the COVID-19 leadership response, and leadership more broadly.

BOP recognises that it is the deeply entrenched **norms, attitudes and perceptions** around concepts of leadership that can sometimes be barriers to achieving improved balance and inclusion.

Changing these requires **sensitive and respectful** navigation of each country's socio-political economy. Central to the approach of BOP is its intent to work through **the values and culture** of the specific context, **bringing together** stakeholders who have the appetite to work as part of **locally-led coalitions** for reform.

This involves recognising the **critical role of men** and important norm-influencing agents in the community, including leaders of faith-based organisations and of traditional governance structures.

BOP will also ensure that it **builds upon existing strengths** and emerging 'green shoots' in shifting attitudes and practice around the roles of women and men in leadership.

How is BOP approaching this

This requires explicit demonstration of the benefits of women's leadership, including in times of crisis.

Through convening bases of power in Vanuatu and Tonga - across media,



government, churches and peak body associations – BOP is building coalitions to increase demand for women's skills and perspectives in enhancing social and economic resilience in the face of new challenges.

In these times of crisis – recovering from both COVID-19 and TC Harold – BOP is maximising the potential for responses that are dynamic and reflective of women's voice, agency and perspective.

KEY ACTIVITIES

The BOP Implementation Strategy identifies a number of Priority Areas for BOP implementation.

Influencing perceptions of women's legitimacy as leaders through more balanced media reporting

BOP is partnering with key media players in both Vanuatu and Tonga, and regional initiatives such as the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS), to deliver a series of customised trainings and mentoring programs to address the conscious or unconscious biases and/or lack of capacity to increase reporting on women's roles.

Showcasing the relevance of women's multi-sector leadership capability to politics in public outreach and media campaigns

BOP is partnering with high-status power-holders in Tonga and Vanuatu - including leaders of provincial and national governments, public service commissions, church and customary leaders - to showcase the

leadership qualities and results of women who have demonstrated, or who are demonstrating, leadership across society in Vanuatu and Tonga.

Supporting development and cross-sector implementation of the National Gender Equality Policies

This Priority Area aims to support the development of, and coalition-building, in the implementation of the Vanuatu and Tonga National Gender Equality Policies, with a focus on increasing women's voice and agency in national crisis leadership.

Strengthening the influence of the Women in Leadership Coalition - Tonga

The Women in Leadership (WIL) Coalition has been revitalised in Tonga to increase broad-based support for, and unified advocacy around, women's leadership. The WIL Coalition comprises members who are regionally acknowledged as highly credible and influential Pacific Island leaders and their motivation to come back together as a driver of social change is an opportunity that BOP is maximising.

Through its unique relationships at the regional level, BOP aims to influence regional bodies to apply a social norm-shifting lens to their own advocacy and coordination efforts in response to COVID-19.

High-Level Outcomes of BOP

- *Women's right to participate in the public sphere, including in humanitarian response decision-making, is increasingly accepted and valued by women and men in the community.*
- *There is a shifting balance of power towards women and men sharing decision-making at all levels.*
- *Traditional, church, and democratic governance institutions demonstrate action consistent with their commitments on women in leadership, and role-model integration of women's voice and agency.*

Adaptive Management

BOP is an investment that is explicitly using adaptive management and politically-informed ways of working to influence change in areas where aid programs have habitually met with limited success. Through the depth and breadth of networks across its implementation team, BOP is able to nimbly leverage opportunities as they arise. BOP's learnings and increasing strategic influence across Vanuatu, Tonga, and Fiji at the regional level, will be an invaluable resource for the broader Australian Government COVID-19 response in support of its Pacific partners.

Addressing negative perceptions around women in political leadership and decision-making through research and targeted advocacy

With no elected female MPs in Vanuatu and only three in Tonga, BOP is working with local research partners to understand the specific reasons behind voters' unwillingness to vote for women in these contexts, and to use these findings to inform subsequent attitudinal change and advocacy campaigns accordingly.

Influencing regionally-based associations to integrate social norm change strategies in their gender-focused advocacy and coordination

BOP is consolidating its status as a strategic 'thought partner' to key regional organisations to influence regional approaches to addressing critical regional challenges. In particular, this involves application of a social norm change lens over key issues arising from COVID-19, including addressing gender-based violence and increasing women's voice and agency in ensuring economic security.