

PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Inquiry into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

November 2021
CANBERRA

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Chair's Foreword

For many decades, Australians have reached out to our Pacific Island neighbours through a range of government and non-government activities.

The Australian government has sought to enhance and expand this engagement through its Pacific Step-up, which was announced in September 2016.

This report examines Australia's important ongoing role in the Pacific in the light of the Step-up. In particular, it focuses on the role of civil society, the advancement of the human rights of women and girls, and the effectiveness of Australia's overseas development assistance programs in supporting these rights.

The Committee acknowledges the considerable efforts of national governments in the Pacific nations. Our recommendations seek to build on the strength of their efforts and to propose means whereby Australia can further assist local efforts.

We acknowledge the invaluable work undertaken by many civil society organisations and the people-to-people assistance they render.

Women and girls are continuing to shape their societies for the better. We trust that our recommendations will encourage their continuing commitment to supporting peaceful, resilient and happy communities throughout the Pacific.

The Hon Kevin Andrews MP
Chair
Human Rights Sub-Committee

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Abbreviations

ACFID	Australian Council for International Development
ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
ANU	Australian National University
AQC	(DFAT) Aid Quality Check
CARE Australia	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CBM Australia	Christian Blind Mission
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	(OECD) Development Assistance Committee
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DPA	(ANU) Department of Pacific Affairs
DPO	Disabled People's Organisation
FWF	Fiji Women's Fund
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
HDI	Human Development Index
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency

JSCFADT	Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
LRSJ	(ANU) Law Reform and Social Justice Research Hub
NGO	Non-Government Organisations
NSW	New South Wales
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODE	(DFAT) Office of Development Effectiveness
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PACER Plus	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations
PICQ	Pacific Islands Council QLD
PIFS	Pacific Island Forum Secretariat
PLS	Pacific Labour Scheme
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PWO	Pacific Women's Organisation
SPC	Pacific Community
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SOGIE	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression
ToT	Training of Trainers
UAF A&P	Urgent Action Fund Asia & the Pacific
UN	United Nations
UNCTP	United Nations Country Teams in the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

Terms of Reference

Inquiry into the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific

With respect to the status of human rights of women and girls in the Pacific, the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), in particular the Human Rights Sub-Committee shall, in the context of the Pacific Step-up, give particular regard to:

- The role of civil society groups in Pacific islands in responding practically to domestic, family and sexual violence, and other human rights issues such as gender equality;
- The key figures and groups which advance the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific context;
- Engagement of these groups with Australia's Pacific Step-up;
- The effectiveness of Australian overseas development assistance programs in supporting human rights of women and girls; and
- Any related matters.

List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

- 2.27 The Committee recommends that all support provided by the Australian Government to any organisation or bodies undertaking disaster management planning and response work include women representatives.

Recommendation 2

- 2.28 To ensure that an understanding of women's needs in local areas are taken into account, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government works with Pacific governments to build the capacity of local organisations in the Pacific to respond to natural disasters and ensure Pacific women are included in the delivery and evaluations of programs.

Recommendation 3

- 2.29 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government works with Pacific governments to provide support for projects mapping the vulnerabilities experienced by women and girls in the region during disasters.

Recommendation 4

- 3.79 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with the tertiary education sector to maintain networks with alumni from Pacific island countries who have studied in Australia, including women and girls.

Recommendation 5

- 3.80 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to focus diplomatic efforts on the implementation of treaties and other legislation aimed at improving the quality of life for women and girls, including political representation and involvement in decision-making.

Recommendation 6

- 3.81 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to work with Pacific governments on public sector capacity-building work.

Recommendation 7

- 4.87 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government publish an assessment of the progress on building the capacity of local organisations in the Pacific to advance the rights of women and girls.
- 4.88 This should include data about what proportion of funding is provided to local organisations directly, and/or through intermediaries.

Recommendation 8

- 4.89 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with Pacific governments to provide support for the secondary and tertiary education sector within Pacific island countries, including infrastructure for education institutions.

Recommendation 9

- 4.90 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government extends the role of the multi-role vessel to include working in partnership with civil society to support the Pacific Islands.

Recommendation 10

- 5.52 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider long-term funding cycles for official development assistance to be at least five-years.

Recommendation 11

- 5.53 The Committee recommends the Australian Government extend its current five-year commitment to the Pacific Women Lead program to allow for funding cycles of this duration to be provided and to include a target for its gender expenditure.

Recommendation 12

- 5.54 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commit to continuing to undertake and publish strategic, thematic evaluations focusing on substantive human rights issues affecting women and girls.
- 5.55 This should allow evaluations of the full range of official development assistance, and extend evaluations beyond those focused only at the investment or program-level.

Recommendation 13

- 5.56 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government improve monitoring, evaluation and reporting of development assistance programs to ensure transparency and easy access to data, especially including reporting on funding for gender equality and women's empowerment activities in the Pacific.

Recommendation 14

- 5.57 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, on an annual basis, publish data on the disbursements made to organisations for the purpose of gender equality initiatives. This should list the organisations receiving disbursements.

1. Introduction

Context of the inquiry

1.1 The JSCFADT has had a longstanding interest in the rights of women and girls, as well as a commitment to ensuring the promotion of human rights in the Asia-Pacific region. This report is the latest in a series which has considered evidence relating to these issues.

1.2 In December 2019, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Marise Payne, referred an inquiry in the following terms:

With respect to the status of human rights of women and girls in the Pacific, the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), in particular the Human Rights Sub-Committee shall, in the context of the Pacific Step-up, give particular regard to:

- The role of civil society groups in Pacific islands in responding practically to domestic, family and sexual violence, and other human rights issues such as gender equality;
- The key figures and groups which advance the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific context;
- Engagement of these groups with Australia’s Pacific Step-up;
- The effectiveness of Australian overseas development assistance programs in supporting human rights of women and girls; and
- Any related matters.

1.3 Given the focus of the terms on the role of civil society, the Committee has revisited issues from its 2015 report, in particular the mechanisms and frameworks used by the Australian Government to:

- reduce the ‘epidemic of violence experienced by women and girls’; and

- make progress on challenges relating to ‘health, education, economic participation and the involvement of women in community decision-making and political life more broadly.’¹
- 1.4 The inquiry was referred as part of a series of inquiries conducted by Subcommittees of the JSCFADT designed to consider the Pacific Step-up. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) states that ‘the Step-up was first announced at the Pacific Island Forum Leaders’ Meeting in September 2016 as a “step-change” in the way [Australia] would engage the region.’²
- 1.5 The inquiry was announced on 12 February 2020, with submissions to be received by 20 May; the deadline was later extended to August due to the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. Work of the inquiry was subsequently ‘paused’ in recognition of these disruptions on inquiry participants. Additionally, these impacts stretched the limited resources of communities and organisations, as they focused their priorities on the health crisis.
- 1.6 The Committee received 43 submissions. These are listed at Appendix A.
- 1.7 The Committee called for submissions at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and as border closures in our region were enacted. The fast-changing pace of events meant that contributions were received at different stages of the pandemic. Many initiatives under the Pacific Step-up were also disrupted as a result.
- 1.8 A public hearing was held on 18 June 2021, with representatives from DFAT and civil society organisations.

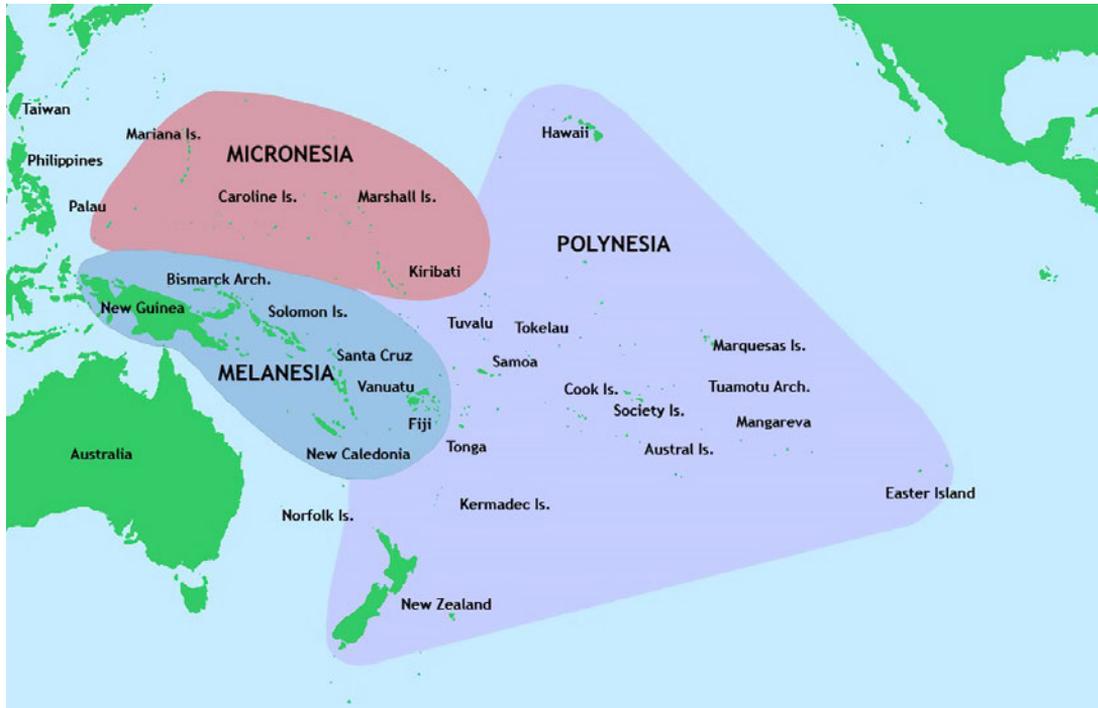
The Pacific islands

- 1.9 A map providing an overview of the Pacific islands can be found at Figure 1.1.

¹ Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), *Empowering Women and Girls*, December 2015, pp. x-xi.

² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), ‘Stepping-up Australia’s engagement with our Pacific family’, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/engagement/stepping-up-australias-pacific-engagement>, viewed 14 July 2021.

Figure 1.1 Three of the major groups of islands in the Pacific Ocean



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pacific_Culture_Areas.png, viewed 12 March 2021.

- 1.10 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) lists 22 nations targeted as part of the Pacific.³ These nations are listed in Table 1.1.
- 1.11 In December 2020, the United Nations Development Programme published its Human Development Index (HDI) statistics.⁴ Not all Pacific island nations were included in this index, with human and gender development indices not calculated for the majority of countries. Table 1.1 includes life expectancy at birth statistics, data that is generally available across Pacific island nations. Table 1.2 lists ranks of Pacific nations where a HDI rank, out of 189 countries, was published.

³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), 'Pacific Step-up', <https://www.dfat.gov.au/countries/pacific-step>, viewed 11 March 2021.

⁴ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2020*, December 2020.

Table 1.1 Population statistics for Pacific island nations

Nation	Total population (2020 Estimate) ⁵	Female population (2020 Estimate) ⁶	Life expectancy at birth, female (2015-20 Estimate) ⁷	Life expectancy at birth, male (2015-20 Estimate) ⁸
American Samoa	55,000		77.72*	72.55*
Cook Islands	18,000		79.88*	74.05*
Fiji	896,000	442,000	69.08	65.60
French Polynesia	281,000	139,000	79.65	75.32
Guam	169,000	84,000	83.30	76.50
Kiribati	119,000	61,000	71.97	63.90
Marshall Islands	59,000		76.76*	72.12*
Micronesia (Fed. States of)	115,000	57,000	69.38	66.07
Nauru	11,000		71.3*	64.06*
New Caledonia	285,000	142,000	80.16	74.66
Niue	2,000			
Northern Mariana Islands	58,000		78.79*	74.22*
Palau	18,000		77.75*	71.19*
Papua New Guinea	8,947,000	4,379,000	65.45	62.94
Pitcairn Island	50			
Samoa	198,000	96,000	75.24	71.13
Solomon Islands	687,000	338,000	74.62	71.11
Tokelau	1,000		72.69	68.83
Tonga	106,000	53,000	78.99*	75.63*
Tuvalu	12,000		70.59*	65.67*
Vanuatu	307,000	151,000	71.90	68.79
Wallis and Futuna Islands	11,000		83.61*	77.44*

⁵ United Nations, 'Total Population by sex (thousands)' in *World Population Prospects 2019*, August 2019.

⁶ United Nations, 'Total Population by sex (thousands)' in *World Population Prospects 2019*, August 2019. Breakdown by sex not available for all nations.

⁷ United Nations, 'Life expectancy at birth'' in *World Population Prospects 2019*, August 2019.

⁸ United Nations, 'Life expectancy at birth'' in *World Population Prospects 2019*, August 2019.

Notes: Items marked with * sourced from World Factbook, 'Life expectancies at birth', <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/life-expectancy-at-birth/>, viewed 15 March 2021. Calculation methodologies may vary depending on data source.

Table 1.2 Human Development Index 2020

Nation	HDI Rank out of 189
Fiji	93
Tonga	104
Samoa	111
Marshall Islands	117
Kiribati	134
Micronesia (Fed. States of)	136
Vanuatu	140
Solomon Islands	151
Papua New Guinea	155

Source: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2020*, December 2020, pp. 16-19.

Previous inquiries and reports

2019 - Australia's aid program in the Indo-Pacific

1.12 In April 2019 the JSCFADT tabled its report into *Australia's aid program in the Indo-Pacific*, and made recommendations relating to the empowerment of women and girls. As at July 2021, a government response is yet to be received.

2015 - Human rights of women and girls in the Indian Ocean–Asia Pacific region

1.13 In the 44th Parliament, the inquiry into *human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region* was referred to the JSCFADT on 28 February 2014 and concluded in December 2015. The Committee heard from a wide range of stakeholders across 94 submissions and 17 public hearings. In December 2015, the JSCFADT tabled its report into *human rights*

issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region. The Committee made 33 recommendations.

- 1.14 The Australian Government responded to this report in April 2017, with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) noting that ‘many of the recommendations remain relevant for Australia and the Pacific in 2020.’⁹
- 1.15 DFAT’s *Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy*, published in 2016, underpinned the Government’s response to the 2015 report. The strategy adopted the following three priorities to guide the Australian Government’s work on gender equality:
- enhancing women’s voice in decision-making, leadership and peace-building;
 - promoting women’s economic empowerment; and
 - ending violence against women and girls.¹⁰

2010 - Human rights mechanisms and the Asia-Pacific

- 1.16 In 2010 the JSCFADT tabled its report into *human rights mechanisms and the Asia-Pacific*. The Australian Government responded to this report in 2012.

Report structure

- 1.17 Noting the challenges presented by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on evidence gathering, the Committee’s report makes broad observations on key issues and notes that some evidence is effectively a snapshot of moments in time. The Committee thanks all inquiry participants for their understanding around this interpretation of central issues.
- 1.18 The Committee encourages interested readers to review the submissions and hearing transcript that has been published on the Committee’s website.
- 1.19 Chapter 2 discusses the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and disaster readiness for the impacts of climate change; two factors that were commonly raised by inquiry participants.
- 1.20 Chapter 3 explores the role of Pacific island civil society groups in responding practically to domestic, family and sexual violence, and other human rights issues such as gender equality; and the key figures and groups which advance the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific context.

⁹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Submission 28*, p. 4.

¹⁰ DFAT, *Gender equality and women’s empowerment strategy*, February 2016, p. 5.

- 1.21 Chapter 4 discusses the engagement of these groups with Australia's Pacific Step-up.
- 1.22 Chapter 5 examines the effectiveness of Australian overseas development assistance programs in supporting human rights of women and girls in the Pacific islands.

2. Impact of the pandemic and disaster readiness

- 2.1 There are lessons for disaster resilience and recovery to be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. Submissions emphasised that the pandemic is causing additional negative impacts on women’s human rights in the Pacific islands. Submissions also described how the threats and risks to women and girls will be exacerbated by climate change.
- 2.2 In April 2021, the Australian Government released its second *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031*.¹ The *National Action Plan* states that the Australian Government’s work to support ‘resilience, crisis response, and security, law and justice sector efforts to meet the needs and rights of all women and girls’² include actions that aim to:
- amplify the work of women’s rights organisations, networks and coalitions, which are already investing in crisis response and sustainable disaster management, and encourage their leadership in humanitarian response and disaster management;
 - adopt a gender-responsive approach to resilience, relief and recovery in our humanitarian action, and stabilisation, development and disaster management;

¹ Minister for Foreign Affairs, *Australia’s second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, Media Release, 12 April 2021.

² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Australia’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021–2031*, p. 8.

- ensure stabilisation and recovery approaches meet the needs of women and girls for long-term sustainable livelihoods, including access to health, education, and economic opportunities.³

Impact of the pandemic

- 2.3 World Vision stated that the pandemic is ‘acting as a risk multiplier for women and girls in the Pacific region.’⁴ The Australian Red Cross similarly stated that as a result of the pandemic, women in the Pacific will ‘be impacted significantly by the economic downturn given their over-representation in sectors and jobs such as retail, hospitality and tourism.’⁵
- 2.4 YWCA Australia explained that the pandemic has resulted in women taking on ‘increased domestic and care responsibilities and many have lost employment, plunging their families and themselves into hardship.’⁶
- 2.5 The International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) suggested that ‘the losses in revenue and income streams’ in the Pacific due to the pandemic’s global shutdowns, ‘risk entrenching poverty and gender inequality in ways that, if left unchecked, could reverberate for years, and possibly decades, to come.’⁷
- 2.6 To assist Pacific island countries in their response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) announced in May 2020 its *Partnerships for Recovery* strategy, which aims to ‘reprioritise ... future assistance’ to the region.⁸
- 2.7 DFAT in July 2020 stated that in response to the pandemic, it has supported the implementation of protective health measures throughout the region:

Australia has been working with Pacific countries to help them prepare for and respond to the pandemic. This includes deploying health experts and providing personal protective equipment (PPE), medical supplies and support for laboratories, public information campaigns. We worked with our partners

³ DFAT, *Australia’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021–2031*, p. 43.

⁴ World Vision, *Submission 22*, p. 15.

⁵ Australian Red Cross, *Submission 8*, p. 7.

⁶ YWCA Australia, *Submission 24*, p. 4.

⁷ International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA), *Submission 35*, p. 5.

⁸ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 5.

to pivot our development program to meet the highest priorities, including delivery of financial support.⁹

- 2.8 DFAT also outlined in July 2020 that it was responding to ‘the gender impacts’ of the pandemic by reprioritising its areas of focus:

Australia is pivoting its aid programming ... to ensure we meet the immediate needs of women and girls. This includes ensuring that women and girls who have experienced violence can continue to access local services, safe shelter and support.¹⁰

- 2.9 Oaktree encouraged that after the pandemic, Australia should focus on ‘strengthening the human capital of young women in the Pacific’, including initiatives that ‘expand education and training opportunities for young women, which is critical to the Pacific’s economic recovery post the COVID-19 crisis.’¹¹

- 2.10 DFAT stated that women were increasingly represented in the hospitality and tourism sectors, and stated in June 2021 that this would be an important area ‘as we emerge out of COVID’:

... pre-COVID, [hospitality and tourism] was a major area of growth for Pacific women to take up jobs in. In north Queensland, a lot of people from Kiribati, Samoa, and Tonga are actually front of house in semi-skilled types of jobs in Australia. And these types of opportunities are going to be important.¹²

- 2.11 In June 2021, DFAT also detailed that its new Pacific Women Lead program ‘will be flexible enough to respond to the emerging needs of women and girls, including through the post COVID-19 pandemic period as well as climate change.’¹³

Climate change and disasters

- 2.12 Submissions raised concerns about the detrimental impacts of climate change, and what this meant for women and girls. The Burnet Institute emphasised that as a result of heightened areas of vulnerability:

⁹ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 11.

¹⁰ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 12.

¹¹ Oaktree, *Submission 26*, p. 1.

¹² Ms Danielle Heinecke, First Assistant Secretary, Pacific Operations and Development, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 5.

¹³ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 2.

... it is critical that any efforts geared towards improving the attainment of human rights for women and girls in the Pacific also recognise and address the real and growing challenges related to climate change.¹⁴

- 2.13 The Australian National University (ANU) Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA) noted that ‘climate forced migration and displacement has already started to occur and is likely to increase in the near future.’¹⁵ Sustainable Population Australia emphasised that ‘consideration must be given to the fact that many people in the Pacific are likely to be displaced in the coming decades due to climate change.’¹⁶
- 2.14 The ANU DPA also outlined that ‘existing, structural and deeply entrenched gender inequalities across the Pacific exacerbate [climate change] impacts for women and girls.’¹⁷ World Vision similarly elaborated that:
- ... women and their rights are particularly vulnerable to climate change for a range of reasons, including unequal access to resources and power, restricted rights and ability to move freely and without fear, and limited ability to influence the ways their communities are managed.¹⁸
- 2.15 ‘Conflict, climate-related disasters, climate-induced displacement and labour migration’ was emphasised by the Australian Red Cross to be ‘increasing drivers of other protection issues impacting women and girls, particularly human trafficking and modern slavery.’¹⁹
- 2.16 Walk Free similarly explained that ‘as the impacts of climate change displace people from their homes, female migrants face heightened risk of violence, trafficking, and forced and early marriage.’²⁰ The ANU International Law Clinic reiterated this cause and effect theme:

The uncertainty caused by potential territorial inundation may lead to increased domestic violence. Such an increase has been proven to occur when nations are put under economic stresses or environmental disaster.²¹

¹⁴ Burnet Institute, *Submission 13*, p. 3.

¹⁵ Australian National University (ANU) Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA), *Submission 18*, p. 9.

¹⁶ Sustainable Population Australia, *Submission 36*, p. 3.

¹⁷ ANU DPA, *Submission 18*, p. 10.

¹⁸ World Vision, *Submission 22*, p. 14.

¹⁹ Australian Red Cross, *Submission 8*, p. 5.

²⁰ Walk Free, *Submission 40*, p. 8.

²¹ ANU College of Law’s International Law Clinic, *Submission 34*, p. 1.

2.17 World Vision also highlighted that women's needs are often overlooked in the aftermath of disasters:

This is particularly true for women or girls displaced or living in temporary accommodation, where there is a far greater risk of rape and physical violence. Women also often face increased insecurity, with women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, such as health checks, access to sanitary items, and contraception, often being overlooked.²²

2.18 The ANU DPA stated that 'there is an increasing need to build climate ready infrastructure, as the cost of dealing with more frequent and intense natural disasters escalates and tourism revenue falls due to environmental degradation and the recent pandemic.'²³

2.19 To lessen the gendered impacts of these disasters on women and girls, the Australian Red Cross recommended that:

Australia work with Pacific island states, Pacific regional organisations and local civil society actors to implement commitments to increase women's representation and leadership and to elevate women's participation and voice in disaster management and planning platforms.²⁴

2.20 The Red Cross also stressed the importance of enhanced cooperation with local actors to enhance their disaster preparedness rather than have the region dependent on external actors:

Investing in working with local organisations—supporting them to be able to step up and step into the space that has previously been taken by international organisations—is a huge opportunity for the Australian government to continue working in that space.²⁵

2.21 ActionAid Australia highlighted three means through which 'Australia could continue to build on its support for women's rights across the Pacific region':

... firstly, strengthening Australia's response to climate change, including through an integrated approach to climate change and gender equality; secondly, increasing support for local women's rights organisations, including through development, humanitarian and climate funding streams; and,

²² World Vision, *Submission 22*, p. 14.

²³ ANU DPA, *Submission 18*, p. 9.

²⁴ Ms Veronica Bell, Head of International Technical Services, Red Cross Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 13.

²⁵ Ms Bell, Red Cross Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 19.

finally, prioritising infrastructure investment to reflect the needs of women in their communities.²⁶

2.22 To protect ‘women’s human rights in disasters, including climate change’, the United Nations Country Teams in the Pacific recommended:

- Investment in vulnerability mapping for women and girls to ensure targeted response and prevention.
- Increased technical assistance to integrate gender responsive climate action (including sexual and reproductive health and rights) into national priorities in adaptation to climate change.
- Strengthened National Disaster Management Offices to support mainstreaming of gender and protection of women’s human rights across all sectors of humanitarian response, including the engagement of protection cluster members in all disaster assessment teams and across all phases of preparedness, risk, response and resilience.²⁷

Concluding comment

2.23 The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many planned initiatives under the Pacific Step-up, and required swift responses to the impacts of the pandemic. The Committee notes that the Australian Government responded to these challenges through its COVID-19 support to the region, and that the pandemic did not limit its engagement and consultation with Pacific leaders.

2.24 Many lessons have been learned both in Australia and across the Pacific islands from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee considers that the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic should translate to a sharpened focus on disaster management.

2.25 The Committee recognises that disasters such as pandemics, climate change and natural disasters exacerbate existing difficulties faced by women and girls. The particular chain of impacts that a disaster can have on women and girls needs to be fully understood, and the Committee heard that the direct involvement of women and girls in disaster management planning is critical to ensuring that their needs are not overlooked.

2.26 The Committee heard that Australian Government programs should work with organisations in the Pacific islands to build on the existing work of local organisations to manage and recover from disasters, whether they are

²⁶ ActionAid Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 14.

²⁷ UN Country Teams in the Pacific, *Submission 30*, p. 16.

pandemic or climate change-related. This is because local organisations are best placed to ensure that factors most relevant to specific regions are accounted for in disaster management plans. In a similar manner, professional groups, such as Engineers without Borders, faith groups, and other NGOs could be supported in their work for Pacific Islanders.

Recommendation 1

- 2.27 The Committee recommends that all support provided by the Australian Government to any organisation or bodies undertaking disaster management planning and response work include women representatives.**

Recommendation 2

- 2.28 To ensure that an understanding of women's needs in local areas are taken into account, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government works with Pacific governments to build the capacity of local organisations in the Pacific to respond to natural disasters and ensure Pacific women are included in the delivery and evaluations of programs.**

Recommendation 3

- 2.29 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government works with Pacific governments to provide support for projects mapping the vulnerabilities experienced by women and girls in the region during disasters.**

3. Roles of civil society and other groups

- 3.1 Submissions revealed a complex web of interactions between a variety of groups that play significant roles in promoting the human rights of Pacific island women and girls, including:
- church and faith-based groups;
 - non-government organisations (NGO);
 - government;
 - academia;
 - women and girls;
 - diaspora groups; and
 - men and boys.
- 3.2 These civil society groups based in the Pacific islands play a key role in responding practically to domestic, family and sexual violence, and other human rights issues such as gender equality.
- 3.3 The Australian Government states in its *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031* that it will ‘work with partner countries and other donors, including the UN, NATO, regional and global organisations, and civil society organisations’ and ‘also identify local civil society actors and support their priorities, particularly women’s rights organisations, women human rights defenders, women-led peace building organisations, faith-based organisations and civil society peace networks.’¹

¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Australia’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021–2031*, p. 54.

- 3.4 The *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031* also states that the Australian Government's actions to reduce sexual and gender-based violence aim to:
- support women's rights organisations to advance gender equality, and amplify women and girls' capacity to speak, be heard, innovate and drive change;
 - support local efforts to change harmful gender norms and discriminatory practices;
 - strengthen local laws and institutions to protect human rights, and to protect against sexual and gender-based violence;
 - engage with men and boys, women and girls, and sexual and gender minorities to challenge gender inequality and find local solutions to realise gender equality; and
 - contribute to the evidence base of what works to change harmful gender norms.²

Civil society organisations

- 3.5 The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) defined civil society groups as including: 'individuals, non-government organisations, community-based organisations, union groups, faith-based groups, youth groups and social movements.'³ Adopting a similar definition, the Law Council of Australia characterised civil society groups as essentially autonomous 'at least in principle, from both government and business.'⁴
- 3.6 The AHRC outlined that it is civil society groups that 'provide frontline services to survivors [of gendered violence]—such as specialist sexual assault support services, and homelessness support or refuges.'⁵ The Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and Pacific Community (SPC) categorised civil society groups in the Pacific islands as being involved in the following service provision areas:
- Primary prevention;
 - Referral;
 - Counselling;

² DFAT, *Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021–2031*, p. 29.

³ Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Submission 23*, pp. 5-6.

⁴ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 9.

⁵ AHRC, *Submission 23*, p. 7.

- Training, workshop, awareness advocacy for reform;
- Legal aid;
- Safe shelter;
- Research; and
- Helpline.⁶

3.7 The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) emphasised the pivotal position of civil society groups in facilitating ‘stigma-free, friendly, and accessible services’ that uphold the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of women and girls:

Young people, marginalised and vulnerable groups such as people of diverse SOGIEs [sexual orientation and gender identity expression], sex workers and people living with disabilities are often unable or unwilling to access government health services, especially for SRHR information and services. In many parts of the region, civil society groups such as IPPF Member Associations are the only ones able to facilitate stigma-free, friendly, and accessible services for these groups.⁷

The role of church and faith-based groups

3.8 The Committee in its 2015 report heard about the work of faith-based organisations in the region⁸, work which has evolved in the past 6 years to express ideas adapted to local cultural contexts. Submissions received in 2020 referred to the widespread religious populations in the Pacific islands and resultant ability of faith-based groups to influence people’s perceptions about the human rights of women and girls.

3.9 The United Nations Country Teams in the Pacific (UNCTP) stated that ‘faith based organisations are central to communities in the Pacific.’⁹ Caritas Oceania detailed that this centrality means that churches have influence in locations that other groups do not:

Churches in the Pacific also have extensive reach, long-established networks and a presence in locations where other actors, including police, may not be

⁶ Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and Pacific Community (SPC), *Submission 16*, Attachment 1, p. 1.

⁷ International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), *Submission 25*, p. 3.

⁸ Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), *Empowering Women and Girls*, December 2015, pp. 87-88, 95, 97.

⁹ UN Country Teams in the Pacific (UNCTP), *Submission 30*, p. 6.

able to access. Their representatives are embedded within the community and have strong relationships at the local level, so are best placed to ensure targeting of at-risk women and girls.¹⁰

- 3.10 World Vision similarly noted that ‘in the Pacific context, faith leaders are among the most influential, trusted and accessible members of communities,’ and subsequently emphasised the scope for altering community mindsets:

World Vision is encouraged by Australia’s investment in faith-based communities and sees significant opportunities to better leverage faith leaders to change attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls to ensure they are respected and protected.¹¹

- 3.11 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) recognised that ‘churches do have a significant service delivery effort. That’s one of the reasons we’ve supported them as well: to help them get better outcomes through their service delivery arms.’¹²

- 3.12 DFAT outlined that it had funded faith-based organisations such as House of Sarah, which takes a ‘community mobilisation approach to prevent violence against women.’¹³ DFAT explained that this has led to ‘community discussions on interpretations of the Bible that can contribute to a reduction in violence.’¹⁴

- 3.13 UnitingWorld stated that ‘there are several church leaders who translate and connect rights based concepts with biblical teachings. UnitingWorld works with prominent, progressive leaders in Pacific churches who are strong advocates of gender equality.’¹⁵

- 3.14 DFAT also stated that its partnership with the Pacific Conference of Churches ‘as part of the [Pacific] Step-up’ is locally led, and was ‘focused on the things that they identify as being important.’¹⁶ DFAT elaborated that:

¹⁰ Caritas Oceania, *Submission 41*, p. 13.

¹¹ World Vision, *Submission 22*, p. 8.

¹² Ms Danielle Heinecke, First Assistant Secretary, Pacific Operations and Development, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 8.

¹³ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 17.

¹⁴ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 17.

¹⁵ Ms Jane Kennedy, Associate Director, International Programs, UnitingWorld, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 13.

¹⁶ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 8.

Initially, [the Pacific Conference of Churches] did want to focus on sexual abuse and the response to various learnings from global and Australian efforts, but then, when COVID hit, they shifted that. They also wanted to have a climate resilience focus in what they did.¹⁷

3.15 UnitingWorld stated that ‘churches and church leaders are often the first refuge and source of help for women and girls in situations of violence, especially in rural settings and particularly during COVID-19 lockdowns.’¹⁸

3.16 Table 3.1 provides statistics from Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (PNG) relating to reporting and disclosure of violence against women. The data provided by World Vision indicates reporting of incidents to religious or customary leaders do occur, but there are more opportunities to increase reporting rates.

Table 3.1 Violence against women (2019 Snapshot)

Issue	Vanuatu (per cent)	Solomon Islands (per cent)	Papua New Guinea (per cent)
Number of women who reported experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime	60	64	68
Women who disclosed experience of physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner in the last 12 months	44	42	33
Number of women reporting incidents of violence to customary leaders	24	-	39
Women reporting incidents of violence to religious leaders	23	-	36.4

Source: World Vision, Submission 22, p. 6.

¹⁷ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 8.

¹⁸ Ms Kennedy, UnitingWorld, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 13.

- 3.17 UnitingWorld highlighted the feminist structure of many Pacific churches, including the Presbyterian Women Mission Union of the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu and the Methodist Church Women’s Fellowship in Fiji:

Pacific churches have a parallel organisational structure for the women, and these are well organised and resourceful. Many of them are active in advancing the rights of women and girls and combatting domestic violence.¹⁹

- 3.18 World Vision outlined, however, that the impact of faith-based groups can be two-sided:

Faith and community leaders often serve as trusted informal service providers, especially in contexts with limited or non-existent formal services for survivors of gender-based violence, yet they often hold and reinforce harmful beliefs focusing on community mediation, forgiveness or compensation rather than prioritising women’s rights and safety and facilitating referrals for survivors through the legal system. Such practices deny women access to services, support and long-term safety.²⁰

The role of women’s leadership

- 3.19 Inquiry participants emphasised the importance of generating greater agency for women to lead progress for their own human rights. The benefits of doing so were highlighted by the Fiji Women’s Fund, and Urgent Action Fund Asia & the Pacific, which stated that women’s rights organisations had largely driven ‘the changes in policy and legislation across the Pacific in the areas of domestic violence and family law or protection.’²¹
- 3.20 CARE Australia stated that ‘women’s limited participation in decision making cut[s] across and exacerbate[s] all other underlying causes of poverty.’²²
- 3.21 DFAT stated that it was investing in ‘local level leadership ... across private sector, civil society, government or regional organisations’ to ‘start to grow that next generation of change’ and ‘have enough people at the table to change policymaking or to change the culture of particular organisations.’²³

¹⁹ UnitingWorld, *Submission 29*, p. 6.

²⁰ World Vision, *Submission 22*, p. 6.

²¹ Fiji Women’s Fund, and Urgent Action Fund Asia & the Pacific, *Submission 10*, p. 2.

²² CARE Australia, *Submission 37*, p. 3.

²³ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 2.

- 3.22 The UNCTP in July 2020 outlined ‘the chronic under-representation of women in politics in the Pacific’ as the Pacific islands ‘retains the world’s lowest levels of women in parliament at just 8.8 per cent and is home to three countries that have no women in their national parliament.’²⁴
- 3.23 DFAT stated it had ‘offered support to ... women leaders in the region by hosting several’ dialogue events in 2020, including ‘virtual Pacific women leaders meetings throughout 2020—in May, August and December 2020.’²⁵ DFAT also advised that following advocacy by Australia, the Pacific Island Forum from 2022 is establishing an ‘annual PIF women leaders meeting’.²⁶
- 3.24 The Pasifika Women’s Alliance suggested that since ‘women shoulder the burden of supporting themselves’, they must be directly ‘included in the conversations that affect them.’²⁷ The Pasifika Women’s Alliance further recommended that women should ‘lead program development and be part and parcel of co-designing programs to achieve context and relevance before it is implemented.’²⁸
- 3.25 The International Women’s Development Agency similarly advocated that women and girls should have ‘meaningful influence in designing development cooperation programs that affect them.’²⁹ The IPPF echoed this sentiment by suggesting that:

Addressing deeply entrenched gender discrimination and inequality requires women’s meaningful participation to achieve inclusive and effective governance.³⁰

- 3.26 To generate greater agency and leadership, Tetra Tech Coffey explained that women’s leadership programs must build a wide range of skills:

Leadership capability goes beyond good networks, sectoral expertise and communication skills. Emotional intelligence and resilience are key drivers of

²⁴ UNCTP, *Submission 30*, p. 9.

²⁵ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 1.

²⁶ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 1.

²⁷ Pasifika Women’s Alliance, *Submission 20*, p. 2.

²⁸ Pasifika Women’s Alliance, *Submission 20*, p. 2.

²⁹ International Women’s Development Agency, *Submission 35*, p. 10.

³⁰ IPPF, *Submission 25*, p. 3.

success and help form our ability to respond to crises and other times of turmoil.³¹

- 3.27 YWCA Australia described that it had designed its 'Rise Up' leadership development program to build a self-expanding network of leaders in the region:

The program has a unique approach, adopting a 'Train the Trainer' (ToT) model, empowering young women with the knowledge and leadership skills necessary to access their own human rights, and then to train and support other young women to do the same. ... The intended effect is an expanding network of young women in each community who have formally or informally developed their leadership skills. Through this model, the program itself provides a leadership opportunity that is driven by young women, for young women and deeply embedded within the community.³²

- 3.28 Ms Jane Alver from the University of Canberra drew attention to that in the Pacific 'spaces for feminist civil society voices to be heard are shrinking.'³³ To rally against this and 'amplify their voices and pool their resources,' Ms Alver stated that the We Rise Coalition had been formed.³⁴ This coalition is comprised of Pacific groups associated with the 'sexual orientation/gender identity movement and the feminist movement.'³⁵

The role of non-government organisations (NGOs)

- 3.29 The UNCTP stated that NGOs assist in ensuring the accountability of governments:

Non-government organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) remain a strategic partner for the United Nations in advancing human rights of women and girls because they play a key role in ensuring the accountability of governments to respect, protect and fulfil human rights commitments.³⁶

- 3.30 NGOs are also involved in direct service provision. Melbourne Children's Global Health noted that '[NGOs] provide primary health care in

³¹ Tetra Tech Coffey, *Submission 21*, p. 4.

³² YWCA Australia, *Submission 24*, p. 9.

³³ Ms Jane Alver, *Submission 6*, p. 1.

³⁴ Ms Jane Alver, *Submission 6*, p. 1.

³⁵ Ms Jane Alver, *Submission 6*, p. 1.

³⁶ UNCTP, *Submission 30*, p. 5.

partnership with governments in the Pacific’ and that these NGOs ‘can reach marginalised young women and vulnerable groups that may not have equitable access to health and education services.’³⁷

- 3.31 Family Planning NSW, for example, operates in nine Pacific island countries and has been ‘implementing gender equality, sexual and reproductive health, contraception, comprehensive sexuality education, disability, and cervical cancer prevention programs.’³⁸ Family Planning NSW stated its work with similar local Pacific island organisations has seen ‘over 14,000 women and girls benefit each year.’³⁹
- 3.32 The PIFS-SPC stated that an ‘emphasis on service provision, driven in part by the gap in government service provision’ means that the other functions, such as accountability, training and advocacy duties, have ‘become secondary.’⁴⁰
- 3.33 The George Institute and University of New South Wales Australian Human Rights Institute identified that NGOs have been an important accountability mechanism for gathering data on the progress of implementing Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) recommendations by governments, stating that:

Each CEDAW review cycle, hundreds of nongovernmental organisations and service providers send submissions and shadow reports on government actions to the CEDAW Committee.⁴¹

- 3.34 The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) observed that progress may not be possible without unified approaches between ‘upstream’ and ‘grassroots’ organisations:

While there is a role for government services and criminal sanctions to aid the justice response, these will be insufficient to address the problem without ‘upstream’ intervention and buy-in from grassroots organisations and community groups that can provide education, influence social values and challenge traditional thinking about men and women’s roles in society.⁴²

³⁷ Melbourne Children’s Global Health, *Submission 27*, p. 3.

³⁸ Family Planning NSW, *Submission 5*, p. 2.

³⁹ Family Planning NSW, *Submission 5*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, p. 7.

⁴¹ The George Institute and University of New South Wales Australia Human Rights Institute, *Submission 43*, p. 2.

⁴² AHRC, *Submission 23*, p. 7.

3.35 NGOs also described working directly with local groups in the Pacific. In Papua New Guinea, WaterAid Australia is ‘collaborating with the East Sepik Council of Women and the East Sepik Disabled People’s Organisation to improve access to, and control over WASH [water, sanitation and hygiene] for women and people with disabilities.’⁴³ WaterAid stated its interviews revealed that:

Women interviewed felt they were excluded from decision-making about WASH services, it documented many reports that women and children were primarily responsible for collecting water and spent labour and time on this task each day and often were subjected to harassment and other forms of violence while completing this task.⁴⁴

The role of Pacific governments

3.36 The UNCTP described the work of Ministries of Education, Youth, Health, National Statistics Offices, and National Human Rights Institutions across Pacific island countries as having exercised the levers they hold for progressing human rights.⁴⁵

3.37 The PIFS-SPC stated that national governments are instrumental in the advancement of women and girls human rights as they are ‘primarily responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights, through national policies, legislation and ratification of international human rights instruments.’⁴⁶ The PIFS-SPC recognised that:

... there is growing appreciation amongst Pacific Island governments of the importance of human rights and the positive role they can play in helping to achieve sustainable development outcomes.⁴⁷

3.38 The UNCTP identified that governments set the context in which human rights issues are discussed in the region. The UNCTP observed that through the work of Pacific governments, SRHR has come to be treated as a norm:

Ministries of Health across Pacific countries are critical advocates for the inclusion of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as part of universal health coverage. The provision of SRHR services through the

⁴³ WaterAid Australia, *Submission 4*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ WaterAid, *Submission 4*, p. 2.

⁴⁵ UNCTP, *Submission 30*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, p. 10.

⁴⁷ PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, p. 2.

Ministries of Health ensures ongoing protection and respect of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. This has ensured the strength of Pacific language on the normative language used in Pacific wide outcomes statements and documents. There is largely consensus across the Pacific of the use of normative language around Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).⁴⁸

- 3.39 The PIFS-SPC detailed the status of human rights treaties ratification in the Pacific, as at 15 July 2020⁴⁹, and stated that while there had been positive movements, implementation of CEDAW 'remains a challenge':

The rate of [Pacific island countries] reporting against treaties has increased significantly in recent years while participation in the Universal Periodic Review process has been positive although implementation of recommendations from the Human Rights Council and treaty bodies remains a challenge, as has the domestication of human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).⁵⁰

- 3.40 The PIFS-SPC stated 'in the last 10 years, the majority of Pacific Island governments have adopted domestic violence legislation that provides protection orders to assist those affected by family violence.'⁵¹ The PIFS-SPC identified that under-resourcing led to a low level of dissemination of the legislation on the ground:

Despite these legal reforms, implementation and the actualisation of protection remains a stark challenge. In many countries, implementation of domestic violence legislation remains critically under-resourced, resulting in low awareness of the legislation even among those responsible for its implementation.⁵²

- 3.41 The Law Council of Australia noted that while legislative reform had occurred in areas of the Pacific, there is an 'implementation gap ... linked to a lack of capacity in government and judicial institutions, and shortcomings in the standards adhered to by prosecutors and law enforcement officials.'⁵³

⁴⁸ UNCTP, *Submission 30*, p. 7.

⁴⁹ PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁰ PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, p. 2.

⁵¹ PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, p. 6.

⁵² PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, p. 6.

⁵³ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 12.

The Law Council of Australia further stated that this lack of capacity had a basis in under resourcing:

Insufficient funding, coupled with an increased demand for services, hinders the capacity of courts and tribunals to resolve matters swiftly and fairly, to the detriment of women and children. Due to critical under-resourcing, federal courts and tribunals are under immense and chronic pressure and are struggling to meet demand. The Law Council notes that due to resourcing pressures, many of the members of the judiciary in [Pacific island countries and territories] are expatriates from Australia, New Zealand and other Commonwealth nations.⁵⁴

3.42 The Committee was advised that the Attorney-General's Department had worked with law officers in Pacific island countries, through work that:

... has supported the [Pacific Islands Law Officers' Network Sexual and Gender Based Violence] working group to develop General Principles for Obtaining the Best Evidence from Vulnerable Witnesses to [Sexual and Gender Based Violence] Offences and raise awareness of special measures, such as screens and support in court to protect vulnerable witnesses, including children.⁵⁵

3.43 Femili PNG stated that working in partnership with the public sector in PNG had led to successes. It detailed that at the individual client case level, it brings together 'the police, the courts, maybe the child welfare officer' for meetings. At a higher level, it has relationships with the head of agencies.⁵⁶

3.44 Femili PNG also stated that 'providing resources for the public sector ... on a small scale' is a secondary role played by Femili PNG:

We have a very small resourcing fund, but we will provide practical support for these agencies. It might be toner or paper for the printer, because they just don't have the budget to print the paper to give you the restraining order. Petrol for the police car is a common one.⁵⁷

3.45 DFAT recognised the value of the SPC as a 'regional mechanism', through which Australia, New Zealand, France and the US as foreign aid donors are

⁵⁴ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 32*, p. 13.

⁵⁵ DFAT, *Submission 28: Annex B*, p. 39.

⁵⁶ Mr Stephen Howes, Director, Development Policy Centre, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University (ANU); Chair, Femili PNG, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 17.

⁵⁷ Mr Howes, ANU Development Policy Centre; Femili PNG, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 17.

able to work closely with Pacific nations.⁵⁸ The PIFS-SPC called for continued investment ‘in regionalism and the regional architecture, namely PIFS and SPC. These organisations are of the Pacific and for the Pacific.’⁵⁹

National human rights institutions

- 3.46 National human rights institutions were described by the AHRC to generally operate as ‘independent, statutory bodies that play a key role in the implementation of human rights in a country’.⁶⁰ The UNCTP identified that national human rights institutions operated ‘in Samoa, Fiji, Vanuatu and Tuvalu.’⁶¹ The PIFS-SPC stated that that ‘at least four other [Pacific island countries] are at various stages of assessing whether they should establish NHRIs.’⁶²
- 3.47 The AHRC identified that ‘only Samoa has an “A status” accredited institution.’⁶³ The AHRC explained that ‘A status’ accreditation under the United Nations Paris Principles means that the institutions ‘are able to participate independently of their state with the UN Human Rights Council and its mechanisms ... [and] also have participation rights to some UN General Assembly bodies.’⁶⁴
- 3.48 The AHRC elaborated on its advocacy for Pacific governments to establish national human rights institutions:
- [National human rights institutions] provide an objective appraisal of human rights in a country and work with government, business and civil society to foster change and the realisation of human rights. ... The [AHRC] has long advocated for the establishment of [national human rights institutions] throughout the Pacific and believes that the promotion and protection of human rights in the Pacific would benefit immensely from their establishment.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Ms Jane Bastin-Sikimeti, Director, Pacific Gender Section, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 7.

⁵⁹ PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, p. 21.

⁶⁰ AHRC, *Submission 23*, p. 8.

⁶¹ UNCTP, *Submission 30*, p. 6.

⁶² PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, p. 2.

⁶³ AHRC, *Submission 23*, p. 8.

⁶⁴ AHRC, *Submission 23*, p. 3.

⁶⁵ AHRC, *Submission 23*, p. 8.

National statistics offices

3.49 The UNCTP stated:

The strength of evidence in the Pacific of the prevalence of violence against women was a catalyst for significant and strategic investment in the region to end violence against women. The National Statistics Offices then, are central to ensuring the availability of credible data to support advocacy efforts and accountability mechanisms to ensure progress towards fulfilment of women's human rights.⁶⁶

3.50 The PIFS-SPC stated that 'most governments rely to some extent on civil society organisations' as 'data gatherers and informers when it comes to generating information to guide policy or UN treaty reporting.'⁶⁷

3.51 The UNCTP stated that it was working with National Statistics Offices and civil society organisations to 'support increased administrative data collection.'⁶⁸

The role of academia

3.52 Submissions were received from Australian researchers undertaking Pacific-related research, including researchers associated with the:

- Australian National University;
- University of Canberra;
- Macquarie University;
- University of Melbourne;
- University of New South Wales; and the
- University of Sydney.

3.53 The UNCTP stated that academics have been playing an increasing role in advancing human rights causes:

Academic institutions, including the University of the South Pacific and its growing support towards developing human rights courses, research, and academic papers, play an increasing role in the field of human rights through human rights education, human rights research, dissemination of knowledge,

⁶⁶ UNCTP, *Submission 30*, p. 7.

⁶⁷ PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ UNCTP, *Submission 30*, p. 8.

and outreach to other actors including [national human rights institutions] and civil society.⁶⁹

- 3.54 The UNCTP described the need for ‘for effective partnerships’ between academia, government and other development stakeholders.⁷⁰ From the Australian Government’s perspective, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research outlined that through its country offices ‘in Fiji and Papua New Guinea,’ it seeks ‘to facilitate links between Australian research organisations and research agencies in developing countries.’⁷¹
- 3.55 The ANU Development Policy Centre detailed its partnership with Femili PNG as an ‘innovative model’ where ‘the Development Policy Centre provides institutional and research support, on a pro bono basis, to Femili PNG.’ The Centre detailed that this fostered ‘deep institutional linkages ... both from a service delivery point of view and in doing important research and advocacy’ work.⁷²
- 3.56 Mr Stephen Howes, Director, ANU Development Policy Centre also detailed the role of universities to maintain ‘links with our alumni when they go back’⁷³:
- In my particular case, we have a partnership with the University of Papua New Guinea, and we have lecturers at UPNG while we’re training their future lecturers here in Australia. We have an agenda to that. We recently trained the first female economics lecturer at the University of Papua New Guinea. With that institutional linkage supported by DFAT, we’re able to keep those links going.⁷⁴
- 3.57 Inquiry participants identified research gaps in the evidence base which could be improved upon with further academic investigation. For example, Melbourne Children’s Global Health highlighted that domestic violence

⁶⁹ UNCTP, *Submission 30*, p. 8.

⁷⁰ UNCTP, *Submission 30*, p. 8.

⁷¹ Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, *Submission 7*, pp. 1-2.

⁷² Mr Howes, ANU Development Policy Centre; Femili PNG, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 10.

⁷³ Mr Howes, ANU Development Policy Centre; Femili PNG, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 18.

⁷⁴ Mr Howes, ANU Development Policy Centre; Femili PNG, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 18.

programs draw from evidence from ‘high-income settings’ and not specifically ‘low- and middle-income countries’⁷⁵:

Overall, the evidence for interventions to prevent violence from low- and middle-income countries is limited. Further there is limited evidence for effective prevention strategies for children with disabilities, the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex] community and other vulnerable groups. However, there is evidence from high-income settings for a number of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls, including those that Australian overseas development assistance has supported.⁷⁶

- 3.58 Such research gaps may also impact how governments and organisations proceed when implementing initiatives. In relation to adolescent health, Melbourne Children’s Global Health stated that ‘the poor quality of evidence for actions to improve adolescent health’ meant that ‘programs should be piloted and evaluated prior to being scaled-up.’⁷⁷

The role of diaspora groups

- 3.59 The Pasifika Women’s Alliance, a diaspora network based in Queensland, stated ‘the diaspora represents decades of migration into Australia in search of higher standards of education, health and safety, especially the health and safety of children and women who make up part of the diaspora and represent a huge repository of intellectual resources that can be utilised to develop and enhance the state of Pacific affairs, especially women.’⁷⁸
- 3.60 The Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) ‘enables citizens from 9 Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste to take up low-skilled and semi-skilled work opportunities in all sectors in rural and regional Australia for up to 3 years.’⁷⁹
- 3.61 DFAT noted that the PLS currently has 20 per cent female participation rate.⁸⁰ DFAT stated it intends to focus on creating pathways for work in

⁷⁵ Melbourne Children’s Global Health, *Submission 27*, p. 4.

⁷⁶ Melbourne Children’s Global Health, *Submission 27*, p. 4.

⁷⁷ Melbourne Children’s Global Health, *Submission 27*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Ms Cassandra Rangip, Vice-President, Pasifika Women’s Alliance Inc., *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 14.

⁷⁹ Australian Government, ‘Frequently Asked Questions - Pacific Labour Mobility’, <https://pacificlabourmobility.com.au/about/frequentlyaskedquestions/>, viewed 2 July 2021.

⁸⁰ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 4.

‘hospitality, tourism and aged care, which will provide more opportunities for women.’⁸¹

- 3.62 The Australian Red Cross stated that ‘the PLS could be strengthened to mitigate negative risks for women and promote their skills development, education and economic opportunities’, and detailed that:

A positive example of skills development through migration was the initiative to train Kiribati nurses in Australia, which helped to build women’s capacity and leadership skills while also contributing to the Government of Kiribati efforts to diversify its remittance base through emigration of skilled people accessing the global nursing market.⁸²

- 3.63 The Pasifika Women’s Alliance stated that ‘we would like to see Pacific women as leaders in our own issues to the extent of co-designing the programs.’⁸³ The Pasifika Women’s Alliance provided an example of the contribution that the Pacific diaspora in Australia has made:

Part of this co-designing is the inclusion of the Australian diaspora through using CSOs, as contact points of Australian government, to contribute meaningfully in providing true context of our state of affairs. For example, through our links with PICQ, we were able to contribute to the 2050 gender strategy organised by the Regional CSO Forum of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.⁸⁴

- 3.64 The Pasifika Women’s Alliance detailed the assistance that it provides to the diaspora community:

For example, some women are seeking work. We’ve got a newsletter and we basically put all that information together so they know what opportunities are available. Whatever Brisbane City Council is offering in terms of employment training, we make that available. When they come here, we should be tapping into educating them while they’re here and developing them while they’re here—for example, some of the women who are seeking asylum.⁸⁵

- 3.65 The ANU Development Policy Centre referred to students from Pacific island countries who had studied in Australia and stated that ‘alumni

⁸¹ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 4.

⁸² Australian Red Cross, *Submission 8*, p. 10.

⁸³ Ms Rangip, Pasifika Women’s Alliance, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 14.

⁸⁴ Ms Rangip, Pasifika Women’s Alliance, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 14.

⁸⁵ Ms Rangip, Pasifika Women’s Alliance, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 19.

overwhelmingly look back on their time in Australia with great fondness and as a key moment in their lives, so it is an asset we could build on.’⁸⁶ The ANU Development Policy Centre also stated that ‘DFAT does try to keep in touch with them, and there are various alumni reunion events.’⁸⁷

The role of men and boys

3.66 Some submissions also discussed the involvement of men and boys as being crucial towards advancing the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific islands. The Burnet Institute characterised men and boys as ‘partners and agents of change in changing the gendered drivers of poor health outcomes’ in the Pacific islands.⁸⁸

3.67 The Australian National University (ANU) Law Reform and Social Justice (LRSJ) Research Hub recommended that the Pacific Step-up support ‘advocacy programs which both empower women and educate men to improve human rights, focusing on those which employ the pre-existing religious and customary structures that are familiar to Pacific Island communities.’⁸⁹ The ANU LRSJ emphasised that:

One reason such programs have been successful is that they are more easily accepted in communities where male heads of religious organisations or customary systems dominate discussions about human rights and those which may use religious texts to justify gender-based violence.⁹⁰

3.68 Cardno suggested that gender equality initiatives should ‘engage with those that are not the “usual suspects.”’⁹¹ Cardno elaborated on the value of diversity in leadership teams:

The Balance of Power leadership team has diverse backgrounds and therefore, diverse networks. The Vanuatu Country Manager, Wilson Toa, is male. Therefore, he is able to have conversations with a range of other men in

⁸⁶ Mr Howes, ANU Development Policy Centre; Femili PNG, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 18.

⁸⁷ Mr Howes, ANU Development Policy Centre; Femili PNG, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 18.

⁸⁸ Burnet Institute, *Submission 13*, p. 8.

⁸⁹ Australian National University (ANU) Law Reform and Social Justice Research Hub (LRSJ), *Submission 17*, p. 3.

⁹⁰ ANU LRSJ, *Submission 17*, p. 3.

⁹¹ Cardno, *Submission 12*, p. 6.

politics, churches and in traditional and government leadership positions that women would not be able to access given prevalent cultural norms in Vanuatu.⁹²

3.69 Reinforcing the need to engage men and boys on changing social norms, Cardno stated:

A study commissioned by [DFAT's Pacific Women program] found that some initiatives aiming to empower women economically were linked to an increased risk of domestic violence for some participants. Since women's economic empowerment challenges unequal gender norms, it can lead to men using violence against women to reinforce their power.⁹³

3.70 Save the Children referred to research that shows 'children in the Pacific who were beaten are more likely to become perpetrators of intimate partner violence in adulthood.'⁹⁴ Further, Save the Children emphasised that preventative strategies aimed at boys and adolescents are seeing results:

New evidence is emerging that shows programs which transform gender norms through working with boys and adolescents are having a measurable impact on reducing violence in the Pacific and around the world. There is now an opportunity for Australia to support these kind of programs to scale. A part of this world will involve preventing violence against children, which is key to ending violence against women.⁹⁵

Concluding comment

3.71 Australia's *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031* recognises that that women, peace and security agenda can only be realised in partnership with others.⁹⁶ Civil society is fundamental to the delivery of services in the Pacific islands that ensure a safe environment for women and girls. These services are deeply embedded into the practical response to domestic, family and sexual violence, ranging from safe shelters, legal aid, to helpline work.

3.72 The work of civil society is tireless and demanding. Each group has a role to play, and holds different levers in advancing gender equality in the region.

⁹² Cardno, *Submission 12*, p. 6.

⁹³ Cardno, *Submission 12*, p. 6.

⁹⁴ Save the Children, *Submission 39*, p. 6.

⁹⁵ Save the Children, *Submission 39*, p. 6.

⁹⁶ DFAT, *Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021–2031*, p. 54.

The Committee acknowledges that Australia's aid program has supported directly, or indirectly, many of these organisations.

- 3.73 NGOs in the Pacific face a conflict in managing their service delivery duties, and the advocacy and accountability functions that civil society organisations are expected to undertake. The Committee heard that some Australian academic institutions have been able to provide support to the advocacy functions of NGOs based in the Pacific.
- 3.74 A message that was repeatedly heard is that long-term progress in women's rights issues is dependent on building the capacity for women to lead and make decisions for themselves.
- 3.75 Cultural change, however, requires change across all areas of society. An emphasis on ensuring the local leadership of initiatives to advance the rights of women and girls was also presented to the Committee. The Committee heard about the progress that has been achieved by church and faith-based groups, through translating rights-based ideas into the local cultural context through theology.
- 3.76 While Pacific governments face substantial resource constraints, the Committee heard that Pacific governments have executed an essential role in the advancement of the rights of women and girls. For example, the Committee heard that Pacific governments have achieved consensus in the setting of norms, contributing to changes in the way that the role of women and girls is considered.
- 3.77 The Committee also heard about the positive progress that has been made in legislative reform and treaty ratification by Pacific governments in the region. The Committee heard that the opportunities for further progress is in the implementation of this legislative reform, work that will require close partnerships with Pacific governments and civil society organisations on the ground.
- 3.78 Many Pacific islanders come to Australia for education and employment opportunities. The Committee acknowledges DFAT's evidence that work is being undertaken to target sectors that will increase the rate of women's participation in the Pacific Labour Scheme.

Recommendation 4

- 3.79** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with the tertiary education sector to maintain networks with alumni from Pacific island countries who have studied in Australia, including women and girls.

Recommendation 5

- 3.80** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to focus diplomatic efforts on the implementation of treaties and other legislation aimed at improving the quality of life for women and girls, including political representation and involvement in decision-making.

Recommendation 6

- 3.81** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to work with Pacific governments on public sector capacity-building work.

4. Engagement with the Step-up

- 4.1 Submissions were received discussing the engagement of civil society and other key groups with the Pacific Step-up at that time. Groups working in the Pacific discussed Australia’s aid funding framework, and the ways in which this influences the operation and governance of civil society groups in the Pacific.
- 4.2 Considerations that inform the balance of targeting measures across the whole of society were also discussed. Submissions described a variety of perceptions of what the Pacific Step-up constituted, and whether it was appropriately focused. These perceptions are considered within the understanding that ‘elements of gender equality cannot easily be segmented by theme or topic – for a donor’s or a program’s convenience.’¹
- 4.3 As noted in the introduction to this report, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) states that ‘the Step-up was first announced at the Pacific Island Forum Leaders’ Meeting in September 2016 as a “step-change” in the way [Australia] would engage the region.’² Initiatives, such as the Pacific Labour Scheme for mobility commenced in July 2018.³
- 4.4 On 8 November 2018, the Australian Government announced further initiatives under this Pacific Step-up.⁴ DFAT stated ‘under the Pacific Step-

¹ Cardno, *Submission 12*, p. 6.

² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), ‘Stepping-up Australia’s engagement with our Pacific family’, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/engagement/stepping-up-australias-pacific-engagement>, viewed 14 July 2021.

³ DFAT, *Policy Handbook: Pacific Labour Scheme*, November 2019, p. 3.

⁴ Prime Minister, ‘Strengthening Australia’s commitment to the Pacific’, *Media Release*, 8 November 2018.

up Australia is making its highest ever contribution to Pacific development in 2019-20 with an estimated \$1.4 billion, realising new opportunities for gender equality.⁵ In November 2018, the following initiatives were announced as part of the broader Pacific Step-up program:

- Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific, a \$2 billion infrastructure initiative to significantly boost Australia's support for infrastructure development in Pacific countries and Timor-Leste.⁶
- [Opening of] diplomatic missions in Palau, the Marshall Islands, French Polynesia, Niue and the Cook Islands. This will mean that Australia is represented in every member country of the Pacific Islands Forum.
- Establish an enduring rotational ADF Pacific Mobile Training Team [and] put in place arrangements to ensure that Australia has a dedicated vessel to deliver [humanitarian] support to our partners in the Pacific.⁷

Consultation

4.5 DFAT's COVID-19 strategy, *Partnerships for Recovery*, resulted in a change of priorities for the Pacific Step-up.⁸ DFAT, in July 2020, stated that:

Minister Payne has led regional-level discussions with Pacific women leaders and Minister Hawke has led public consultations to inform Australia's development response strategy, *Partnerships for Recovery*, which prioritises women's safety, reproductive health and rights and women's economic empowerment as part of our development response to COVID-19.⁹

4.6 The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Pacific Community (SPC) stated that the Pacific Step-up 'places engagement with Pacific countries at the centre of the initiative, and as one of [Australia's] highest foreign policy priorities.'¹⁰

⁵ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Submission 28*, p. 7.

⁶ Prime Minister, 'Strengthening Australia's commitment to the Pacific', *Media Release*, 8 November 2018.

⁷ Prime Minister, 'Address – Australia and the Pacific: A new chapter', <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/address-australia-and-pacific-new-chapter>, viewed 22 March 2021.

⁸ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 5.

⁹ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 12.

¹⁰ Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Pacific Community (SPC), *Submission 16*, p. 18.

- 4.7 The PIFS-SPC, in July 2020, raised concerns about the level of engagement with local civil society groups as part of the Pacific Step-up. The PIFS-SPC stated that ‘Pacific groups (governments and civil society)’ that it ‘consulted have heard of Pacific Step-up, however most are not across the details of the initiative, particularly how it fits with existing interventions and support for regional and national human rights commitments.’¹¹ The PIFS-SPC elaborated that ‘some stakeholders consulted for this submission were unsure whether or not they had been engaged or involved with Pacific Step-up.’¹²
- 4.8 The United Nations Country Teams in the Pacific (UNCTP) stated that ‘development partners working in the gender equality space have limited engagement with Australia’s Pacific Step-Up and may benefit from more systematic engagement’.¹³
- 4.9 UnitingWorld acknowledged the engagement by the Australian Government with Pacific churches, and suggested this approach should be repeated across the broader Step-up:
- The Church Partnership Program section of the Australian Government’s Pacific Step up has shown commendable leadership in building connections with Pacific Churches. A key step was prioritising meeting with Pacific Church leaders at the Pacific Conference of Churches Pacific Church Leaders Meeting. The Churches’ priorities, concerns and desired engagement could be heard and inform the Pacific Step-up’s mode of collaboration with Pacific Churches. This approach should be a blueprint for the broader Pacific Step-up engagement within the Pacific.¹⁴
- 4.10 In June 2021, DFAT advised that additional engagements had been undertaken throughout 2020 and the first half of 2021.¹⁵
- 4.11 World Vision observed the exclusion of women with disabilities from ‘regional and national initiatives, policy, programs and services’, and noted that ‘unique forms of discrimination require holistic responses from

¹¹ PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, p. 18.

¹² PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, p. 18.

¹³ United Nations Country Teams in the Pacific, *Submission 30*, p. 8.

¹⁴ UnitingWorld, *Submission 29*, p. 6.

¹⁵ Ms Danielle Heinecke, First Assistant Secretary, Pacific Operations and Development, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 1.

lawmakers and policymakers alike.¹⁶ CBM Australia stated that targeted engagement should be more deliberate:

Australia's Pacific Step-up has driven prioritised engagement with a number of representative women's organisations through the Pacific Women network and existing relationships with regional bodies such as the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Pacific Community (SPC). However, targeted engagement with women with disabilities has been less intentional.¹⁷

Locally led development

4.12 Inquiry participants presented a consensus on the value of official development assistance directly supporting locally led initiatives. The *Localisation Policy Note* published by DFAT defines localisation in the following terms:

For Australia, localisation means recognising, respecting and strengthening leadership and decision-making by national and local actors in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations.¹⁸

4.13 DFAT stated that its *Pacific Women* program was 'a deliberate strategy to reach more women and girls with practical support services through local organisations which respond to the diverse and culturally specific needs of women across Pacific island countries.'¹⁹

4.14 The funding of crisis centres was presented by DFAT as an illustration of how Australian Government funding could enable a local organisation to grow into a stable institution:

... Vanuatu originally had a crisis centre that was really just run out of a house, a very local initiative. What we've been able to do through this program is to institutionalise that and support them through funding for them to institutionalise it. So there are now crisis centres across Vanuatu's provinces, which do not just provide services for women but also support men, who are important to engage with in this space. And that's really the ongoing lesson for the program—you need to have long-term, predictable

¹⁶ World Vision, *Submission 22*, p. 10.

¹⁷ CBM Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 3.

¹⁸ DFAT, 'Annex 1: Humanitarian, NGOs and Partnerships Division Localisation Policy Note', *Localisation and the ANCP 2019-20*, July 2021, p. 23, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/localisation-and-the-ancp-2019-20>, viewed 21 July 2021.

¹⁹ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 16.

support for these countries to grow themselves, and they need to institutionalise their own institutions in their own country.²⁰

- 4.15 The Australian Red Cross stated that Government is ‘well-placed to require that partner multilateral organisations’ take actions to ‘support for locally led programs²¹:

Power imbalances, which continue to undermine the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific, can be addressed by supporting local women’s organisations and initiatives that foster women leaders at all levels of decision making. It is important that funding mechanisms and opportunities are structured to enable and encourage local organisations, in particular those focused on women and girls, to access and receive international humanitarian funding without having to compete with international actors.²²

- 4.16 At the World Humanitarian Summit 2016, Australia committed to the Grand Bargain, which included a commitment for signatories to ‘achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs.’²³ ActionAid Australia stated that ‘the Government should develop a clear pathway over the next 12 months to meet its Grand Bargain commitment.’²⁴

- 4.17 DFAT’s 2020–2021 self-report against Grand Bargain commitments states that ‘a localisation practice note’ was in draft form in February 2021.²⁵ The self-report also states that:

We require all partners to submit localisation plans that outline how they intend to strengthen the capacity and influence of their downstream partners over the course of the multi-year agreement. ... We encourage intermediaries

²⁰ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 7.

²¹ Australian Red Cross, *Submission 8*, p. 9.

²² Australian Red Cross, *Submission 8*, p. 9.

²³ Agenda for Humanity, ‘The Grand Bargain’, 23 May 2016, p. 5, https://agendaforhumanity.org/sites/default/files/resources/2018/Jan/Grand_Bargain_final_22_May_FINAL-2.pdf, viewed 14 July 2021.

²⁴ ActionAid Australia, *Submission 12*, p. 2.

²⁵ DFAT, ‘Grand Bargain in 2020: Annual Self Report – Narrative Summary’, 22 February 2021, p. 5. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/grand-bargain-self-reporting-exercise-2020-2021>, viewed 21 July 2021.

to pass down an appropriate portion of the overhead costs to local/national partners to support institutional strengthening.²⁶

Capacity to access aid funding

4.18 DFAT stated that it ‘works with civil society organisations’ which have varying capacity levels ‘through a mix of funding mechanisms’²⁷:

Using partnerships with established organisations helps us to manage the risk of working with small local organisations, which are often best placed to deliver effective services, but which may not have the capacity or systems in place, working alone, to satisfy Australian Government standards.²⁸

4.19 The Australian Council for International Development stated that ‘some organisations do not have the capacity or desire to service the high levels of compliance required on DFAT grants.’²⁹ The PIFS-SPC stated that ‘many smaller and community based [civil society organisations] cannot access funding at all’, explaining that:

... many requirements of existing grant programmes – including having undergone formal audits, having certain policies in place, or being able to conduct in-depth scoping, analysis, or evaluation – exclude community based CSOs. Similarly, many smaller organisations do not have the absorptive capacity to take on larger grants or execute significant budgets, especially when project-based funding has only marginal allocations to management and administration.³⁰

4.20 Cardno stated in July 2020 that it was ‘uncommon for Australian development programs to be locally led’, and it supported ‘DFAT’s process of initiating a “localisation agenda”’.³¹ However, Cardno outlined the challenges associated with local and ‘international expert’ leadership models, explaining that:

More often, at the leadership level, program management functions, such as financial management and procurement, are prioritised and typically filled by ‘international’ experts. While these functions are fundamental to protecting

²⁶ DFAT, ‘Grand Bargain in 2020: Annual Self Report – Narrative Summary’, 22 February 2021, p. 2.

²⁷ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 15.

²⁸ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 15.

²⁹ Australian Council for International Development, *Submission 9*, p. 2.

³⁰ PIFS-SPC, *Submission 16*, p. 17.

³¹ Cardno, *Submission 12*, p. 2.

Australian taxpayer funds (including from fraud risks and upholding safeguards, such as child protection), local contextual knowledge and associated skills are also essential for achieving desired program outcomes and realising value for money from Australian aid spend. Sometimes, local personnel are put in leadership roles and valued for their contextual knowledge and relationships, but then penalised for not having perfect written English or knowing how to submit reports to DFAT in exactly the right format.³²

- 4.21 Cardno stated that it dealt with these challenges by establishing teams where ‘wholly local’ leadership teams ‘drive the program and make the decisions, with the support of others as needed.’³³ Cardno advised that the recruited international personnel ‘help [the local leadership] translate their vision into practice and support them [to] meet donor accountability requirements.’³⁴
- 4.22 It was suggested by the International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) that non-government organisations acting as intermediaries for funding local organisations should be engaged on the condition that they be ‘held accountable for demonstrating improvements in the capacity of local partners through clear benchmarks included in contracts.’³⁵ The IWDA contended that while intermediary funding channels mitigate some risks, they also exacerbate others:
- The use of intermediaries is largely focused on mitigating the institutional risks created by working through smaller providers; however, the addition of a third party comes with its own risks to program effectiveness. This extra layer can dilute control, decrease responsibility, reduce access to information and networks for both donor and implementer, and increase contract uncertainty.³⁶
- 4.23 The IWDA also identified that there was a need to ‘invest in DFAT staffing and capacity’ to allow DFAT to ‘actively manage tailored partnership arrangements and complex designs and contracts’.³⁷

³² Cardno, *Submission 12*, p. 2.

³³ Cardno, *Submission 12*, pp 3-4.

³⁴ Cardno, *Submission 12*, pp 3-4.

³⁵ International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA), *Submission 35*, p. 13-14.

³⁶ IWDA, *Submission 35*, p. 13.

³⁷ Ms Tracey Newbury, Senior Program Manager, IWDA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 12.

Areas of focus for the Pacific Step-up

- 4.24 Inquiry participants expressed different views as to whether the Step-up had engaged with the most critical areas of need. This was seen in discussions about infrastructure development, economic empowerment, education and training. The COVID-19 pandemic also crystallised the importance of health systems.
- 4.25 Some submissions suggested additional areas the Step-up might focus upon to advance the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific islands. These areas included:
- Domestic violence prevention³⁸
 - Protection of children from violence³⁹
 - Modern slavery⁴⁰
 - Education services⁴¹
 - Water, sanitation and hygiene⁴²
 - Decriminalisation of homosexuality⁴³
- 4.26 As discussed in Chapter 3, the underlying drivers of issues facing women and girls are interlinked and complex. Walk Free recognised that ‘investment in addressing the drivers of modern slavery will also work to tackle many other social, health and economic issues that co-exist in the region.’⁴⁴

Focus on infrastructure

- 4.27 Submissions presented differing views about the appropriateness of the Pacific Step-up’s focus on infrastructure development and whether it may sideline women and girls’ human rights.
- 4.28 More generally, the Committee has continued to hear since its 2015 report about the effectiveness of ‘gender mainstreaming’ across the aid program, that is, the ‘concept of assessing the different implications for women and

³⁸ Save the Children, *Submission 39*, p. 14.

³⁹ Save the Children, *Submission 39*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Walk Free, *Submission 40*, p. 2; Save the Children, *Submission 39*, p. 16-17.

⁴¹ RESULTS International Australia, *Submission 38*, p. 10.

⁴² WaterAid Australia, *Submission 4*, p. 2.

⁴³ Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, *Submission 1*, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Walk Free, *Submission 40*, p. 2.

men of any planned policy action, including legislation and programmes in all areas and at all levels.’⁴⁵

4.29 The DFAT *Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy* states that the Australian Government ‘takes a twin-track approach to gender equality.’⁴⁶

DFAT stated:

In addition to gender-targeted investments, the Australian Government incorporates gender equality through Australia’s stepped up engagement to support a more resilient Pacific, through economic, security and people-to-people initiatives in our bilateral and regional investments in sectors such as health, education, law and justice, governance and economic growth.⁴⁷

4.30 The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) outlined that ‘it works to empower women and girls and improve greater gender equity in all projects,’⁴⁸ and elaborated:

Project proposals must address gendered social relations from design to completion including the composition of research teams, any gender differentiated impacts, and application of the ‘do no harm’ principle.⁴⁹

4.31 The ‘do no harm’ principle is one of four principles underpinning the Australian Government’s second *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031*. The *National Action Plan* states ‘in this context, a “do no harm” approach means maximising positive outcomes for women and girls, men and boys, while minimising any unintended potential harm that could arise from our actions.’⁵⁰

4.32 ActionAid Australia agreed that ‘to be most effective the Government should adopt a twin track approach that invests in both standalone programming that has gender equality as its central objective, alongside mainstreaming gender equality outcomes across all other investments.’⁵¹

⁴⁵ Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), *Empowering Women and Girls*, December 2015, p. 294.

⁴⁶ DFAT, *Gender equality and women’s empowerment strategy*, February 2016, p. 5.

⁴⁷ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 22.

⁴⁸ ACIAR, *Submission 7*, p. 1.

⁴⁹ ACIAR, *Submission 7*, p. 1.

⁵⁰ DFAT, *Australia’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021–2031*, p. 14.

⁵¹ ActionAid, *Submission 15*, p. 4.

4.33 World Vision described that ‘the focus of the Pacific Step-up to [July 2020] has been primarily on financing economic infrastructure and strengthening defence ties, instead of addressing the pressing social challenges facing women and girls in the region’, and further recommended that:

... the Government’s Pacific Step-up integrates a stronger focus on the issues raised [including] women’s empowerment, child protection, social transformation, climate resilience and inclusive community development.⁵²

4.34 The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) commented that along with funding reductions, an ‘emphasis on large infrastructure projects and specific cuts to health care spending within the [official development assistance] will’ contribute to ‘a slowing or detrimental effect on the achievement of human rights for women and girls in the Pacific.’⁵³ Family Planning NSW echoed concerns about the redirection of funding:

The Step-up focuses on financial and structural development of the Pacific region and uses funds that have been redirected from programs that focused on health and education. Without health and education development programs, improvements in hard-infrastructure allow people who already have opportunities to take advantage of Step-up initiatives, leaving many women and girls behind.⁵⁴

4.35 The value of infrastructure development that incorporates the needs of women and girls was described by the Australian Red Cross:

It is important the [Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific] is not gender neutral and potential gendered impacts are taken into account at all stages of infrastructure project development. There is an opportunity for Australia to contribute to gender equality and women’s empowerment through the Facility as well as mitigating against potentially harmful or negative consequences (such as perpetuating existing gender inequality), but this needs to be part of the framework, analysis, development, implementation and monitoring of projects.⁵⁵

⁵² World Vision, *Submission 22*, p. 4.

⁵³ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Submission 23*, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Family Planning NSW, *Submission 5*, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Australian Red Cross, *Submission 8*, pp. 9-10.

- 4.36 Infrastructure was recognised by the UNCTP to have ‘a gendered dimension’ but stated that infrastructure is ‘only one component of the larger agenda in working towards women’s human rights more broadly.’⁵⁶

Focus on economic prosperity

- 4.37 The interplay between economic stimulation and the advancement of human rights, and what this meant for official development assistance, was discussed in some submissions.
- 4.38 DFAT highlighted that it is ‘investing in gender equality through mainstreaming’ women and girls issues.⁵⁷ As part of its *Partnerships for Recovery* strategy, DFAT recognised the heightened economic insecurity facing women and girls as a result of the pandemic:

We will invest in gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. Women are shouldering much of the economic burden of COVID-19. They are more vulnerable to economic insecurity during crises due to an increase in unpaid domestic labour. They often hold less stable jobs, rely on the informal economy for their livelihoods, and may not be part of policy-making processes.⁵⁸

- 4.39 The International Consortium for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights emphasised that gender equality is a precondition to economic prosperity as ‘achieving economic prosperity will be impossible without realising gender equality and the prioritisation of the rights of women and girls, including [sexual and reproductive health and rights].’⁵⁹ The Consortium emphasised that this will require:

... incorporating gender-based analyses when financing infrastructure initiatives to ensure the needs of women and girls and other marginalised groups are included and prioritised. Meaningful engagement with community leaders and local civil society, including women and girl-focused organisations can ensure Step-up initiatives such as labour mobility and sporting programs are accessible and responsive to the needs of these groups.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ UNCTP, *Submission 30*, p. 8.

⁵⁷ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 22.

⁵⁸ DFAT, *Partnerships for Recovery*, 29 May 2020, p. 12.

⁵⁹ International Consortium for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, *Submission 31*, p. 5.

⁶⁰ International Consortium for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, *Submission 31*, p. 5.

4.40 Oaktree stated that ‘increasing young women’s opportunities to participate in the Pacific labour market is more vital now than ever, so they can further contribute to the Pacific’s economic recovery process, following the COVID-19 pandemic.’⁶¹ Oaktree elaborated that this may stimulate broader economic benefits:

Investment to galvanise the economic participation of young women also strengthens Australia’s commitments under the Pacific Step-up. This includes our shared vision of an economically prosperous region, which in turn, paves the foundation for greater regional stability and security.⁶²

4.41 Concerns were voiced by ActionAid Australia that trade liberalisation as a result of ‘the PACER Plus agreement could negatively impact on women’s rights and gender equality across a range of spheres.’⁶³ ActionAid elaborated that ‘the reduction in trade tariffs could reduce available resources for public services that support gender equality’⁶⁴ and raised concerns that:

The agreement could also threaten women’s livelihoods by increasing competition in sectors with the highest rate of women’s participation, such as small holder farming and industries in their infancy such as garment manufacturing and food processing.⁶⁵

Focus on education and training

4.42 Improving education outcomes in the Pacific islands was posited by inquiry participants as important to advancing gender equality. The Committee in its 2015 report stated that ‘the right to education is a basic human right, and an essential foundation for efforts to empower women and girls and enable them to achieve their potential,’ and discussed evidence that ‘highlighted a range of factors that contribute to lower levels of education and poorer outcomes for girls and women.’⁶⁶

⁶¹ Oaktree, *Submission 26*, p. 8.

⁶² Oaktree, *Submission 26*, p. 8.

⁶³ ActionAid Australia, *Submission 15*, p. 11.

⁶⁴ ActionAid Australia, *Submission 15*, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁵ ActionAid Australia, *Submission 15*, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁶ JSCFADT, *Empowering Women and Girls*, December 2015, p. 204.

- 4.43 DFAT stated it was ‘looking for transformative change, which does mean supporting young women leaders to become the future leaders in their specific countries.’⁶⁷
- 4.44 World Vision stated that ‘access to education does lead to increased human capital. Investment in education is an investment in the future for all these communities across the Pacific.’⁶⁸ RESULTS Australia stated that ‘educated girls can bring about unprecedented social and economic changes to their families and communities’⁶⁹, and further stated:
- The World Bank has noted the following benefits of girls’ education: ‘Better educated women tend to be healthier, participate more in the formal labour market, earn higher incomes, have fewer children, marry at a later age, and enable better health care and education for their children, should they choose to become mothers. All these factors combined can help lift households, communities, and nations out of poverty.’⁷⁰
- 4.45 Melbourne Children’s Global Health similarly highlighted the importance of education, stating that ‘the largest determinant of child health is female literacy.’⁷¹
- 4.46 The Pasifika Women’s Alliance suggested that a ‘brain-drain’⁷² in the Pacific was occurring:
- ... there is a lack of infrastructure to cater to the educational and employment demands of the people, which has caused a massive ‘brain-drain’ as more of the advantaged Pacific people leave their countries to live in Australia and New Zealand mainly.⁷³
- 4.47 In offering improved educational and skill development opportunities in Australia, DFAT recognised that Australia did not ‘want to contribute to

⁶⁷ Ms Julie-Ann Guivarra, Ambassador for Gender Equality, and First Assistant Secretary, Gender Equality Branch, Multilateral Policy Division, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Ms Kate Moss, Manager, Pacific, World Vision Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 17.

⁶⁹ RESULTS Australia, *Submission 38*, p. 8.

⁷⁰ RESULTS Australia, *Submission 38*, p. 8.

⁷¹ Melbourne Children’s Global Health, *Submission 27*, p. 2.

⁷² Pasifika Women’s Alliance, *Submission 20*, p. 3.

⁷³ Pasifika Women’s Alliance, *Submission 20*, p. 3.

brain drain in the Pacific. We want their skilled labour to go back and use that to start up businesses.⁷⁴

- 4.48 DFAT stated it was important for Australia to ‘engage with Pacific governments to spend more of their money on education’ in their own countries.⁷⁵ DFAT detailed that the quality of, and not access to, education was often inhibiting women and girls:⁷⁶

Access [to education] is actually not too bad in the Pacific. It’s pretty equal for women and men. The issue is quality, and it’s also the transition from primary school to secondary [education] and then on to higher skills. That’s actually really where the constraint is. So we’re shifting more of our focus to secondary with the Pacific and with partnerships like the Global Partnership for Education, because that secondary space is where we are going to get those emerging leaders coming from.⁷⁷

- 4.49 The Australian National University (ANU) Development Policy Centre similarly stated that ‘the quality of education is a major concern’⁷⁸:

... it’s not only about getting children into school or even necessarily about spending money but about making sure that translates into quality education.⁷⁹

- 4.50 The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics maintains national monitoring statistics on education, including data disaggregated by male and female. On page 60, Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 lists enrolment statistics for primary education in Pacific island countries. On page 66, Table 4.3 and Table 4.4 lists enrolment statistics for secondary education in Pacific island countries.

- 4.51 Table 4.1 shows that 15 out of 22 countries targeted as part of the Pacific Step-up⁸⁰ have good enrolment rates for girls in primary education across

⁷⁴ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 5.

⁷⁵ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 9.

⁷⁶ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 3.

⁷⁸ Mr Stephen Howes, Director, Development Policy Centre, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University (ANU); Chair, Femili PNG, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 15.

⁷⁹ Mr Howes, ANU Development Policy Centre; Femili PNG, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 15.

⁸⁰ See Chapter 1 for list of countries targeted as part of the Pacific Step-up.

their population. This is reflected by these countries' gross enrolment ratio indicator for girls in primary education being above 90 per cent.⁸¹ This is further discussed at Paragraph 4.73.

- 4.52 Levels of engagement with secondary education for girls is reduced, with Table 4.3 reflecting that only 9 out of 22 countries targeted as part of the Pacific Step-up have a gross enrolment ratio for girls in secondary education that is above 90 per cent.⁸²
- 4.53 Generally, enrolment levels of girls in primary and secondary education has improved over time. However, there are significant gaps in the data obtained by UNESCO. Notably, data is not consistently available for all Pacific island countries. Some of the indicators included in Tables 4.1 to 4.4 did not have data reported for years after 2015 for American Samoa, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Micronesia (Federated States of), New Caledonia, Palau, Solomon Islands. Only 10 out of 22 nations listed as part of the Pacific Step-up had data reported for the number of female students enrolled in primary education for 2019.
- 4.54 World Vision Australia highlighted concerns that 'Australia's aid investments in education are predominantly focused on adult scholarships and not primarily on children's education.'⁸³
- 4.55 To see progress, the IWDA stated an 'understanding why boys and girls are engaging differently in the education sector, why they're dropping out of school and what is there for the kids when they finish their education' is required.⁸⁴
- 4.56 DFAT described that 'very little comprehensive education regarding sexuality is made available to girls and boys, and school-based "family life education" programs are often limited and face opposition from gatekeepers.'⁸⁵

⁸¹ In the most recent year of data being reported.

⁸² In the most recent year of data being reported.

⁸³ Ms Mercy Jumo, Senior Policy Adviser, Child Rights, World Vision Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 16.

⁸⁴ Ms Newbury, IWDA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 15.

⁸⁵ DFAT, *Submission 28*, pp. 10-11.

4.57 The UNCTP observed that Pacific governments used education curricula as an:

... important mechanism for transforming gender relations, gender norms, contextualising cultural contexts, prevention of gender-based violence, and importantly instilling in young people a strong understanding of choice, responsibility, agency, social citizenship, and the promotion and protection of human rights.⁸⁶

4.58 The UNCTP also advised that it is working closely with Ministries of Education across the Pacific to 'ensure the standardisation of curriculums with international best standards and practices.'⁸⁷

4.59 The Shifting the Power Coalition recognised a need to 'raise the standards or raise the understanding of why we are working for women's rights and gender equality' within national curriculums and community education programs.⁸⁸

4.60 Cardno detailed how education curriculums and programs in the Pacific islands can be audited for inclusion of gender objectives:

If you did an audit of the kinds of materials that a school might be using and the way that girls and boys or men and women might be portrayed in those materials—the kinds of roles they're playing, the stereotypes that emerge—that would be one example of how people's ideas of male and female roles and the appropriate relationships between them get shaped from that young age and through the education system.⁸⁹

4.61 DFAT also identified that the achievement of gender parity in access to education does not guarantee women's economic empowerment on its own:

Forum Island Countries except Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands have achieved gender parity in access to primary and secondary education. However, this is not necessarily translating into opportunities for economic empowerment for a number of reasons, including a lack of reintegration to the workforce for mothers and legislation that directly and

⁸⁶ UNCTP, *Submission 30*, p. 7.

⁸⁷ UNCTP, *Submission 30*, p. 7.

⁸⁸ Ms Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls, Technical Adviser, Shifting the Power Coalition, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 15.

⁸⁹ Ms Joanne Choe, Regional Manager, Pacific, Cardno, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 16.

indirectly limits women's access to employment opportunities or contributes to discriminatory pay and conditions for women.⁹⁰

- 4.62 The Shifting the Power Coalition stated that improving educational outcomes needed improvements across other areas of society, including 'information communications technology that is appropriate and accessible'.⁹¹

Focus on health needs

- 4.63 Submissions were received prior and during the pivot of the Pacific Step-up to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some groups perceived that the earlier announcements relating to Pacific Step-up activities did not adequately focus on supporting health systems.⁹²

- 4.64 DFAT detailed that following consultations, it would be seeking to revise its approach to health and gender programs:

There's an opportunity to strengthen linkages between our health programs, particularly the ones that focus on sexual and reproductive health and gender. Traditionally, they've been separate in DFAT, where we've had health programs and gender programs. We're bringing those together so that there are much stronger linkages, and we can use the networks, particularly of Pacific women, to drive effectiveness on sexual and reproductive health programs, because it's a component, again, of not only service delivery but also advocacy and community awareness.⁹³

- 4.65 The specific impacts of disease that are felt by women was highlighted by Results International Australia, which stated that 'statistically, women are less likely to seek medical help than men, often due to issues such as lower levels of literacy or being worried about the impact on their family.'⁹⁴

⁹⁰ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 10.

⁹¹ Ms Bhagwan-Rolls, Shifting the Power Coalition, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 15.

⁹² International Consortium for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, *Submission 31*, p. 5; International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF), *Submission 25*, p. 5; Family Planning NSW, *Submission 5*, p. 4.

⁹³ Ms Jane Bastin-Sikimeti, Director, Pacific Gender Section, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 6.

⁹⁴ RESULTS International Australia, *Submission 38*, p. 2.

- 4.66 DFAT detailed that ‘maternal health in an ongoing issue in the Pacific’, and referred to maternal mortality statistics for Pacific island countries reported by UNICEF⁹⁵:

The average maternal mortality ratio is 84 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, according to UN-validated estimates from 2015, which means the region is a long way from reaching international development targets. Importantly, these estimates are based on data from seven countries only, and may be unstable because they often relate to small numbers of deaths per country per year.⁹⁶

- 4.67 The International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF) highlighted that ‘the Pacific Step-up does not specifically mention health and has no targeted funding support towards health systems strengthening.’⁹⁷ The IPPF accordingly welcomed the focus in DFAT’s COVID-19 response, Partnerships for Recovery, ‘on strengthening health systems.’⁹⁸
- 4.68 The IPPF acknowledged that DFAT’s funding of programs aimed at improving sexual and reproductive health and rights access in the region had seen successes. The IPPF provided the example of DFAT’s support for the Niu Vaka Pacific Strategy 2019-2022, which ensured that:

In 2019 alone, almost 500,000 [sexual and reproductive health and rights] services, and almost 1 million health services overall, were delivered in the Pacific. This long-term investment has allowed Member Associations to increase mobile outreach services, enhance youth engagement, build a robust and vibrant volunteer and peer support network and reach people with [sexual and reproductive health and rights] services and awareness programmes in some communities for the first time.⁹⁹

Humanitarian and disaster relief vessel

- 4.69 As part of the Pacific Step-up, the Prime Minister announced on 8 November 2018 that ‘the Government will also put in place arrangements to ensure that Australia has a dedicated vessel to deliver our support to our partners in the

⁹⁵ DFAT, *Submission 28*, pp. 10-11.

⁹⁶ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Pacific Office, *Situation Analysis of Children in the Pacific island Countries*, December 2017, p. 7.

⁹⁷ IPPF, *Submission 25*, p. 5.

⁹⁸ IPPF, *Submission 25*, p. 5.

⁹⁹ IPPF, *Submission 25*, p. 6.

Pacific. Its duties will include humanitarian assistance and response.¹⁰⁰ The Defence Minister stated that this was a 'commitment to a large-hulled humanitarian and disaster relief vessel that would operate semi-permanently operating in the south west Pacific.'¹⁰¹

4.70 Through other concurrent inquiries examining the Pacific Step-up, the JSCFADT on 4 September 2020 conducted a public hearing with representatives of Pacific governments. The Deputy High Commissioner for Papua New Guinea, Mr Tameo, referred to the medical ships operated by Youth with a Mission (YWAM)¹⁰² and stated:

That would really help a lot because we need a lot of health facilities and health workers out there. I'm sure that would also be beneficial in other Pacific island countries. Imagine bringing a hospital next to a community that would never have an opportunity to access facilities and doctors.¹⁰³

4.71 The High Commissioner for the Solomon Islands, Mr Sisilo, stated 'it certainly would be a very useful thing if we have a medical ship or health vessel with a multipurpose role going around the islands, especially the rural areas where health facilities are very much wanting.'¹⁰⁴ Mr Sisilo elaborated:

I come from a Polynesian atoll in the Solomons that is really on the outskirts of the country. The only way to get there is by boat, and the boat goes there once every three months—if you are lucky. Most of the time the clinic at home is without medication or medicines, and even without a registered nurse, so it's really a challenge for some of our outlying islands. If we had this kind of vessel working in Solomon Islands, visiting the islands every now and then, that would certainly be a game changer. It would also prevent people from coming every now and then to the main town. It can be very expensive

¹⁰⁰ Prime Minister, 'Strengthening Australia's commitment to the Pacific', *Media Release*, 8 November 2018.

¹⁰¹ David Wroe, 'Christopher Pyne promises new ship in 'pivot' to the south Pacific', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 November 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/christopher-pyne-promises-new-ship-in-pivot-to-the-south-pacific-20181108-p50es8.html>, viewed 6 September 2021.

¹⁰² Mr Sakias Tameo, Deputy High Commissioner, Papua New Guinea, *Committee Hansard, Inquiry into strengthening Australia's relationships with countries in the Pacific region*, Canberra, 4 September 2020, p. 24.

¹⁰³ Mr Tameo, *Committee Hansard, Inquiry into strengthening Australia's relationships with countries in the Pacific region*, Canberra, 4 September 2020, p. 24.

¹⁰⁴ His Excellency Mr Robert Sisilo, High Commissioner, Solomon Islands, *Committee Hansard, Inquiry into strengthening Australia's relationships with countries in the Pacific region*, Canberra, 4 September 2020, p. 26.

coming over to Honiara, and then you have to spend another two or three months before the next boat goes back.¹⁰⁵

Education indicators for Pacific island countries

- 4.72 The following tables provide education enrolment statistics for Pacific islands countries, as published in the UNESCO Institute for Statistics' national education monitoring dataset. There are significant periods where data is not available for some Pacific island countries. Accordingly, the data presented for each country is the most recent data available (generally 2019) and the earliest data available in the 30 year period from 1990 to 2020.
- 4.73 The *school age population* in Table 4.1 and Table 4.3 provides the number of girls, based on their age, that could be expected to be in primary or secondary education in that country.
- 4.74 The *gross enrolment ratio* (GER) listed in Table 4.1 and Table 4.3 measures the 'general level of participation'¹⁰⁶ in primary and secondary education by girls in a country, by providing a percentage of the number of girls enrolled in primary (or secondary) education against the *school age population*. As the GER counts the 'number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age,' the GER can exceed 100 per cent as it accounts for over-age or under-age children enrolled in a particular level of education.¹⁰⁷
- 4.75 The UNESCO Institute for Statistics suggests that:
- A high GER generally indicates a high degree of participation, whether the pupils belong to the official age group or not. A GER value approaching or exceeding 100% indicates that a country is, in principle, able to accommodate all of its school-age population, but it does not indicate the proportion already enrolled.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Mr Sisilo, *Committee Hansard, Inquiry into strengthening Australia's relationships with countries in the Pacific region*, Canberra, 4 September 2020, p. 26.

¹⁰⁶ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'Gross enrolment ratio by level of education', http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=NATMON_DS, viewed 13 August 2021.

¹⁰⁷ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'Gross enrolment ratio by level of education', http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=NATMON_DS, viewed 13 August 2021.

¹⁰⁸ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'Gross enrolment ratio by level of education', http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=NATMON_DS, viewed 13 August 2021.

4.76 Table 4.2 and Table 4.3 provide the number of ‘individuals officially registered in’ primary or secondary education ‘regardless of age.’¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, ‘Enrolment by level of education’,
http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=NATMON_DS, viewed 13 August 2021.

Table 4.1 Gross enrolment ratio (GER) of school age female population in primary education

Country	Year	Gross enrolment ratio, primary, female (per cent)	Change in GER (per cent)	School age population, primary education, female (number)	Change in school age population (number)
American Samoa	1992	88.1	-12.0	4,278	+243
American Samoa	1990	100.1		4,035	
Cook Islands	2019	112.7	+8.8	797	-510
Cook Islands	1997	103.8		1,307	
Fiji	2019	114.2	+5.6	51,084	-3,475
Fiji	1991	108.6		54,559	
French Polynesia	1996	111.7	-13.5	12,587	+1,992
French Polynesia	1990	125.2		10,595	
Kiribati	2017	104.9	-13.3	8,090	+1,911
Kiribati	1990	118.1		6,179	
Marshall Islands	2019	78.1	-10.7	4,449	-12
Marshall Islands	1999	88.8		4,461	

Micronesia (Federated States of)	2019	94.7	-17.1	7,002	-1,258
Micronesia (Federated States of)	2004	111.8		8,260	
Nauru	2019	121.0	+10.2	758	+27
Nauru	1998	110.8		731	
Niue	2019	145.6	+54.5	79	-55
Niue	1998	91.0		134	
Palau	2014	105.2	+4.4	712	-166
Palau	1999	100.8		878	
Papua New Guinea	2016	103.6	+52.3	568,258	+208,850
Papua New Guinea	1990	51.2		359,408	
Samoa	2019	115.7	+15.4	14,133	+1,523
Samoa	1994	100.3		12,610	
Solomon Islands	2019	103.9	+23.1	49,703	+23,584
Solomon Islands	1990	80.8		26,119	

Tokelau	2019	134.4	+39.9	61	-68
Tokelau	1991	94.6		129	
Tonga	2015	116.0	+9.1	6,942	-463
Tonga	1990	106.9		7,405	
Tuvalu	2019	104.1	+27.5	756	-49
Tuvalu	1990	76.6		805	
Vanuatu	2015	107.8	+11.8	20,172	+8,168
Vanuatu	1990	96.0		12,004	

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'National Monitoring Indicators: GER_1_F; SAP_1_F', Education National Monitoring, data extracted on 12 August 2021.

Table 4.2 Number of enrolled students in primary education, female and both sexes

Country	Year	Enrolment in primary education, female (number)	Change in enrolment in primary education, female (number)	Enrolment in primary education, both sexes (number)	Change in enrolment numbers, both sexes (number)
American Samoa	1992	3,769	-270	7,884	-690
American Samoa	1990	4,039		8,574	
Cook Islands	2019	898	-459	1,871	-1,011
Cook Islands	1997	1,357		2,882	
Fiji	2019	58,340	-904	121,666	-342
Fiji	1991	59,244		122,008	
French Polynesia	1996	14,058	+795	29,415	+1,561
French Polynesia	1990	13,263		27,854	
Kiribati	2017	8,483	+1,185	16,695	+1,986
Kiribati	1990	7,298		14,709	
Marshall Islands	2019	3,474	-486	7,234	-975
Marshall Islands	1999	3,960		8,209	

Micronesia (Federated States of)	2019	6,633	-2,601	13,819	-5,286
Micronesia (Federated States of)	2004	9,234		19,105	
Nauru	2019	917	+107	1,856	+193
Nauru	1998	810		1,663	
New Caledonia	1991	10,780	-318	22,325	-633
New Caledonia	1990	11,098		22,958	
Niue	2019	115	-7	217	-65
Niue	1998	122		282	
Palau	2014	749	-136	1,639	-262
Palau	1999	885		1,901	
Papua New Guinea	2016	588,562	+404,434	1,275,085	+859,890
Papua New Guinea	1990	184,128		415,195	
Samoa	2019	16,355	+3,709	33,841	+7,160
Samoa	1994	12,646		26,681	

Solomon Islands	2019	51,632	+30,525	107,118	+59,520
Solomon Islands	1990	21,107		47,598	
Tokelau	2019	82	-40	167	-85
Tokelau	1991	122		252	
Tonga	2015	8,052	+137	16,982	+460
Tonga	1990	7,915		16,522	
Tuvalu	2019	787	+170	1,688	+433
Tuvalu	1990	617		1,255	
Vanuatu	2015	21,741	+10,223	45,931	+21,460
Vanuatu	1990	11,518		24,471	

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'National Monitoring Indicators: 20063; 20062', Education National Monitoring, data extracted on 12 August 2021.

Table 4.3 Gross enrolment ratio (GER) of female population in secondary education

Country	Year	Gross enrolment ratio, secondary, female (per cent)	Change in GER (per cent)	School age population, secondary education, female (number)	Change in school age population (number)
American Samoa	1992	88.9	+0.6	1,890	+22
American Samoa	1990	88.3		1,868	
Cook Islands	2019	98.1	+26.3	934	-318
Cook Islands	1998	71.7		1,252	
Fiji	2012	94.3	+19.0	52,569	-1,251
Fiji	1991	75.3		53,820	
French Polynesia	1993	86.8	+9.1	14,098	-197
French Polynesia	1990	77.8		14,295	
Kiribati	2008	91.4	+54.1	6,486	+2,566
Kiribati	1990	37.3		3,920	
Marshall Islands	2019	66.4	-4.4	4,409	+160
Marshall Islands	1999	70.7		4,249	

Micronesia (Federated States of)	2005	86.6	+1.6	7,765	+16
Micronesia (Federated States of)	2004	85.0		7,749	
Nauru	2019	98.4	+45.0	621	-53
Nauru	2000	53.4		674	
Niue	2019	109.7	+10.3	93	-67
Niue	1991	99.4		160	
Palau	2014	122.9	+12.7	646	-316
Palau	1999	110.2		962	
Papua New Guinea	2016	39.9	+31.7	517,605	+212,077
Papua New Guinea	1990	8.2		305,528	
Samoa	2016	98.0	+12.8	13,420	+318
Samoa	1994	85.2		13,102	
Solomon Islands	2012	47.0	+36.5	41,413	+21,743
Solomon Islands	1990	10.5		19,670	

Tokelau	2019	113.6	+48.1	81	-55
Tokelau	2000	65.4		136	
Tonga	2015	102.4	+4.9	7,547	+291
Tonga	1990	97.5		7,256	
Tuvalu	2019	47.2	-31.1	808	+436
Tuvalu	1990	78.2		372	
Vanuatu	2015	54.9	+39.1	18,326	+6,978
Vanuatu	1991	15.8		11,348	

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'National Monitoring Indicators: GER_2T3_F; SAP_2T3_F', Education National Monitoring, data extracted on 12 August 2021.

Table 4.4 Number of enrolled students in secondary education, female and both sexes

Country	Year	Enrolment in secondary education, female (number)	Change in enrolment in secondary education, female (number)	Enrolment in secondary education, both sexes (number)	Change in enrolment numbers, both sexes (number)
American Samoa	1992	1,680	+30	3,643	+206
American Samoa	1990	1,650		3,437	
Cook Islands	2019	916	+18	1,819	+40
Cook Islands	1998	898		1,779	
Fiji	2012	49,596	+9,054	97,254	+12,697
Fiji	1991	40,542		84,557	
French Polynesia	1993	12,241	+1,124	22,366	+2,711
French Polynesia	1990	11,117		19,655	
Kiribati	2008	5,931	+4,468	11,583	+8,580
Kiribati	1990	1,463		3,003	
Marshall Islands	2019	2,926	-80	5,764	-193
Marshall Islands	1999	3,006		5,957	

Micronesia (Federated States of)	2005	6,724	+136	13,634	+128
Micronesia (Federated States of)	2004	6,588		13,506	
Nauru	2019	611	+251	1,203	+541
Nauru	2000	360		662	
New Caledonia	1997	13,230	+2,557	25,560	+4,887
New Caledonia	1990	10,673		20,673	
Niue	2019	102	-57	199	-103
Niue	1991	159		302	
Palau	2014	794	-266	1,604	-573
Palau	1999	1,060		2,177	
Papua New Guinea	2016	206,319	+181,384	507,278	+441,635
Papua New Guinea	1990	24,935		65,643	
Samoa	2016	13,154	+1,995	25,964	+4,173
Samoa	1994	11,159		21,791	

Solomon Islands	2012	19,473	+17,405	41,660	+36,024
Solomon Islands	1990	2,068		5,636	
Tokelau	2019	92	+3	186	+6
Tokelau	2000	89		180	
Tonga	2015	7,728	+652	15,800	+1,051
Tonga	1990	7,076		14,749	
Tuvalu	2019	381	+90	682	+57
Tuvalu	1990	291		625	
Vanuatu	2015	10,070	+8,273	20,568	+16,384
Vanuatu	1991	1,797		4,184	

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'National Monitoring Indicators: 20063; 20062', Education National Monitoring, data extracted on 12 August 2021.

Concluding comment

- 4.77 During the Committee's 2015 inquiry into *the human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean-Asia Pacific region*, DFAT discussed the need for a better integration between aid and diplomacy. It appears, through the Pacific Step-up, that this integration has been realised.
- 4.78 The Committee heard that consultation may not have been effective in the early stages of the Pacific Step-up, with some organisations being unsure if they had been involved in consultations. The Committee acknowledges DFAT's advice that virtual consultation sessions were held throughout 2020, particularly following the pivot of the Pacific Step-up to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4.79 The issues facing women and girls in the region are interlinked, and cut across the whole of society. The Committee heard that progress continues to be achieved, for example as can be seen in the improvements in education enrolment levels across the Pacific islands. However, there may be several areas of society where engagement as part of the Step-up could be improved.
- 4.80 For example, opportunities to enhance the quality of education and an investment in skills development is considered critical. The Committee heard that a particular focus on working with Pacific governments secondary education and institutions within the Pacific was necessary, as funding primarily for Australia-based tertiary scholarships may contribute to a 'brain-drain' in the Pacific.
- 4.81 The Australian Government's second *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031* is underpinned by the principles of 'do no harm' and 'gender mainstreaming'. The evidence received to this inquiry in 2020 revealed concerns that a gender-neutral approach to supporting infrastructure development could lead to unintended harms for women and girls.
- 4.82 The Committee acknowledges that the twin-track approach adopted by DFAT in its 2016 *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy* recognises that 'gender mainstreaming' does not eliminate the need for targeted gender initiatives.
- 4.83 Throughout the inquiry, DFAT detailed the work it has undertaken to support local organisations, and locally led development in the Pacific.

Inquiry participants also expressed support for a 'localisation agenda' for development assistance.

- 4.84 However, this localisation agenda may be frustrated by the capacity and willingness to provide funding directly to small organisations. The Committee heard that the use of intermediaries can bridge these challenges, but presents different risks through the introduction of an additional layer of abstraction from direct service delivery.
- 4.85 The Committee understands that DFAT is currently developing guidance for localisation of humanitarian and development programming, which may clarify how DFAT will approach these challenges.
- 4.86 The Committee notes evidence of the efficacy of the medical ship operated by Youth with a Mission (YWAM) in partnership with the Government of PNG to provide health services and training to the western provinces. The Committee considers that the role of Australia's dedicated large-hulled vessel should extend beyond naval humanitarian and disaster relief responses. In partnership with governments across the Pacific islands, the role of the vessel should include helping to facilitate the work of civil society groups in areas such as health, engineering and capacity building.

Recommendation 7

- 4.87 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government publish an assessment of the progress on building the capacity of local organisations in the Pacific to advance the rights of women and girls.**
- 4.88 **This should include data about what proportion of funding is provided to local organisations directly, and/or through intermediaries.**

Recommendation 8

- 4.89 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with Pacific governments to provide support for the secondary and tertiary education sector within Pacific island countries, including infrastructure for education institutions.**

Recommendation 9

- 4.90 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government extends the role of the multi-role vessel to include working in partnership with civil society to support the Pacific Islands.**

5. Effectiveness of Australian official development assistance

- 5.1 Submissions considered the means by which Australian official development assistance might be evaluated. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) outlined that when measuring success, it looks at the ‘long-term impacts that might be contributing to that transformational change,’ as well as ‘outcomes and inputs.’¹
- 5.2 DFAT’s Aid Programming Guide suggests that ‘outcomes should define:’²
- an ‘end state’ when the outcome has been achieved;
 - who or what is expected to change; the type of change expected to occur: knowledge (awareness of new ideas, techniques or strategies);
 - action (behaviour change based upon new information/ideas); or
 - condition (organisational or societal conditions changes due to the stakeholder’s actions); and
 - the time by which the change is expected to occur.³
- 5.3 It was recognised that outcomes for women and girls in the region requires long-term strategies. The Pacific Women program, in particular, was

¹ Ms Danielle Heinecke, First Assistant Secretary, Pacific Operations and Development, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 2.

² DFAT, ‘Glossary – Aid Programming Guide’, p. 6, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/aid-programming-guide-glossary.pdf>, viewed 13 July 2021.

³ DFAT, ‘Glossary – Aid Programming Guide’, p. 6, viewed 13 July 2021.

discussed by inquiry participants as an example of long-term development assistance.⁴

- 5.4 DFAT provides funding through a variety of programs, including: those associated with the Pacific Step-up, such as the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific; the Australian NGO Cooperation Program; Pacific Women; and bilateral aid.⁵

Evaluating effectiveness of development assistance

- 5.5 Changes have been made to the DFAT's performance assessment framework since the Committee's 2015 report, which examined DFAT's then-recently revised performance framework, *Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid*.⁶
- 5.6 DFAT stated in its submission to this inquiry that 'the effectiveness of Australia's overseas development assistance is regularly evaluated in line with DFAT's publicly available monitoring and evaluation standards.'⁷ Evaluation is defined by DFAT as:

... the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed investment, program or policy. It is an in-depth process which takes place on a periodic basis. Evaluation aims to provide credible evidence which can inform major program management and policy decisions and highlight important development lessons.

Evaluation is distinct from, but related to, monitoring. Monitoring is a continuous process which examines whether an investment, policy or program is on track to achieve its intended results.⁸

- 5.7 The performance assessment process was revised as part of DFAT's COVID-19 response, *Partnerships for Recovery*, in May 2020.⁹ Continuing from

⁴ Australian Council for International Development, *Submission 9*, p. 1; United Nations Country Teams in the Pacific, *Submission 30*, p. 16.

⁵ DFAT, *Submission 28*, pp. 16, 22-23.

⁶ Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), *Empowering Women and Girls*, December 2015, p. 332.

⁷ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 20.

⁸ DFAT, 'DFAT Development Evaluation Policy', p. 1, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/dfat-development-evaluation-policy.pdf>, viewed 13 July 2021.

consultations in 2019 on a ‘new international development policy’¹⁰, this includes performance indicators relating to violence against women and girls, education enrolment rates, women’s entrepreneurship, and percentage of investments effectively addressing gender issues.¹¹

- 5.8 In November 2020, DFAT published good practice guidance on *gender equality in monitoring and evaluation and reporting* to support the performance measures described in *Partnerships for Recovery*.¹²
- 5.9 DFAT described strategic evaluations on its website as ‘broad assessments of Australian aid that focus on policy directions or specific development themes.’¹³ This is differentiated by DFAT from investment- or program-level evaluations which ask whether a specific program has been successful.¹⁴
- 5.10 The strategic evaluation work of DFAT’s Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) was cited by a range of inquiry participants¹⁵, indicating a good awareness of the insights provided by the ODE. In relation to women and girls in the Pacific, in recent years the ODE has published two substantial reports:
- *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Evaluating a decade of Australia’s development assistance (2019)*¹⁶

⁹ DFAT, ‘Australia’s development program – performance assessment’, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/development/performance-assessment>, viewed 13 July 2021.

¹⁰ DFAT, ‘Submissions on a new international development policy’, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/aid/new-international-development-policy/Pages/submissions>, viewed 13 July 2021.

¹¹ DFAT, ‘Australia’s Development Program – performance assessment’, July 2021, pp. 6-8, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australias-development-program-performance-assessment.pdf>, viewed 21 July 2021.

¹² DFAT, ‘Gender equality in monitoring and evaluation’, November 2020, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/gender-equality-in-monitoring-and-evaluation-good-practice-note.pdf>, viewed 21 July 2021.

¹³ DFAT, ‘Development evaluation’, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/development/performance-assessment/development-evaluation>, viewed 5 July 2021.

¹⁴ DFAT, ‘Development evaluation’, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/development/performance-assessment/development-evaluation>, viewed 5 July 2021.

¹⁵ Australian National University (ANU) Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA), *Submission 18*, p. 3; World Vision Australia, *Submission 22*, p. 4; International Women’s Development Agency, *Submission 35*, p. 12.

¹⁶ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 21.

- *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Six-Year Evaluation Report (2020)*¹⁷

5.11 The ODE commissioned its 2019 evaluation ‘to assess the progress made since its 2008 evaluation, *Violence Against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches*.’¹⁸ The ODE’s evaluation work included identifying best practice examples. Femili PNG stated it had been identified ‘as an example of best practice’ in regard to ‘the importance of supporting and strengthening case management services’.¹⁹

5.12 CBM Australia raised concerns that a lack of baseline data prior to the implementation of the Pacific Step-up has made it difficult to measure the effectiveness of specific initiatives:

Insufficient reporting on the Australian aid program’s efforts to engage with [disabled people’s organisations] on gender equality issues or to advance the human rights of women and girls with disabilities more broadly has led to difficulty assessing recent effectiveness. Without a baseline prior to the implementation of the Pacific Step-up, observers can note broad outcomes but are unable to determine the extent to which specific initiatives under the banner of the Pacific Step-up have advanced human rights in the region.²⁰

5.13 CBM Australia also commented that changes in DFAT’s performance reporting had led to a decrease in detail:

Prior to the Step-up, DFAT’s Aid Quality Checks (AQC) provided some evidence of impactful engagement against two primary metrics: investments identifying and addressing barriers to inclusion and opportunities for participation for people with disabilities, and investments involving [disabled people’s organisations] in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. AQC data following the launch of the Pacific Step-up in late 2018, however, demonstrates ‘business as usual’ for people with disabilities, and

¹⁷ DFAT, ‘Pacific Women Pacific Development: Six year evaluation report and management response’, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/pacific-women-shaping-pacific-development-six-year-evaluation-report-and-management-response>, viewed 22 March 2021.

¹⁸ DFAT, ‘Ending violence against women and girls: Evaluating a decade of Australia’s development assistance’, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/development/performance-assessment/aid-evaluation/strategic-evaluations/evawg>, viewed 5 July 2021.

¹⁹ ANU Development Policy Centre and Femili PNG, *Submission 11*, pp. 11-12.

²⁰ CBM Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 4.

does not provide information on disability inclusion within gender-specific aid investments.²¹

- 5.14 DFAT's *Aid Program Performance Report 2018-19 for the Pacific Regional Program* stated 'in 2018-19, the Aid Quality Check (AQC) process has been revised to focus on fewer quality criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, gender equality).'²² Further changes to the AQC process had been made by May 2020²³, with Aid Quality Checks being replaced by Investment Monitoring Reports.²⁴
- 5.15 Oaktree similarly recommended that evaluations of gender equality initiatives 'must evolve to collect both age and gender disaggregated data' to better equip the Australian Government to 'track the progress towards securing the human rights of women and girls in the Pacific and achieving gender equality.'²⁵
- 5.16 The Fiji Women's Fund (FWF), and Urgent Action Fund Asia & the Pacific (UAF A&P) stated that a clear picture of DFAT's funding activity was not publicly available:
- It is challenging for Pacific Women's Organisations (PWOs) and Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) in the Pacific to obtain data that presents a picture of total funding for gender equality and women's empowerment activities, including funds disbursed to women's organisations and DPOs in the Pacific region in the previous reporting year, in a readily accessible format.²⁶
- 5.17 The FWF and UAF A&P highlighted a disparity between funding commitments and funding disbursements, and advocated that data sets 'currently sent by donors each year to the OECD [Development Assistance Committee (DAC)]'²⁷ be published, including:

²¹ CBM Australia, *Submission 19*, p. 4.

²² DFAT, *Aid Program Performance Report, Full APPR 2018-19, Pacific Regional Program*, p. 18.

²³ DFAT, *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response*, May 2020, p. 27.

²⁴ DFAT, 'Glossary – Aid Programming Guide', p. 1, viewed 13 July 2021.

²⁵ Oaktree, *Submission 26*, p. 9.

²⁶ Fiji Women's Fund (FWF), and Urgent Action Fund Asia & the Pacific (UAF A&P), *Submission 10*, p. 4.

²⁷ FWF and UAF A&P, *Submission 10*, pp. 4-5.

- Total gross funding disbursements directed to the Pacific region that target gender equality and women's empowerment as a significant or principal objective (using the OECD DAC criteria)
- Total gross funding disbursements that reach PWOs
- Total gross funding disbursements that reach Pacific DPOs
- The proportion of funds earmarked for women's organisations and DPOs that are being disbursed to: (i) INGOs, international organisations and managing contractors and (ii) PWOs and DPOs, as well as the names of these organisations.²⁸

5.18 The Pasifika Women's Alliance emphasised greater involvement of women when evaluating the success of development assistance programs as 'it is preferred that Pacific women are included in the delivery and evaluation of programs to provide context, relatability, and a stronger impact in their communities.'²⁹ CBM Australia advocated for the inclusion and consultation of women and girls with disabilities 'in the program cycle from design to implementation to evaluation.'³⁰

5.19 A 'severe gender imbalance' in Australia's foreign policy sector was highlighted by YWCA Australia.³¹ The YWCA elaborated that this could be impacting evaluations of progress towards achieving gender equality:

When policy is not inclusive of women's input and does not seek to evaluate its effectiveness through a gender lens, it becomes an additional and unnecessary barrier to the achievement of gender equality, not only in Australia but in regions such as the Pacific.³²

5.20 Melbourne Children's Global Health highlighted that those delivering programs were well-placed to obtain data for robust monitoring and evaluation:

Non-government organisations also have a critical role in improving the evidence-base for interventions to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence. Non-government organisations can incorporate high-quality evaluation of their programs, using robust methodologies that combine both

²⁸ FWF and UAF A&P, *Submission 10*, p. 5.

²⁹ Pasifika Women's Alliance, *Submission 20*, p. 3.

³⁰ CBM Australia, *Submission 19*, Attachment 1, p. 21.

³¹ YWCA Australia, *Submission 24*, p. 5.

³² YWCA Australia, *Submission 24*, p. 5.

quantitative and qualitative methods to develop a better understanding of the effectiveness of their programs.³³

- 5.21 The Australian National University (ANU) Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA) stated that evaluating the progress made for women and girls requires more than program-based evaluations:

The evidence of effective strategies, and of the implementation of reforms in the law and justice sector, remains thin and centred on program evaluations. To ascertain whether the rights of women and girls are being upheld, in multiple contexts, requires extensive collaborative and ethical research with service providers and advocacy networks.³⁴

Long-term perspectives

- 5.22 Submissions outlined that long-term strategies are required for Australia's official development assistance to be effective in advancing the human rights of Pacific island women and girls.

- 5.23 The ANU Development Policy Centre and Femili PNG emphasised that gendered violence in the Pacific islands was a long-term problem due to its enduring repercussions:

Family and sexual violence must be recognised as a long-term human rights problem that disproportionately affects women and girls, has multigenerational impacts, and is a constraint on development that requires sustained and serious engagement and investment.³⁵

- 5.24 DFAT recognised that 'changing social and cultural norms to improve gender equality is difficult and can require decades to see results'.³⁶ DFAT stated that it had 'expanded long term funding to key civil society organisations' and emphasised that:

... Australia has proven it has a long-term commitment to the Pacific region to address gender equality and support immediate service delivery. We recognise that activities and projects are foundational and critical for providing services, training, and empowering women. However, our

³³ Melbourne Children's Global Health, *Submission 27*, p. 3.

³⁴ The Australian National University (ANU) Department of Pacific Affairs, *Submission 18*, p. 4.

³⁵ ANU Development Policy Centre and Femili PNG, *Submission 11*, p. 2.

³⁶ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 20.

programs seek to trigger longer term cultural and institutional change through supporting local leadership.³⁷

- 5.25 A distinction between immediate relief and long-term approaches was identified. The Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship and others emphasised that ‘immediate relief measures are necessary to alleviate hardships and protect survivors, the approach of changing mind-sets appears to be more sustainable on a long run.’³⁸ The International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) stated:

While protection is an important first step, it addresses the symptoms of gender equality rather than the causes. It is therefore unlikely to create meaningful and sustainable change to the status of women and girls alone. As one of the Pacific’s strongest allies, Australia’s COVID-19 Response should therefore look beyond protection towards expanding transformational interventions, by investing in policies and programs that challenge the power relations, systems and norms that underpin gender inequality.³⁹

- 5.26 Long-term thinking was described as an iterative process. Cardno stated that ‘successive programs in the Pacific, whether they be gender-focussed or take a gender mainstreamed approach, [should] leverage the gains and learnings, as well as the relationships, of earlier programs.’⁴⁰

- 5.27 The Australian Council for International Development similarly stressed that learning from current programs is a foundational step in long-term planning:

The Government should ensure that any new investments build on the successes and lessons learned through Pacific Women, as part of a commitment to long-term thinking, building on a program that continues to demonstrate success.⁴¹

³⁷ DFAT, *Submission 28*, p. 20.

³⁸ Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford and others, *Submission 14*, p. 4.

³⁹ International Women’s Development Association (IWDA), *Submission 35*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Cardno, *Submission 12*, p. 5.

⁴¹ Australian Council for International Development, *Submission 9*, p. 2;

5.28 Two to three year funding cycles were described as inadequate. The IWDA stressed the ‘importance of long-term, continuous funding’⁴², highlighting that short funding cycles restrict the time available for program delivery:

What we are dealing with is an intergenerational issue around gender equality, and we can’t effectively respond to that when we’re working on two- and three-year funding cycles. Often it’s much shorter—at the moment, it’s sort of 18 months or six months. You can’t get into a program; you start activities and then you need to report on it again. It doesn’t give us any basis to be able to address these fundamental issues.⁴³

5.29 The ANU Development Policy Centre stated ‘most of our funding comes in for one or two or three years. The Australian government has been very good in giving us three- or five-year funding. Of course it can be repeated, but we think the expectation needs to be that the funding will be provided over a long period.’⁴⁴

5.30 An increased disbursement of funds to civil society organisations from governments in the Pacific was not expected by the ANU Development Policy Centre in the near-term:

The Australian government does prioritise these issues above the level they are prioritised within the government of PNG and of course has a lot more resources, and the problem is going to be there for a long time, so there needs to be long-term security of funding.⁴⁵

Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women)

5.31 The *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program*, commonly referred to as Pacific Women, was established in 2012. At the time of the Committee’s

⁴² Ms Tracey Newbury, Senior Program Manager, IWDA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 19.

⁴³ Ms Newbury, IWDA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 19.

⁴⁴ Mr Stephen Howes, Director, Development Policy Centre, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University (ANU); Chair, Femili PNG, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 10.

⁴⁵ Mr Howes, ANU Development Policy Centre; Femili PNG, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 10.

2015 report, it was considered that it was ‘too early to assess’ whether Pacific Women was achieving results.⁴⁶

5.32 Pacific Women was outlined by DFAT to have ‘expended \$218.68 million between 2012–2019’⁴⁷ on the following areas of focus:

- \$18,116,899 (8 per cent) on Leadership and Decision Making.
- \$49,514,935 (23 per cent) on Economic Empowerment.
- \$96,184,154 (44 per cent) on Ending Violence against Women.
- \$32,147,464 (15 per cent) on Enhancing Agency.
- \$18,578,937 (8 per cent) on administration and program support.
- \$4,137,448 (2 per cent) on monitoring, evaluation and design.⁴⁸

5.33 The We Rise Coalition recognised the Pacific Women program for ‘assisting thousands of women to step into leadership roles, participate in financial services and training, and access crisis support services.’⁴⁹

5.34 An initiative of the Pacific Women program was recognised by the Law Council of Australia as being especially impactful on women’s economic participation:

... the Markets for Change program, funded by the Australian Government through Pacific Women, and implemented by UN Women, works to ensure that marketplaces in Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are ‘safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory, promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment.’⁵⁰

5.35 Cardno highlighted the success of locally led efforts funded under the Pacific Women program. Cardno provided the example of Balance of Power, a social norm change initiative, stating that it had been ‘accepted as a local initiative’⁵¹:

Balance of Power is seen and accepted as a local initiative, driven by well-known and respected individuals from the local community. It is not perceived as a donor-driven, foreign ‘intervention’. This is particularly

⁴⁶ JSCFADT, *Empowering Women and Girls*, December 2015, p. 310.

⁴⁷ DFAT, *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Annual Progress Report 2019*, p. 54.

⁴⁸ DFAT, *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Annual Progress Report 2019*, p. 54.

⁴⁹ We Rise Coalition, *Submission 33*, p. 13.

⁵⁰ Law Council of Australia, *Submission 32*, pp. 16-17.

⁵¹ Cardno, *Submission 12*, pp. 3-4.

important in the case of gender programming, given the complexity of promoting norm change on issues that are so deeply, culturally entrenched.⁵²

- 5.36 The ANU DPA recognised the Balance of Power program for being flexible towards changing priorities due to the coronavirus pandemic:

Programs that are heavily pre-determined in terms of their activities and deliverables have been the hardest to reshape in the aftermath of the 2020 pandemic. ... The program is intentionally adaptive, and leaves decisions about activities and partners to the core leadership team who have an intuitive understanding of their local contexts, including power bases and opportunities to build coalitions.⁵³

- 5.37 The Pacific Women program has a range of priorities, and it was highlighted that individual initiatives may still experience funding constraints.⁵⁴ Oaktree stated that youth programs under the *Pacific Girl* initiative ‘relies on a relatively tiny budget, limiting its potential to facilitate progress toward gender equality’.⁵⁵

- 5.38 Caritas Oceania drew attention to the limited 10-year nature of Pacific Women, stating that ‘funding ... is set to expire in 2021-2022.’ Caritas Oceania advocated that the program be renewed.⁵⁶

Pacific Women Lead

- 5.39 In June 2021, DFAT advised that it was in the process of co-designing its *Pacific Women Lead* program as a successor to *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development*.⁵⁷ DFAT stated:

Pacific Women Lead sees Australia increase its financial commitment to \$170 million over five years, which is in addition to our bilateral gender support delivered through our bilateral development programs. The new program shifts program ownership to Pacific organisations, including the Pacific community, the SPC and women’s organisations in the Pacific. Pacific Women Lead builds on the achievement response to the lessons learned from the

⁵² Cardno, *Submission 12*, pp. 3-4.

⁵³ ANU DPA, *Submission 18*, p. 15.

⁵⁴ Oaktree, *Submission 26*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Oaktree, *Submission 26*, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Caritas Oceania, *Submission 41*, p. 12.

⁵⁷ Ms Jane Bastin-Sikimeti, Director, Pacific Gender Section, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 6.

Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program, and will be flexible enough to respond to the emerging needs of women and girls, including through the post COVID-19 pandemic period as well as climate change.⁵⁸

5.40 The co-design process for the Pacific Women Lead program was announced on 24 November 2020.⁵⁹ The material published by DFAT states that ‘Pacific Women Lead has an initial timeframe of 5 years with the potential for an extension to 8 years’.⁶⁰

5.41 DFAT stated that ‘consultations and co-design with the region’ had identified areas ‘where we can do things differently.’⁶¹ DFAT highlighted that Pacific Women Lead will focus further on programs lead by women in the Pacific directly:

We’ve reached the stage now, with our support to the region ... where there will be a shift so that Pacific women themselves and Pacific organisations will lead the programs in ways that they haven’t before. ... In particular, the Pacific community and Pacific women’s organisations, which ... through DFAT’s support over the years have grown and strengthened themselves, will lead a lot of the elements of the program.⁶²

5.42 The IWDA welcomed the Pacific Women Lead program⁶³, but stated that:

However, this commitment is only for regional activities. It’s imperative, if Australia is to continue the hard won gains under the current gender programming, that bilateral aid programs also have a target for their gender expenditure. Currently only 41 per cent of Australia’s ODA has a principal or significant focus on gender equality.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁹ Pacific Women, ‘Design of new Gender Equality Program’, 24 November 2020, <https://pacificwomen.org/opportunities/design-of-new-gender-equality-program/>, viewed 13 July 2021.

⁶⁰ Pacific Women, ‘FAQs – Design of a new regional gender equality program for the Pacific’, 15 April 2021, <https://pacificwomen.org/news/pacific-women-lead-design-faqs/>, viewed 13 July 2021.

⁶¹ Ms Bastin-Sikimeti, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 6.

⁶² Ms Bastin-Sikimeti, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 6.

⁶³ Ms Newbury, IWDA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁴ Ms Newbury, IWDA, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, pp. 11-12.

- 5.43 DFAT stated that Pacific Women Lead has been designed so that it ‘is easy for donors’, such as the European Union, ‘that don’t have a large presence in the Pacific to provide funding’.⁶⁵

Concluding comment

- 5.44 The Committee heard that to be effective in solving long-term challenges, long-term funding is required. This is not a new problem for official development assistance. The Committee heard that some thought has been given to this issue, with some organisations receiving three-year funding terms. The Committee heard that three-year or less funding cycles can hamper stable program delivery, and that five-year funding cycles would be preferred.
- 5.45 The Committee notes the success of the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development as a ten-year program in its approach to long-term development aid planning. The Committee heard that through this program DFAT has recognised and demonstrated a long-term commitment to advancing the human rights of women and girls in the region.
- 5.46 The Committee understands that the Pacific Women Lead program is currently a five-year commitment of funding, and considers this inconsistent with DFAT’s previous success in managing the long-term injection of funding through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program.
- 5.47 The Committee understands that the Pacific Women Lead may, however, be extended for a longer period. The Committee also notes that the Pacific Women Lead program aims to building on the successes of the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program, based on DFAT’s intention to take the support for locally led initiatives further.
- 5.48 To determine whether outcomes are being achieved for women and girls in the region, the Committee heard that a single evaluation methodology is not sufficient. Investment or program-based evaluations are important, but are necessarily limited by scope in the conclusions they can draw.
- 5.49 The Committee considers that methodologies that evaluate a wide range of programs across a specific theme to be essential to directly evaluating whether Australia’s official development assistance is leading to progress for women and girls. This is particularly so as Australian Government funding

⁶⁵ Ms Heinecke, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 18 June 2021, p. 7.

for these initiatives is not neatly encapsulated in a single program, but across a range of programs.

- 5.50 Based on the evidence received to this inquiry, the Committee considers that the Office for Development Effectiveness was a model for evaluation that was well-received. The JSCFADT acknowledges DFAT's evidence from its COVID-19 inquiry that the Office for Development Effectiveness was abolished in late 2020, and evaluation functions moved into DFAT's Office of the Chief Economist.⁶⁶
- 5.51 The Committee heard that an overall picture of DFAT aid funding is difficult to ascertain on a year-to-year basis, and that external scrutiny and evaluation would be assisted by regular publication of funding disbursements by the Australian Government.

Recommendation 10

- 5.52 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consider long-term funding cycles for official development assistance to be at least five-years.**

Recommendation 11

- 5.53 **The Committee recommends the Australian Government extend its current five-year commitment to the Pacific Women Lead program to allow for funding cycles of this duration to be provided and to include a target for its gender expenditure.**

Recommendation 12

- 5.54 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commit to continuing to undertake and publish strategic, thematic evaluations focusing on substantive human rights issues affecting women and girls.**
- 5.55 **This should allow evaluations of the full range of official development assistance, and extend evaluations beyond those focused only at the investment or program-level.**

⁶⁶ DFAT, [Answers to Questions on Notice from the public hearing on 16 September 2020](#), JSCFADT, *Inquiry into the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for Australia's foreign affairs, defence and trade*, pp. 8-12.

Recommendation 13

5.56 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government improve monitoring, evaluation and reporting of development assistance programs to ensure transparency and easy access to data, especially including reporting on funding for gender equality and women's empowerment activities in the Pacific.

Recommendation 14

5.57 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, on an annual basis, publish data on the disbursements made to organisations for the purpose of gender equality initiatives. This should list the organisations receiving disbursements.

Senator the Hon David Fawcett

Chair

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

24 November 2021

The Hon Kevin Andrews MP

Chair

Human Rights Sub-Committee

24 November 2021

A. Submissions

- 1 Victorian Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby
- 2 Marshall Islands Council of Non-Governmental Organizations
- 3 Robert Heron
- 4 WaterAid Australia
- 5 Family Planning NSW
- 6 Ms Jane Alver
- 7 Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
- 8 Australian Red Cross
- 9 ACFID
- 10 Urgent Action Fund Asia & Pacific and Fiji Women's Fund
- 11 Development Policy Centre and Femili PNG
- 12 Cardno
- 13 Burnet Institute
- 14 Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford
- 15 ActionAid Australia
- 16 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and The Pacific Community
 - Attachment 1
 - Attachment 2
- 17 ANU Law Reform and Social Justice Research Hub
- 18 Department of Pacific Affairs, The Australian National University

- 19 CBM Australia
 - Attachment 1
- 20 Pasifika Women's Alliance
- 21 Coffey International Development Pty Ltd
- 22 World Vision Australia
- 23 Australian Human Rights Commission
- 24 YWCA Australia
- 25 International Planned Parenthood Federation
- 26 Oaktree
- 27 Melbourne Children's Global Health
- 28 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- 29 UnitingWorld
- 30 United Nations Country Team in the Pacific and the United Nations Pacific Strategy
- 31 Marie Stopes International Australia (on behalf of 11 organisations)
- 32 Law Council of Australia
- 33 We Rise Coalition
- 34 Australian National University College of Law's International Law Clinic
- 35 International Women's Development Agency
- 36 Sustainable Population Australia Inc
- 37 CARE Australia
- 38 RESULTS International Australia
- 39 Save the Children
- 40 Walk Free
- 41 Caritas Oceania
- 42 Dr Farida Akhtar and Assoc Prof Shumi Akhtar
- 43 The George Institute for Global Health and the Australian Human Rights Institute
 - Attachment 1

B. Public Hearings

Friday, 18 June 2021 - Canberra

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

- Ms Jane Bastin-Sikimeti, Director, Pacific Gender Section
- Ms Julie-Ann Guivarra, Ambassador for Gender Equality, and First Assistant Secretary, Gender Equality Branch, Multilateral Policy Division
- Ms Danielle Heinecke, First Assistant Secretary, Pacific Operations and Development

ActionAid Australia

- Ms Michelle Higelin, Executive Director
- Ms Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls, Technical Adviser, Shifting The Power Coalition

ANU Development Policy Centre and Femili PNG

- Mr Stephen Howes, Director, Development Policy Centre, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University; Chair, Femili PNG
- Ms Fiona Gunn, Chief Executive Officer, Friends of Femili PNG; Development Manager, Femili PNG

Australian Red Cross

- Ms Veronica Bell, Head of International Technical Services

Cardno

- Ms Joanne Choe, Regional Manager, Pacific
- Ms Angela Lenn, Contractor Representative

International Women's Development Agency

- Ms Tracey Newbury, Senior Program Manager

Pasifika Women's Alliance

- Ms Cassandra Rangip, Vice-President

UnitingWorld

- Ms Jane Kennedy, Associate Director, International Programs

World Vision Australia

- Ms Kate Moss, Manager, Pacific
- Ms Mercy Jumo, Senior Policy Adviser, Child Rights, World Vision Australia

YWCA Australia

- Ms Bobbie Trower, Senior Manager, Advocacy