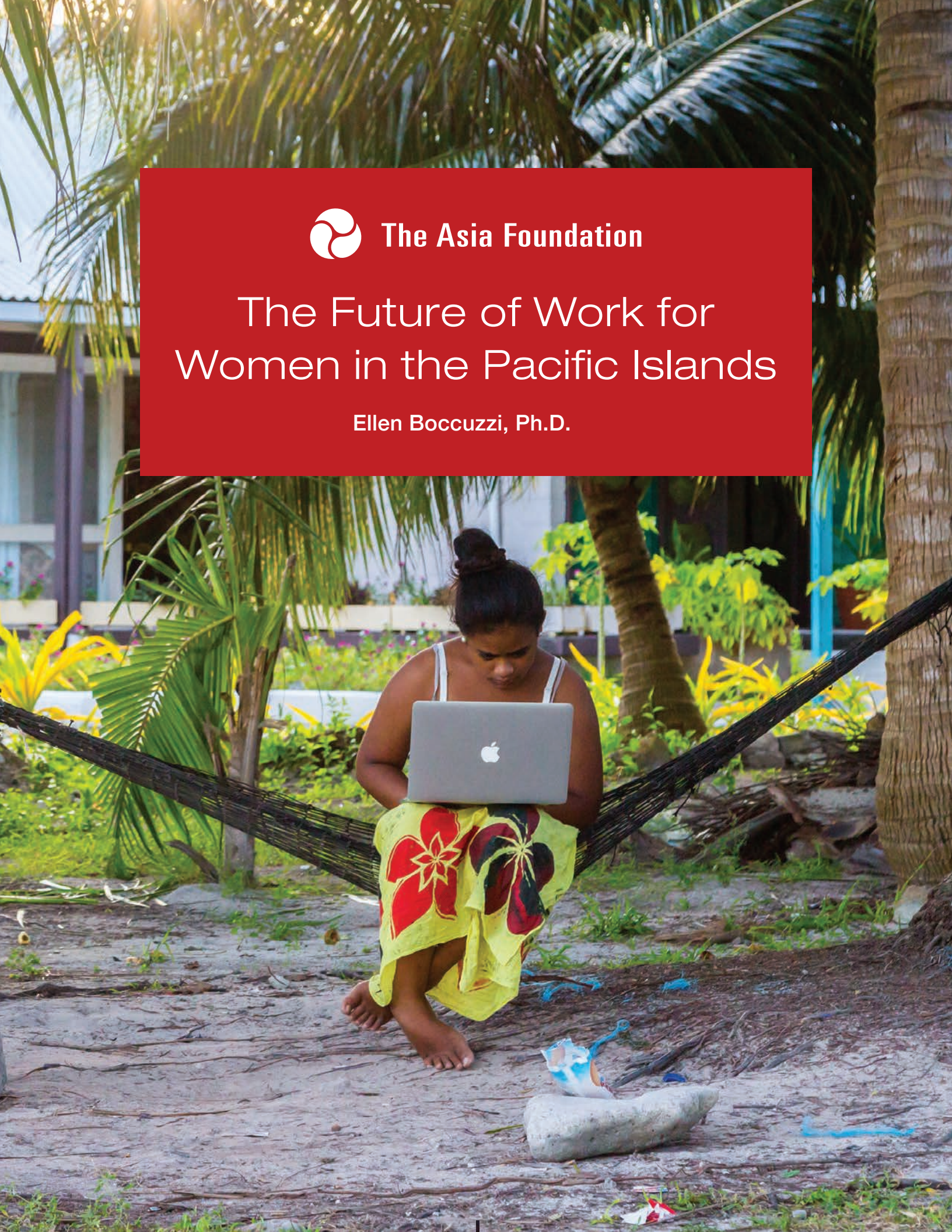

The Asia Foundation

The Future of Work for Women in the Pacific Islands

Ellen Boccuzzi, Ph.D.

THE FUTURE OF WORK FOR WOMEN IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS
by Ellen Boccuzzi, Ph.D.
on behalf of The Asia Foundation
Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Program
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Asia Foundation gratefully acknowledges the contributions that many individuals have made in supporting this study on the future of work for women in the Pacific Islands. In particular, the author would like to thank Laisa Bulatale, Jeannine Daniel, Lynnsay Rongokea, June Hosling, Imrana Jalal, Wadan Narsey, Niki Rattle, Dinesh Shankar, and Nalini Singh for their insights and input into the report.

The author would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the review team:

Lead reviewers: Sandra Kraushaar and Jane Sloane

Additional reviewers: Priya Dhanani, John Karr, Katherine Loh, Eileen Pennington, Oliver Petzold, Sofia Shakil, and Paula Uniacke.

Acronyms

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
ADB	Asian Development Bank
APTC	Australia Pacific Training Coalition
CEIC	Census and Economic Information Center
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FHTA	Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association
FTUC	Fiji Trades Union Congress
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOS	Global Outsourcing Services
GSMA	GSM Association
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NAWPP	Pacific Microstates - Northern Australia Worker Pilot Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLS	Pacific Labour Scheme
PNG	Papua New Guinea
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
WGEA	Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Australian Government

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INTRODUCTION

Early in the Covid-19 pandemic, Pacific Island governments acted swiftly to put strong policies in place to contain the virus and stem its spread. As a result, Covid-19 case numbers in the Pacific have remained relatively low compared with those in other world regions. To date, there have been 26,040 cases of Covid-19 in Pacific Island countries and a total of 261 deaths. Eleven countries have been affected, with the vast majority of cases in French Polynesia (17,483), followed by Guam (7,457), Northern Mariana Islands (128), Fiji (53), New Caledonia (40), and Solomon Islands (17). French Polynesia and Guam have each had 124 deaths, and there have been a total of 4 deaths elsewhere in the region. [1] And while effective policies and geographic isolation have helped Pacific Island countries avoid the worst of Covid's health impacts, the social and economic impacts of Covid-19 on the region have been profound.

Tourism is an important driver of economic activity in several Pacific Island countries, so the cessation of global travel has led to massive layoffs for those working in the tourism industry and to the loss of livelihoods for those reliant on it, including taxi drivers, handicraft vendors, cleaners, and restaurant workers, many of whom are informal workers without social protection. In addition, the dependence of Pacific Island countries on external resources means that the spike in unemployment has occurred in concert with rising prices, which has made it difficult for people to meet basic needs such as food, health, and housing. These economic pressures, coupled with the increase in care burden due to school closures, have put enormous strain on households, with reports of gender-based violence (GBV) spiking (Pacific Women, 2020).

The Covid-19 crisis has laid bare the precarity of gains to date in women's labor force participation. The International Labour Organization (ILO), McKinsey, and others have found that women's jobs have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19 due to occupational segregation in the hardest-hit sectors and entrenched gender barriers, including the impact of increased care duties on women's labor force participation. Across the Pacific, the Covid-19 crisis has underscored the particular vulnerability of women in informal work, as these women have faced barriers to small-scale income generation in the context of mobility restrictions and a drop in demand for goods and services, and have been easily dismissed without social protection to fall back on.

The impacts of Covid-19 are layered upon, and, in many cases exacerbate, existing vulnerabilities of workers in the Pacific Islands region, including to climate change and to the uptake of Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies. Most workers in the region are employed in the sectors at greatest risk of climate impact – agriculture, fisheries, and tourism (ILO 2019a), with those in tourism already reeling from the economic impacts of Covid-19.[2] As the pandemic accelerates the use of technology for

1 Data as of January 30, 2021. The World Health Organization's COVID-19 Pacific Islands Situation Report, which does not included PNG, counts 25,190 cases and 252 deaths across the region. Separately, the World Health Organization's Health Emergency Dashboard includes data for PNG as follows: 851 confirmed cases and 9 deaths.

2 In April 2020, as the region grappled with the impacts of the pandemic, Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu were hit by Tropical Cyclone Harold, which destroyed infrastructure in parts of all of these countries.

communication and home-based work, Pacific women risk being left behind due to a lack in requisite skills, the retraditionalization of jobs and norms that preference men for paid work outside the home, or because their jobs are automated altogether.

This paper begins with a discussion of women's labor force participation in the Pacific Islands, including an overview of challenges faced by women in the context of Covid-19, climate change, and technological advancement. Next, the paper analyzes emerging opportunities for quality employment for Pacific women both locally and abroad, and strategies to improve women's preparation for and access to these positions. The paper concludes with recommendations for moving forward, recognizing that the massive disruptions wrought by Covid-19 also present an important opportunity—to shift thinking, systems, and structures through proactive policies and reforms that support a transition toward a greener, more resilient economy and a more inclusive labor force.

LABOR FORCE CHALLENGES IN THE PACIFIC

Gender Disparities in the Labor Market

Across the Pacific, there are pronounced gender disparities in labor market participation and wages, occupational segregation by gender, and differences in the types of work that women and men perform. In Samoa, the labor force participation rate for women is 23 percent, compared with 58 percent for men. Significant disparities are also seen in Fiji (37 percent participation for females, compared with 71 percent for males), Solomon Islands (61 female, 74 male), and Tonga (62 female, 81 male) (ILO 2019a, 9).

Occupational concentration by gender is also a characteristic of Pacific Island labor markets. In Fiji, for example, men are more likely than women to work in construction, transportation, storage, public administration, and defense, while women are more likely than men to be employed in manufacturing, education, accommodation and food services, and health and social work (ADB 2016). Women dominate the caring professions in Pacific Island countries, putting them at increased risk of contracting Covid-19 as frontline responders. In the Western Pacific, 41 percent of physicians and 81 percent of nurses are female (Boniol et al. 2019). Care work is often characterized by low pay, long hours, temporary or "zero-hours" contracts, and difficult working conditions, including harassment and violence, which has increased in the context of Covid-19 (ILO 2020a, 3).

Within sectors such as agriculture and fishing that have high levels of employment across genders, there are pronounced differences in the types of work women and men perform.[3] In fishing, for example, men hold most of the formal jobs in offshore commercial fishing, while women play a larger role in small-scale fisheries, particularly in inshore fishing (coastal reef, flats, and mangrove areas) and the processing, marketing, and distribution of marine products, especially in the informal sector. Women are also involved in freshwater and marine aquaculture and play important roles in SMEs (FAO 2017).

3 See case study on the following page for a discussion of the gendered division of labor in the tourism industry.

Globally, occupational segregation has placed women at greater risk of losing their jobs or having hours reduced as a result of Covid-19, as the hardest-hit sectors have been highly feminized sectors: accommodation and food services; wholesale and retail trade; real estate, business and administrative activities; and manufacturing (ILO 2020b). McKinsey has found that female job loss rates in the wake of Covid-19 are on average 1.8 times higher than the rates of job loss for men, not only due to the gendered nature of work across industries, but also due to a lack of systemic progress on societal barriers to women's labor force participation, including the burden of unpaid childcare (Madgavkar et al. 2020). An ILO rapid assessement of the impact of Covid-19 on employment in Samoa found that 64 percent of job losses in formal sector positions were among women (ILO 2020d). Covid-19 is also exposing and accelerating job polarization and wage inequality, with manual and routine jobs at greater risk of being displaced (Park and Inocencio 2020).

McKinsey has found that Covid-19 is also disproportionately impacting women's entrepreneurship, including in women-owned microenterprises, as pressure on resources at the household level may lead families to redirect funds away from women's entrepreneurial pursuits (Madgavkar et al. 2020). According to UN Women, SMEs have been hit particularly hard by the Covid-19 pandemic relative to their size and cash reserves; women-owned SMEs are less resilient to shocks, given their lower access to credit (UN Women 2020a, 4). Given that women-owned SMEs primarily employ women, closures of these businesses have substantial impacts on women's employment overall.

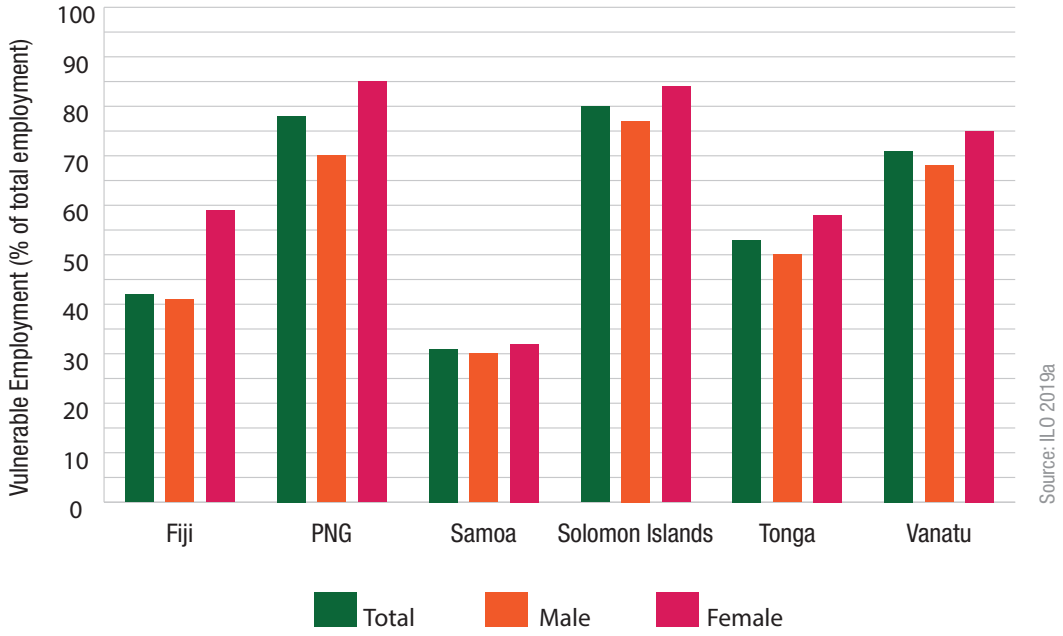
Looking forward, occupational segregation will significantly impact the ways in which women and men experience emerging transitions and the future of work. Because women are more likely than men to conduct routine and repetitive work, their jobs will be at higher risk of displacement through automation. At the same time, fields such as education, healthcare, and social assistance, where women predominate, are expected to grow (WGEA 2020). New jobs will also be created in green building, IT, and other STEM-based fields. Currently men are better placed to take advantage of these technology-driven opportunities given their higher levels of STEM training;[4] however, lower levels of technical skills across both genders in the Pacific labor force (when compared with the incoming migrant workforce) means that both men and women will need to upskill if they are to benefit from these more secure, higher paying jobs in the future. Entrepreneurs will also need to also upskill to adapt their businesses to online platforms and digital marketplaces.

4 A 2014 study of 31,000 students enrolled in major Fijian universities found low numbers of women in STEM fields; for example, only 18 percent of students majoring in the Engineering, science, and technology school within Fiji National University were female, and 10 percent of engineering and physics majors at USP were female. The study concluded that the low representation of women in STEM education implies that gender segregation in professional and technical occupations will continue until more women can be attracted to study in STEM fields (ADB 2016, 19-20).

Vulnerable Employment

Across the Pacific, labor markets are characterized by large informal and subsistence economies, with a significant proportion of the workforce (24.7 percent) in vulnerable employment (ILO 2019a, 7). High rates of vulnerability are rooted in the large number of workers, particularly women, engaged in subsistence agriculture; these own-account or contributing family workers have little income security and few (if any) social protections (ILO 2019a).[5] The ILO has found that most agricultural workers in the Pacific are not skilled in other income-generating activities, so negative impacts on agriculture (due to natural disasters or the impacts of climate change, for example) are likely to push these workers into rural unemployment, rather than toward migration or urban-based work (ILO 2019a, 11).

Figure 1: Vulnerable Employment in Selected Pacific Island Countries by Gender, 2018



Source: World Bank Indicators. Available at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator, modelled ILO estimates, derived from ILOSTAT database (accessed on 13 May 2018) Notes: Vulnerable employment is defined as the sum of the own-account workers and contributing family workers.

Pacific women are overwhelmingly employed in the informal economy, which is also associated with low and unstable incomes, as well as underemployment (ILO and ADB 2017, 6). The ILO has underscored the profound social and economic strain that Covid-19 is placing on the 740 million women working in

5 While all Pacific Island countries have social welfare assistance, formal systems for those of working age are generally limited to those who are employed in the formal sector (ILO and ADB 2017, 13).

the informal economy globally, given this lack of social protection (ILO 2020a, 2). As Figure 1 shows, women are more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment in Pacific Island countries, with vulnerability particularly high in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Solomon Islands, where over 80 percent of women are in vulnerable work.

This vulnerability with regard to income, job security, and labor protections is further exacerbated by climate change, as most workers in the region are employed in the sectors at highest risk of climate change impacts: agriculture, tourism, and fishing (ILO and ADB 2017, 138). Climate change threatens agriculture through erosion, saltwater contamination, drought, and climate-induced disasters that damage

Figure 2: Labor Force Participation by Industry

LABOR FORCE BY SELECTED INDUSTRY (TOTAL NUMBER)				
	Labor Force (15+)[1] (year)	**Agriculture** (ILO modeled estimates for 2019)[2]	**Commercial Fisheries** (2015)[3]	**Tourism** (2014)[4]
Cook Islands	8,000 (2016)	n/a	65	n/a
Fiji	342,000 (2016)	135,000	3,658	41,500
Kiribati	39,000 (2010)	n/a	1,094	2,200
Marshall Islands	13,000 (2011)	n/a	2,674	n/a
Palau	9,000 (2014)	n/a	46	n/a
Papua New Guinea	3,336,000 (2011)	758,000[5]	11,440	24,000
Samoa	47,000 (2017)	2,000	327	n/a
Solomon Islands	414,000 (2013)	n/a	2,356	6,500
Tonga	36,000 (2006)	n/a	142	2,000
Tuvalu	4,000 (2016)	n/a	185	n/a
Vanuata	100,000 (2009)	n/a	228	10,500

Source: ILO 2019a

crops and infrastructure. Fishing is similarly threatened through changes in fisheries productivity and threats to the infrastructure of coastal communities. Tourism is threatened by climate change in multiple ways, including storm surges, flooding, sea level rise, and erosion affecting coastal destinations, as well as interruptions to transport and communication infrastructure in the wake of disasters. Figure 2 provides data for formal employment in agriculture, tourism, and fisheries for the region; although reliable data are not available, estimates suggest that the number of informal workers is significantly higher than the number of formal workers in agriculture and fishing. For instance, in Solomon Islands, approximately 85 percent of the working aged population works in the informal economy, with 95 percent of the rural population engaged in subsistence agriculture (ILO 2017a, 6). In PNG, 81 percent of women and 71 percent of men are engaged in subsistence agriculture, hunting, and forestry (ILO 2017a, 6).

Covid-19's Impact on Employment in Tourism

Prior to Covid-19's devastating impact on travel and tourism globally, tourism was a priority sector driving growth in several Pacific Island countries, including Fiji, Palau, and the Solomon Islands. Tourism contributes a sizeable share of GDP in French Polynesia, Cook Islands, Palau, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Samoa and is a major employer accounting for about a third of formal employment in Fiji, Vanuatu, and Cook Islands (FORWARD 2020). Tourism also has a strong multiplier effect in Pacific Island countries, creating jobs both directly and indirectly. For instance, in Fiji in 2015 there were 42,500 formal jobs in travel and tourism and an additional 76,500 jobs linked to the industry; for Solomon Islands, the direct and indirect contributions were 6,500 and 9,500 respectively (ILO 2017, 141).

Despite the importance of tourism for employment in the Pacific Islands, many in the industry experience flexible or precarious work arrangements (including seasonal employment, part time or excessive hours, and informal hiring), and there are substantial differences in the types of work done by women and men. In Fiji, although women account for nearly two-thirds of university students in tourism courses, women hold only one-quarter of the professional and managerial positions in the sector. Women working in Fiji's formal tourism sector are primarily employed in minimum wage jobs, including front desk work and cleaning (Hamilton 2020). Women are also significantly engaged in informal work and in MSMEs linked to the tourism industry, for instance in the production and sale of handicrafts to tourists.

The vulnerability of tourism's workforce, both formal and informal, and of the industries dependent on it, have been made clear in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC) conducted a rapid assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on employment and business and found that "In Fiji and across the Pacific, the tourism sector has been the most affected, causing a spiral effect on other sectors and industries" (FTUC, 2020, 5). The tourism sector was impacted immediately, and by late March 2020, the Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association (FHTA) announced that 93 percent of its 279 members had closed down. Taxi drivers, restaurant workers, cleaners, and handicraft producers lost their livelihoods as flights were cancelled and hotels shuttered, with tourist arrivals falling to near zero. Governments across the region have put some economic support measures in place for formal sector workers who have lost their jobs, but informal workers (who constitute the majority of workers in the Pacific Islands) have been excluded from such assistance. Travel restrictions, social distancing, and other measures to fight the pandemic – as well as aversion behavior on the part of individuals and firms who do not yet feel comfortable interacting with other people or spending money in the way they once did – have left these individuals struggling to regain their livelihoods. For example, Fiji's largest annual event for women-owned enterprises, the National Women's Expo, had to be cancelled this year due to physical distancing protocols, depriving these women-owned businesses of a significant income-generating and networking opportunity (Hamilton 2020).

Across the Pacific, the Covid-19 crisis has laid bare the vulnerability of informal workers who have been easily dismissed as demand for goods and services has eroded, and who have faced barriers to engaging in small-scale income generation in the context of mobility restrictions and a drop in demand. In Fiji, for instance, 85 percent of market vendors are women, and half are small-scale farmers who sell their own produce. Vending is the only source of income for 77 percent of these vendors, and most do not have enough savings to withstand an income disruption of more than two weeks (COVID-19 Response Gender Working Group 2020, 9). Mobility restrictions and distancing requirements have limited these vendors' ability to sell their products in local markets (CARE 2020, 11), and the economic crunch due to massive unemployment has dampened local demand. For those selling handicrafts and other local products to tourists, the market has evaporated due to flight cancellations and hotel closures. The pandemic has served as a shock not only to these workers' daily incomes, but also to their overall economic security and to the food security of their households (as many Pacific women farm primarily for household subsistence needs and sell surplus in markets).[6] CARE has found that this threat to food security can also increase a women's risk of GBV, as ensuring food security within the family is considered a woman's responsibility (CARE 2020, 10). High rates of GBV across the Pacific exacerbate this vulnerability and will be discussed in a standalone section below.

Barter for a Better Fiji

International travel restrictions put in place to stem Covid-19 have hollowed out Fiji's tourism industry and sent ripple effects across the economy, leading over 100,000 Fijians to lose their jobs. In response to the cash crunch that many households faced this Spring, Marlene Dutta created the "Barter for a Better Fiji" Facebook page, where Fijians could engage in cashless trade of food, services, and goods in order to save money for rent, utilities, and other bills. She stated: "We have all been bartering…most of our lives, whether within our families, in our communities—this (Facebook) space just helps people connect and exchange from a wider pool." The page was launched on April 21 and had over 300,000 posts in the first few days; sites of the same name have quickly been developed in the Solomon Islands, PNG, and Samoa (Williams 2020). This is just one example of a return to traditional economies and practices seen across the region – including the use of tabu (currency made from shells) for everyday transactions in PNG (Fainu 2020) and the increase in urban gardening – as Pacific Islanders turn to existing skills and resources to bolster resilience in the face of Covid's shock.

6 The Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development (FRIEND) has been conducting food drives across Fiji since the start of the pandemic, attempting to reach the most critically affected, with food assistance limited to those with no form of income and no access to social welfare. When FRIEND opened an online portal for food requests among this population in critical need in May 2020, 1275 requests for food aid were received within the first two weeks, according to the organization's Facebook site.

Unemployment

Youth unemployment is an issue in all Pacific Island countries, with young women particularly affected. Across the Pacific, one in four people are unemployed, and in Kiribati, Nauru, and Marshall Islands, unemployment is over 50 percent.[7] High rates of youth unemployment are rooted in low economic growth, high population growth, and mismatches between the skills employers require and those attained through educational and training programs (ILO 2017a). In the Solomon Islands, 10,000 job seekers enter the labor market each year, but only 400 new jobs are created; in PNG, fewer than 1 in 8 school leavers secures a job in the formal economy (ILO 2017a, 7). Given the limited number of opportunities, most young people engage in non-monetary activities such as subsistence agriculture or fishing within their home communities or take on informal employment characterized by insecurity, low wages, and lack of social protection (ILO 2017a). Moreover, many young people in Pacific Island countries who are not working are also not in training, given the low prospects for quality employment upon graduation (ILO 2017a).

The impact of Covid-19 on employment has been profound, with the tourism sector hit the hardest. Fiji's unemployment rate was 4.5 percent in December 2019 and according to IMF estimates reached 13.4 percent by the end of 2020 (IMF 2020)."[8] A rapid assessment undertaken by the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC) in coordination with the ILO in May-June 2020 found that of those workers who did not lose their jobs, 86 percent have either been put on leave without pay or have had their income reduced. For those with reduced income, approximately half had their income reduced by over 30 percent. FTUC analysis found that such reductions would lead to an increase in poverty among the employed (FTUC 2020, 8, 25-6). Only 5 percent of businesses surveyed in Fiji reported allowing their workers to telework (ILO 2020d).

The rapid assessment also found that the vast majority of workers did not have options for other employment. Ninety-four percent of surveyed workers indicated that they lacked the skills to transition to another form of employment without support for reskilling, and the majority stated that they had no access to land (to pursue subsistence agriculture, for instance) or to village-based safety nets (FTUC 2020, 27). Women in many parts of the Pacific have limited access to land given patrilineal inheritance practices, making this vulnerability particularly acute for women – affecting not only their income generating potential, but also their food security and that of their families (CARE 2020, 5). The FTUC study concluded that without support for upskilling, many workers would risk being left behind, with older workers never returning to the workforce and instead retiring in poverty (FTUC 2020, 8).

An ILO rapid assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on the labor force in Samoa found that 26 percent of workers had lost their jobs, with female workers accounting for 64 percent of these losses (ILO 2020d).

7 Pacific Skills Summit – The Future of Work in the Pacific presentation by Dr. Frances Cresantia Koya-Vakauru, Director, USP Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture.

8 The Fiji Bureau of Statistics deferred the 2020-2021 Employment and Unemployment Survey for one year due to Covid-19, so actual unemployment data for this period are not yet available.

Caring Duties within the Household

Women are the primary household caregivers in Pacific Island countries, spending more than three times as many hours on unpaid care work as men (Pacific Women 2020, 2).[9] ADB has underscored the impact of unpaid care and domestic work on women's economic participation, noting that over 20 percent of women in the Asia-Pacific region cite "work/family balance" as a major challenge to labor force participation and that the Asia-Pacific is the only region of the world where women's labor force participation is decreasing (ADB and UN Women 2018, 95). In Fiji, where the underemployment rate for women is estimated at 74 percent (ADB 2014), the vast majority of non-working women surveyed (71 percent) cited "household work" as the primary reason for not participating in the labor force (FBOS and ILO 2018).[10] Research by McKinsey has found that women's share of unpaid care work has a high negative correlation with women's labor force participation and a moderately negative correlation with women's participation in professional or technical jobs or leadership positions (Madgavkar et al. 2020, 4). Patriarchal norms, reinforced by religion, constitute significant structural barriers to women's labor force participation in the Pacific.

With school closures in response to the pandemic,[11] women have borne the brunt of childcare responsibilities, putting their jobs and income security at risk (UN Women 2020a). Traditional gender roles – coupled with the gender pay gap, which makes it more likely that families will prioritize men's work – mean that women are filling care roles at home. Women's workloads have thus increased substantially in the context of the pandemic, as they manage children's schooling, ensure food security for the household, and conduct their own work. For those who work in the informal economy, including in subsistence agriculture and fishing, increased caring responsibilities have decreased the time available for income generating activities; this has weakened families' economic security and made it more difficult to meet immediate needs, including food and housing (Pacific Women 2020, 5).[12] For those who work remotely in professional or civil service jobs while caring for children at home, reductions in productivity may put jobs at risk (UN Women 2020a, 3). The UN has found that as women assume increased care work at home, their jobs will be disproportionately affected by cuts and layoffs, risking already fragile gains in women's labor force participation (United Nations, 2020). In the longer term, this may widen gender gaps in managerial positions, as supervisors promote those who were able to work at full capacity during the pandemic (ADB and UN Women 2018, 3). And while some researchers have found that flexible work arrangements support women's ability to balance competing home and work responsibilities, recent research has shown that women are more likely to be in jobs that are subject to destabilizing, employer-driven flexibility than those with family-friendly, employee driven flexibility (WGEA 2020).[13]

9 Oxfam has found that in rural areas women spend up to 14 hours a day, or 5 times as many hours as men, on unpaid care work (Oxfam 2020, 32).

10 Oxfam has found that in rural areas women spend up to 14 hours a day, or 5 times as many hours as men, on unpaid care work (Oxfam 2020, 32).

11 School closures have affected over 700 million children in the Asia-Pacific region.

12 Female headed households and women living in urban areas may be at particular risk of eviction.

13 McKinsey has argued, for instance that Covid-19's acceleration of remote and independent work "could be a boon for women, who can benefit from the flexibility that such platforms offer, especially for workers in remote, digitally delivered services, such as software, design, or sales and marketing" (Madgavkar et al. 2020,10).

Women's caring duties within the household can also place them at higher risk of contracting Covid-19, as women are expected to care for family members who become sick, including with serious illnesses such as Covid-19. Women in remote or rural areas where there is less access to healthcare may be at particular risk, as it is more likely that they would tend to a sick relative at home.

Girls, too, have been assuming increased caring duties in the context of the pandemic, affecting their participation and achievement in school, as well as their future educational and job prospects. NGOs and UN agencies have reported that adolescent girls who would normally be in school have been given the responsibility of caring for younger siblings during the period of home-based distance learning (Pacific Women 2020, 3). Oxfam has found that girls who undertake substantial care work have lower rates of school attendance (Oxfam 2020), and UNICEF has flagged the significant risk of adolescent girls dropping out of school under these circumstances (Alleman et al. 2020). According to UNESCO, there are now 11 million girls globally who risk never returning to school as a result of the education disruption caused by Covid-19. Leaving school puts these girls at increased risk of early pregnancy and forced marriage, as well as violence and poverty. It also has pronounced impacts on their own future economic prospects; according to UNESCO, one year of school can increase a girl's adult earnings by 20 percent (UNESCO 2020).

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence is a human rights violation and one of the leading public health crises in the Pacific, where it occurs at nearly twice the global rate. Approximately two-thirds of women in Fiji, Vanuatu, and Kiribati have reported physical or sexual violence by a partner in their lifetimes.[14] Violence against women has also been an entrenched feature of conflict in the region, with rape and sexual violence perpetrated as weapons of war and conflict in Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands, and Bougainville (Leslie and Boso 2003). Research has found that violence within families rises dramatically after disasters and during crises (Pacific Women 2020), and crisis centers across the Pacific have documented a surge in the number of GBV reports since the start of the Covid-19 crisis.[15] Fiji's Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation reported on May 4 that "close to 50 percent of women are reporting a correlation between Covid-19 and increased violence, linked directly to the restrictions of movement and economic strain on families" (MWCPA, 2020). These reports are coming both from existing crisis center clients, who report increased violence, as well as from new clients, who are experiencing violence for the first time in the context of Covid-19 (UN Women, 2020b). Compounding the problem, mobility restrictions and economic pressure as a result of the pandemic are making it more difficult for survivors to leave abusive situations.

In addition to the profound psychological and health impacts of GBV, violence also has a significant impact on women's participation in the labor market. A 2019 IFC study of GBV's impact on the

14 According to the Global Database on Violence against Women, rates are as follows: Fiji – 64 percent; Vanuatu –60 percent; and Kiribati – 68 percent.

15 In Fiji, the national domestic violence helpline recorded 87 calls in February, 187 in March, and 527 in April. Samoa has seen a 150 percent increase in helpline calls, and Tonga a 54 percent increase (UN Women 2020b).

workplace in Solomon Islands found that one in three employees surveyed had experienced domestic or sexual violence in the 12 months preceding the survey and that this violence significantly impacted their ability to get to work, stay at work, and how they felt while they were at work (IFC 2019). Of those respondents who had experienced violence in the past year, 63 percent of women and 55 percent of men reported feeling anxious, depressed, or ashamed while at work; 34 percent reported feeling unsafe at work; and one in five said they were currently working in the same workplace as the perpetrator (IFC 2019). GBV can cause a victim to skip work in order to avoid the shame of inquiries from co-workers (UN Women 2011; IFC 2019) and can hamper workplace productivity through higher employee turnover and resignations without notice (UN Women 2020a).[16] A UN expert group on GBV and the workplace found that GBV drives greater economic and social inequalities worldwide and enables the perpetuation of negative stereotypes about women's inability to fully participate in the labor force (UN Women 2011).

Skills Mismatch

Labor markets in the Pacific Islands are characterized by an overabundance of unskilled workers and shortages of workers with technical, managerial, and professional skills. Most technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs in the region do not provide students with the requisite skills to match local skilled employment needs,[17] in part because industry associations and employers are not adequately involved in the development of training curricula (ILO 2017a). Moreover, tertiary and TVET programs are not imparting a level of fluency with technology that is increasingly essential across sectors, particularly in the wake of Covid-19, which is accelerating the use of technology for work. An ILO rapid assessment of the impacts of Covid-19 on employment and business found that three out of ten enterprises surveyed in Fiji reported needing new skills from workers due to operational changes resulting from Covid-19 (ILO 2020d). The ILO has also found a shortage in "generic workplace skills" in Pacific Island countries, including communication and presentation skills in English and local languages, information technology, critical thinking, problem solving, professionalism, and punctuality; this leads the local labor force to be less competitive for higher paying jobs in industry and services compared to workers from other countries (ILO 2017a, 8). Structural constraints relating to the small size of the Pacific Islands labor markets are also a factor, as there is a disincentive to both students and teachers to train in a highly technical area for which there are few local jobs available.

Thus despite high unemployment locally, large numbers of workers are brought in from other countries (including the Philippines and India) to fill skilled and managerial positions in Pacific Island countries, with the largest number of foreign workers in PNG and Palau (ILO 2017a, 12). The availability of foreign workers to fill these positions acts as a further disincentive for employers to invest in upskilling the local labor force (ILO 2017a, vi).

16 A workplace study in China found that GBV survivors missed an average of 15 workdays, took 11 days of personal leave, and/or arrived late or left early from work five times over the course of a year (UN Women 2020a,2).

17 Kiribati stands out as a notable example where TVET has been upgraded and aligned with international standards, and successful apprenticeship schemes have been implemented in Fiji and PNG.

At the same time, thousands of workers from the Pacific Islands go abroad each year for seasonal or temporary work in Australia and New Zealand through regulated labor migration schemes, with most migrants originating in Vanuatu, Tonga, and Samoa (ILO 2017a). Male migrants work primarily in horticulture and viticulture, while female migrants are overwhelmingly employed in service sector positions such as caring, housekeeping, and food and beverage work. Migration has been an outlet for the oversupply of labor, and a number of Pacific Island governments have put in place policies and skilling programs that explicitly prepare workers for overseas employment in identified industries including aged care, hospitality, tourism, and construction.[18]

Brain drain is also a concern, however, particularly in areas such as education and healthcare, where there is a skill need within Pacific Island countries. Substantial numbers of skilled workers leave Fiji and Polynesian countries each year; a 2015 OECD report found that 34 percent of those with tertiary education emigrated from Fiji (ILO 2017a, 12). Permanent migration of medical professionals out of the Pacific Islands has affected the provision of health services in several Pacific Island countries, and the construction industry, tourism management, and professional services have also suffered from the emigration of skilled workers (ILO 2019b). Brain drain is less severe, however, in the case of temporary and seasonal migration, as these migrants tend to bring skills gained abroad back for use in the domestic labor market (ILO 2017a, 45).

Challenges Associated with Technological Innovation

The digital gender gap has been increasing in the Asia-Pacific region since 2013, and as Covid-19 accelerates the use of technology for communication and work, Pacific women risk being left behind (UN Women 2020a, 2). The Pacific Islands region has the lowest rate of mobile internet penetration of any world region, at just 18 percent (GSMA 2019), with access significantly lower among women, particularly those in remote and rural areas (CARE 2020; Curry et al 2016). A study of mobile phone use among market sellers in PNG found that the uptake and use of mobile phones reflected existing patterns of gender inequality, with women in matrilineal East New Britain showing higher levels of phone adoption and use than men, while the opposite pattern was seen in patrilineal Western Highlands Province (Curry et al. 2016). According to CARE, women's mobile use in the Pacific is circumscribed by gender norms dictating that males should control access to information within the household, and mobile phone use by female family members has been used as a rationale for GBV (CARE 2020, 9). Women's limited access to information via mobile text messaging or radio is a significant constraint to knowledge of or engagement in training, employment, and other economic opportunities (CARE 2020, 9). Moreover, limited access to mobile phones could reduce women's access to financial services (for instance through mobile money transfers), a particular concern in the context of Covid-19 where social distancing measures may affect women's access to community-based savings clubs (CARE 2020).

18 Examples of such skilling programs include APTC's Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu and PNG Programs that provide recognized qualifications in Australia in the areas of hospitality and tourism, automotive,construction, manufacturing and electrical services, and health and community service.

Women are substantially underrepresented in STEM education and STEM fields in the Pacific Islands, and the ADB, ILO, and others have warned that without proactive measures to bring women into science and technology training, most women will be excluded from emerging opportunities in the green economy and other technology-driven fields (ADB, 2015; ILO 2017a). More broadly, women are not gaining the facility with technology that is increasingly required across all fields, including in service sector positions where women are highly concentrated. Trends such as automation and digitalization are putting further pressure on women's labor force participation, as these disproportionately affect the sorts of routine jobs that are overwhelmingly occupied by women (Estrada et al., 2020; UN Women 2020a). Jobs at risk of automation include lower-skilled jobs requiring physical labor in predictable environments, such as assembly line work, food preparation, and packaging (ILO and ADB, 2017). The threat that these jobs will be automated may increase in the wake of Covid-19, as firms face pressure to reduce costs and restructure to account for new constraints on human interaction and risk mitigation protocols (Karr et al, 2020).

While there is not yet significant evidence of automation in Pacific Island countries, studies have found that the mining and garment industries are highly susceptible to automation in the near future (ILO and ADB 2017, 145). Mining is an important economic sector for several Pacific Island countries, accounting for the largest share of GDP in PNG and for the bulk of Nauru's economy. Most of the low or medium-skilled jobs in mining are held by local male workers, while managerial and professional positions are predominately filled by foreigners. According to McKinsey, up to 96 percent of all mining jobs could be eliminated as a result of automation (Chui et al, 2015), with low-skilled jobs at greatest risk. As these jobs are eliminated, new higher-skilled technical and professional jobs are expected to emerge, for instance, in data processing, equipment maintenance, and systems and process analysis (ILO and ADB, 2017). If the local workforce is to benefit from the higher salaries and better working conditions that these emerging jobs will provide, they will need to undertake training to gain the requisite technical skills.

Women Countering Technology Barriers

Pacific women's groups, networks, and movements have been at the forefront of efforts to improve women's access to information, particularly in remote areas, through the use of technology. FemLINKpacific has brought portable "suitcase radio" technology to women across Fiji, enabling them to discuss important issues that affect them, while reaching a national radio audience that includes female decision-makers. As part of the program, Fijian women improve their media literacy and technical skills through the use of technology tools to access and produce news. FemLINKpacific's Women's Weather Watch program engages a network of women across Fiji, including in remote and rural communities, to use technology to communicate weather patterns and warnings to those who otherwise would not have real-time access to this information as an inclusive early warning system for storms and disasters.

Fiji's garment sector is also at risk of large-scale automation as a result of technological innovations. While the mining workforce is overwhelmingly male, the garment industry employs large numbers of Pacific women in low-skilled positions that are at risk of elimination. These women are already being affected by layoffs linked to supply chain disruptions and the significant drop in global demand since the start of the Covid-19 crisis. Technologies such as 3D printing, virtual fitting, and automated sewing and cutting machines are already making operations jobs obsolete (ILO and ADB 2017, 147). The ILO has found that the Fiji garment sector can remain competitive if it upgrades its workers' skills to keep pace with the industry's changing requirements, for instance by skilling workers to operate, service, and maintain new textile, clothing, and footwear technologies (ILO and ADB 2017, 147). Without this focused upskilling of the workforce as technologies evolve, however, low-skilled jobs will be at risk of automation and the industry as a whole will be at risk of falling behind competitors in Southeast Asia and China.

If policy responses and investments are not property targeted to address accelerating trends in technology as well as systemic gender inequalities, technological advances will likely deepen inequalities in labor force participation and in the types of jobs women perform. With proper skilling and policy interventions, however, the Pacific is poised to take advantage of emerging opportunities in a number of fields where jobs are being created through innovation. This includes in the fields of green building, outsourcing, organic agriculture, and mobile health.

EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Domestic Employment Creation

Technological innovations are enabling the creation of new industries and employment opportunities across the Pacific. While climate change threatens large numbers of jobs in agriculture, fishing, and tourism, innovative adaption and mitigation measures have the potential to create new types of employment that improve resource efficiency and resilience. These include new green business opportunities in the areas of food production (including organic farming), renewable energy, green building, recycling, and waste management. As most innovation is concentrated in high income countries, Pacific Island countries will rely on technology transfer (ILO 2019a, 24) and must ensure upskilling so that the local workforce has the requisite skills to take advantage of these technologies.

Agriculture is an important area of focus for skilling and green job creation, as it is the largest employer in the region and also a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. Government policies supporting sustainable agriculture can create formal agricultural employment, help small-scale farmers diversify income sources, and strengthen food security while improving resource use. Niche high-value, low-volume agricultural products such as coconut, vanilla, cosmetics, spices, and nuts have already demonstrated success that can be built upon and replicated. Creating linkages between sustainable agriculture and

tourism also holds potential for increased employment in the medium-term once tourism rebounds. With regard to fishing, regional efforts to raise and enforce standards since 2015 have led to more effective management of fish stocks and ocean resources, while creating safer, formalized empoyment for Pacific Islanders on fishing vessels and in seafood processing plants (which are primarily staffed by women). The formalization and oversight of the industry not only supports better quality jobs, but also provides value-add, for instance through the TraSeable platform that enables verification and traceability of seafood products throughout the value chain (ILO, 2019; GSMA 2019).[19]

In the area of green building, new jobs can be created in the construction of climate-resilient houses and infrastructure, including sea walls and other barriers against natural hazards. Renewable energy jobs can be created around the installation and maintence of solar panels and in training positions to support their use. While green jobs offer an excellent opportunity for job creation linked to technological advancement, it is important to note that employment gains in climate change mitigation and adaption currently occur in male-dominated fields (including renewables, manufacturing, and construction). Without proactive policy measures and gender-responsive training regimes, the creation of green jobs could actually widen gender gaps in labor force participation (ILO 2019a, 32). A 2019 ADB pilot project led by Habitat for Humanity demonstrated the effectiveness of training women in green building practices as a means of income generation and improved job security, successfully bringing more women into permanent employment within this male-dominated field. At the same time, course participants noted that they wanted to be involved not just in the construction of houses, but also in their design, to ensure that housing designs were gender-responsive. As policymakers and industry work to expand the green economy, it is essential that gender-responsive policy measures be put in place to steer job creation and ensure job readiness among Pacific Islanders of all genders.

The World Bank has identified Global Outsourcing Services (GOS) as another emerging industry for employment creation within Pacific Island countries, particularly for women and youth. Fiji already has a small GOS industry, employing just over 1000 people in 2015, and this industry experience, coupled with Fiji's relatively high level of internet connectivity, proximity to large markets in Australia and New Zealand, and substantial pool of young labor makes it competitive for expansion of the industry. Samoa and Tonga also have potential for the development of new jobs in GOS, but connectivity, infrastructure, and experience make them less ready than Fiji (Beschorner et al. 2015). Pacific Island countries are likely to be most competitive in the areas of online outsourcing, where tasks are performed over the Internet by workers using online marketplaces or exchanges, with tasks ranging from data entry and other low complexity tasks to higher complexity work including software development and accounting (Beschorner et al. 2015). The ILO notes, however, that despite significant opportunity for job creation in GOS the near term, jobs in this industry are also at risk of automation in the medium-term, ultimately limiting job prospects; this trend is already evident in countries such as India and the Philippines (ILO 2017a, 32).

19 The Covid-19 crisis which has rendered hundreds of thousands of Pacific Islanders unemployed without protection has underscored the importance of working to formalize the vast numbers of workers in the informal economy.

Localization

Currently, large numbers of technical, managerial, and professional jobs in the Pacific Islands are held by workers from outside the region, with significant numbers from India and the Philippines. As discussed in the skills mismatch section, the use of foreign labor to fill skilled positions in the Pacific Islands is rooted in a number of factors, from the relatively low quality of local TVET, to mismatches between the training provided locally and local business needs, to permanent emigration among a substantial proportion of the skilled workforce (primarily to Australia and New Zealand). Pacific Island industries reliant on skilled foreign workers include hospitality and tourism; construction and infrastructure; agriculture, forestry, and fishing; and mining (ILO 2019b). There are particularly large numbers of foreign workers in PNG in the mining sector and significant numbers across several industries in Fiji; in Palau and Cook Islands, the foreign workforce is primarily employed in tourism and is notably large compared to the local population (ILO 2019b).

The significant numbers of foreign workers employed in technical, managerial, and professional positions indicates that Pacific Islanders have not been able to take advantage of the local employment opportunities that currently exist. The presence of a substantial foreign workforce further serves as a disincentive to employers to upskill local workers (ILO 2017a, 22). Improving the prospects for local workers to access higher-level positions will require training that is aligned with labor market needs within the tourism, mining, construction, and other growth industries. It also requires that governments enforce existing policies and regulations that require foreign companies operating in the region to train and employ local workers (Voigt-Graf 2016b).

While tourism in particular has severely contracted in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is expected that this industry will rebound in the coming years; this interim period could be used as an opportunity for improved skilling to meet the needs of the industry in the medium-term. Policymakers may also consider proactive policies that earmark a percentage of jobs in growth industries for local workers[20] as part of redevelopment plans post-Covid or as part of broader workforce or national development plans.

Labor Migration

Overseas demand for workers in the areas of aged care, health, tourism, and hospitality offer important opportunities for lower skilled female workers from the Pacific Islands. New Zealand and Australia are the major destination for temporary and seasonal labor migrants from the Pacific, and Pacific Islanders (primarily men) fill seasonal labor shortages in the agricultural sector. In the past few years, opportunities for seasonal and temporary employment beyond agriculture have emerged, including lower-skilled jobs in Northern Australia in tourism, hospitality, and other industries under the Pacific Microstates–

20 An employment quota has been used in the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), whereby several Pacific Island countries collaboratively manage tuna stocks through regional cooperation. The PNA includes a crew requirement that PNA nationals constitute half of fishing crews, with fees levied to ships that do not meet these requirements (ILO 2017a, 28-29).

Northern Australia Worker Pilot Programme (NAWPP) and temporary migration for up to three years in low- and semi-skilled jobs in rural and regional Australia under the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS). The PLS is open to all sectors and industries, with an initial focus on accommodation and food services; healthcare and social assistance; and non-seasonal agriculture, forestry, and fishing (ILO 2019b, 15). Women's participation in these migration schemes is lower than men's but has grown substantially under the PLS; in 2019, 39 percent of PLS workers were female. Notably, migrants' work is highly gendered, with women representing 100 percent of workers in aged care and men representing 100 percent of workers in meat processing, forestry, and fishing/aquaculture (Howes and Lawton, 2019). Cultural norms,

Figure 3: Number of Migrant Workers in Pacific Island Countries, 2017

Pacific Island State	Total	Male	Female
Cook Islands	4,213	2,109	2,104
Fiji	13,911	7,508	6,403
Kiribati	3,022	1,594	1,428
Marshall Islands	3,292	2,016	1,276
Fed. States of Micronesia	2,785	1,489	1,296
Palau	4,988	2,831	2,157
Papua New Guinea	32,389	20,558	11,831
Samoa	4,879	2,444	2,435
Solomon Islands	2,532	1,421	1,111
Tonga	4,952	2,691	2,261
Tuvalu	143	79	64
Vanuata	3,245	1,612	1,633

Source: IUNDESA, Population Division, n.d.

including the expectation that women be available to support the family in person, coupled with perceived vulnerabilities to women migrants in terms of saftety and security contribute to the lower proportion of female migrants. It is also worth noting that female migrants to Australia and New Zealand earn less on average than their male counterparts, despite the fact that they have higher levels of education and remit more (World Bank 2017).

The experience that women migrants gain over the course of their work abroad, together with the money they remit to their families, makes migration an important economic strategy for many women and households. Remittances not only reduce economic pressure on the household in the immediate term, enabling investments in education and other priorities for socioeconomic advancement, but the skills that women gain through work overseas can used for higher-level employment upon return to the Pacific. These skills include more advanced technical skills, as well as soft skills that can be put to use for entrepreneurship or management. Indeed, because current

migration schemes are temporary and seasonal, there is not a substantial risk of "brain drain"; on the contrary, the skills gained through migration are likely to be brought back for use in the domestic labor market in the future (ILO 2017a, 45). Policy efforts to harness the skills of returning migrants can further reduce the risk of brain drain while capturing and building upon these skills for increased employment and economic growth.

APPROACHES FOR INCREASING WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Targeted Skills Development

Given high unemployment in Pacific Island countries, particularly among women, coupled with the large number of technical, managerial, and professional positions filled by migrants from outside the region, it is essential that a systematic program of skills development be undertaken to meet current employment needs and prepare workers for projected job growth in the next 5-10 years. Skilling programs should ensure that workers gain skills in the following areas:

- Technical and vocational skills in areas of projected domestic employment creation (see detailed discussed in Section III), including sustainable agriculture and fishing, green design and building, and other emerging industries within the green economy.
- ICT skills to enable participation in employment across all sectors, as well as more specialized skills, for instance in software engineering, for emerging opportunities in online outsourcing.[21] Skills currently needed include digital literacy, virtual collaboration, cognitive load management, computational thinking, design, and adaptive thinking. ICT skills can provide new remote work opportunities on islands such as Fiji where better infrastructure is in place. Skilling programs must recognize the gender digital divide as a starting point and include gender-responsive measures to ensure women's participation and acquisition of key skills.
- Vocational skills in sectors in which there is current overseas demand, including aged care/ nursing, tourism/hospitality, construction, agriculture, and seafaring, with a particular focus on those areas in which there is projected future domestic demand.
- Managerial skills, with particular focus on tourism and other industries in which a high number of management positions are currently filled by overseas workers.

21 Speaking at the Pacific Skills Forum in Suva, Fiji (June 26, 2019), Dr. Claire Nelson offered the following list of jobs of the future for the Pacific: mobility platform manager, criminal redirection officer, commercial drone polit, smart building technician, 3D print construction, marine spatial planner, blue biotech engineer, virtual reality designer (including for tourism), space tourism guide, sea bed mining robot operator, and personal privacy advisor.

- Workplace skills, including communication skills, English proficiency (where applicable), and professionalism.
- Enpreneurial skills, including business training and financial education that includes linkages to financial services.

Entrepreneurship training should not be limited to business students, but should be a cross-cutting training area; given the large number of workers currently in the informal economy in the Pacific, entrepreneurship training is an important means of supporting workers to gain access to employment (ILO 2017a). Increasing access to financial services through entrepreneurship training will also address one of the primary constraints to women's entrepreneurial activity in the Pacific (ADB 2018, 324).

Where possible, policymakers should identify areas of overlap between domestic and overseas demand – for instance in construction, healthcare (especially nursing and aged care), and tourism. This will enable Pacific workers who train for overseas migration to ultimately bring technical and professional skills back to the Pacific, improving their own local job prospects and potentially creating new businesses that employ and transfer skills to the local workforce.

It is important to note that skilling programs must be part of a holistic strategy, including a policy framework that supports the creation of jobs in focus skilling areas and incentives for local businesses who employ, retain, and train local staff. Ongoing education for workers will be essential for competitiveness, and employers should be encouraged to invest in continued skills development of workers.

Education and TVET Reform, including Linkages with Industry

Raising the skill level of Pacific workers to meet current and emerging labor market needs requires continued improvement in the quality and relevance of educational and training programs. As recently as 2017, the ILO found weaknesses in training programs ranging from the use of outdated equipment and course content, to low quality of teachers, to mismatches between the skills taught and labor market needs (ILO 2017a, 8). Over the past few years, there has been remarkable investment in TVET and skill training by Pacific Islands governments as well as by New Zealand and Australia aimed at providing students with the technical, professional, and managerial skills to assume jobs currently available in the local labor market and prepare them for future opportunities. The Pacific Skills Partnership, launched in 2018, is a region-led vehicle for collaborating on skills-based, tangible outcomes in alignment with the Pacific Regional Education Framework and the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. The inaugural Pacific Skills Summit, held in 2019, brought policymakers and practitioners together to focus on improving and leveraging TVET, including through the Australia Pacific Training Coalition (APTC), to improve employment among Pacific Islanders and meet the skilled labor market needs of Pacific Rim countries. As education and TVET reform continues, increased linkages with industry will be essential, both through industry input into curricula (particularly for TVET institutions), as well as opportunities for on-the-job training and apprenticeships with pathways to formal employment for students upon graduation. Given the relatively small labor market in the Pacific Islands, regional training approaches should be used to meet

training needs in niche areas with potential job growth, such as green building for climate resilience, so that a cohort of Pacific Island workers, trainers, and entrepreneurs can fill immediately available positions and further expand these emerging areas of the economy across islands.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide gender-responsive support to the industries hardest hit by Covid-19.

Women are disproportionately employed in the industries that have been hit hardest by Covid-19, so policy efforts to bolster and rebuild these industries must take account of the unique barriers that women face as a result of the crisis (including increased care duties and domestic work) to ensure that these women's livelihoods are not ultimately lost in the transition. Cash transfers to small business owners, market vendors, and women working in services, for instance, can help mitigate the worst impacts of the crisis by ensuring that these women do not fall into poverty, which can in turn threaten food security, housing, and education in the household and thus widen existing inequalities. Gender-responsive recovery programs should also be established for SMEs, given the disproportionate impact of the crisis on SMEs, particularly those owned by women, and the substantial number of women employed in SMEs in the Pacific.

Expand protection measures to bolster the care economy and support informal workers.

As the economic impact of Covid-19 continues to reverberate through Pacific Island economies, social protection measures should be expanded to include support to informal workers and bolster the care economy (ILO 2020a; Gentilini et al. 2020). In the context of the ongoing pandemic, social protection measures could include:

- Extending and expanding social protection programs that offer cash payments and paid family leave to families who have to stop wage-earning work to care for family members during pandemic-related closures;
- Subsidies to care centers to help them adjust safety measures and stay open during the pandemic;
- Cash transfers that extend to informal workers; and
- Collection and reporting of sex-disaggregated data about the use of these programs.

It is also important that labor laws be extended to cover informal workers if they currently do not. Under international law, informal workers have many of the same rights as formal workers. Ensuring that all workers are covered by labor protections will help reduce the risk of exploitative working conditions, non-payment of wages, and child labor, as evidence mounts that Covid-19 is pushing informal workers into increasingly precarious work arrangements.

Develop policies that help transition informal workers to formal status.

Covid-19 has laid bare the vulnerability of informal workers, the majority of whom are women, to shocks. As governments plan for economic recovery in the wake of Covid-19, policymakers should consider long-term strategies for moving significant numbers of workers who are currently in informal employment – particularly those in the garment industry and other industries at risk of automation – into formal employment. Those in formal status will not only contribute to government revenues through the payment of taxes, but will also be more resilient to future shocks (given better social and labor protections), supporting greater productivity. An important part of this effort is awareness building among women in the informal economy of the benefits of formalizing a business, including access to legal protections and opportunities such as insurance, national provident funds, and commercial loans (ADB 2018, 325). Recognizing the scale of the informal economy in the Pacific Islands, including the large number of informal workers in agriculture, the transition toward a larger formal economy will take time, and it is imperative that social and labor protection measures be expanded to include informal workers in the interim, as outlined in the recommendation above. Trade unions, workers associations, and agricultural and other cooperatives can serve as important avenues for strengthening protections and bargaining power among workers, including those in the informal economy, to ensure dignity and equality in work. Supporting large businesses or business associations to enter into contracts with informal women-owned MSMEs or women farmers and fishers is another means of increasing the financial security of these women in informal work (ADB 2018).

Develop an enabling environment for women's labor force participation through policies and programs that support work-life balance, including quality childcare.

The creation of a professionalized caring industry – including childcare, aged care, and disabilities support – that includes public sector financing would enable many women with caring duties to enter the workforce, while creating new formal sector employment for the staff of these centers (Madgavkar et al. 2020, 10). Policies such as parental leave, flexible work arrangements for those who prefer to work from home or to work non-standard hours, and mentoring for women going through a transition can increase women's labor force participation and representation in management (World Economic Forum 2016).

Ensure that women experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) have access to assistance and that gender norms perpetuating violence are addressed.

Gender-based violence has a profound impact on women's ability to participate in many aspects of life, including work. Given the high levels of GBV across the Pacific region, ensuring that women have comprehensive access to GBV services, including financial resources, is essential for supporting women to enter and remain in the labor force. Workforce policies that assist those who are experiencing GBV are also important, including respect for confidentiality, prevention and awareness training for staff, and flexibility

in the provision of leave and benefits (UN Women 2011). It is also essential to address the norms and behaviors that enable and perpetuate GBV, including through targeted programs focused on behavioral change among boys and men.[22]

Reform education and TVET institutions toward improved labor market participation.

Educational and training institutions in the Pacific Islands should consider reforms that will increase the employability of their graduates by bringing teaching more in line with current labor market needs. Prior to implementing reforms, labor market assessments should be undertaken to account for any changes in demand (locally or overseas) in the wake of Covid-19. As part of reforms, policies and procedures should be put in place to increase the involvement of industry in curriculum development so that educational insitutions can better ensure that their programs meet market needs. Reforms should be part of a broader policy platform designed to prepare workers to take on jobs currently available in the local marketplace, as well as those that will be created in the medium term through technological advances and the expansion of the green economy. Reform in support of green jobs and other technology-driven sectors will need to focus on the establishment of a cohort of teachers and trainers in emerging areas, while providing for the skilling of youth and women in these areas. Regional approaches should be used to meet training needs in these and other niche areas with potential job growth.

Increase women's participation in STEM education and employment.

Policy measures should be put in place to ensure that greater numbers of women enter STEM fields and develop the qualifications to enter skilled employment in green jobs and other emerging fields. McKinsey has found that long-established barriers that women face in acquiring new skills and making transitions midcareer make the transition to new forms of employment more difficult for women, necessitating gender-responsive interventions (Madgavkar et al. 2020, 5). Proactive measures such as the establishment of a STEM equity fund could help close the gender gap in STEM. The fund could take a holistic, lifecycle, pathway-focused approach to supporting women and girls to engage and excel in STEM fields. The fund could offer scholarships, leadership development, networking, mentoring, and career counseling for students. It could also help support digitalization of women-owned SMEs and provide seed-funding for women-led start-ups in STEM fields. Programs under the fund could include combatting discrimination and bias in the hiring and promotion of women in STEM-focused enterprises, initiatives to combat cyber-harassment and other forms of technology-facilitated GBV, and women's leadership in underrepresented fields. Another important measure for increasing women's employment in STEM fields is employer socialization, which can include programs focused on employers to help them better understand the value that women contribute to their profession and any targeted recruiting, onboarding, or employee support that would help attract and retain women employees. Employer socialization efforts can be furthered

22 The Asia Foundation's Gender Lab Boys Program which works to change attitudes, beliefs, and behavior by engaging boys to question existing norms through group discussions and engagement with their own communities has been highly successful in India and can be adapted for use in the Pacific Islands context.

through the establishment of apprenticeship programs or hiring incentives that help employers bring women directly into STEM positions.

Incentivize businesses to hire local workers in industries with substantial foreign labor forces.

In tandem with policies supporting education reform and skilling to meet local labor market needs, governments can consider policies that incentivize businesses to fill available jobs with local workers (with women equally represented), or restrictions whereby businesses need to prove that no citizen is available to fill a particular position before hiring an overseas worker.

Invest in returning migrants, including through support for entrepreurialism.

High numbers of skilled migrants permanently emigrate from the Pacific Islands each year, contributing to brain drain. In order to capture the skills that Pacific Islanders gain through seasonal and temporary migration to Australia and New Zealand, Pacific Island governments should consider incentive programs that provide financial support and entrepreneurship training to migrants who want to start businesses upon their return, particularly in industries where there is local need, such as construction and healthcare. In this way, skills gained overseas will be captured locally, and returning migrants will contribute to job creation at home.

Establish government procurement programs that increase opportunities for women- and minority-owned SMEs, and incentivize firms to adopt non-discriminatory employment policies.

Proactive policies and gender-responsive budgeting are essential elements of an enabling environment for women's business to gain traction, particularly in male-dominated industries. Procurement policies that encourage contracting and sub-contracting with women-owned businesses (particularly those from disadvantaged groups) will help drive an inclusive growth model in the Covid-19 transition economy. Governments can introduce incentives such as certification for firms that adopt non-discriminatory employment policies and practices, with those firms receiving additional points in government procurement tenders.

Invest in digital infrastructure in gender-responsive ways.

As Pacific Island countries seek to expand their digital readiness in infrastructure, workforce development, cybersecurity, and other areas, it is essential that governments prioritize expansion of infrastructure to areas where women lag behind men in access and use and assess the potential and realized impact of such initiatives on different demographic groups, including women and others who have been excluded from the digital economy.

Promote shared caring and household responsibilities through public information campaigns.

Given the increased caring and home-based workload women have taken on in the context of Covid-19, governments can support women and help increase female labor force participation through public campaigns that address attitudinal biases regarding gender roles.[23] Women should be involved in the development and design of awareness materials, and imagery should depict men and women working together to share household and caring work, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for children.

Ensure women's leadership in planning and implementation.

As governments plan for changes in the nature of work in the wake of Covid-19 and the context of technological innovation, it is essential that women play an active role in leadership bodies on education, training, labor relations, social protection, economic development, and other relevant areas for planning. NGO leaders, women's groups and networks, women's business councils, and other stakeholders with detailed knowledge of women's economic engagement – including in the informal economy – should be represented on these bodies. As governments develop new policies and plans for labor and social protections, having women at the helm will help ensure that work in essential industries such as education, healthcare, and social assistance where women are disproportionately employed is appropriately valued.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide upskilling opportunities for women.

Governments, educational institutions, and development actors must take proactive steps to ensure that reskilling and upskilling programs are reaching women workers whose jobs have been displaced during the Covid-19 economic downturn, including workers in the informal economy. In order to ensure that women are not left behind as the economy adapts in the wake of the pandemic, it is essential that quick action be taken to train women in ICT and create pathways for women to be integrated into jobs reliant on technology. There is an immediate opportunity for skilling of workers who are currently unemployed, particularly those in industries such as tourism that have severely contracted and where jobs are not likely to be added in the near term. Skill-building programs can focus on technology, nursing, construction and other skills where demand has not substantially waned during Covid-19, and where there is significant potential for job growth in the coming years. Reskilling and upskilling training programs must be paired with childcare, eldercare, and disability support and subsidies so that mothers and others with caring duties are able to participate.

23 One recent example, the #HeforSheAtHome challenge launched by UN Women's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific encourages men and boys to take on greater caring and household responsibilities and challenges them to raise awareness on gender inequality by sharing their most creative moments completing household work.

Women's limited access to information via mobile phone or through community meetings (which men generally attend) are significant constraints to knowledge about training opportunities (CARE 2020); it is essential that women directly receive information on opportunities and that these opportunities be formulated in such a way that households will agree to women's participation.

Provide entrepreneurship training for SMEs and for women entrepreneurs in the informal economy.

Development programs and educational institutions can provide training for micro and small entrepreneurs focused on the green economy, GOS, or other industries poised to grow in the coming years and can support networking among women entrepreneurs engaged in these industries. Trainings can focus on a particular growth industry, while providing general business training, financial education, and access to financing. Support and mentoring can be provided for informal workers in the group to help them move toward formal SME ownership. Mentoring can also be established to help women entrepreneurs and women-owned SMEs capitalize on specific business opportunities that have emerged in the wake of the pandemic, including in remote services for business, healthcare, and social services. Support can be provided to women's small business associations and incubators to apply to digitalization grants for women entrepreneurs that provide instruction on how to better use technology to improve business outcomes.

Support monitoring through a gender lens.

Development actors can establish or support programs whereby local civil society organizations (CSOs), especially women's organizations, monitor and report on public implementation of Covid-19 responses through a gender lens, including differential impacts of policies and implementation across genders. CSOs can then use this data for advocacy toward improved gender outcomes.

Support local advocacy for an improved enabling environment for women's work.

In tandem with policy measures to support women's labor force participation, development actors can support local NGOs, women's rights organizations, workers' collectives, think tanks, and others to conduct research and advocacy on the importance of work-life balance for women's labor force participation, including through the availability of quality childcare options. Advocacy efforts could include a range of interventions from media campaigns highlighting women's unpaid care work, to direct advocacy with government for improved parental benefits, to programmatic interventions targeting boys and men toward greater involvement in household work.

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