

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336421620>

Creating community-based indicators of gender equity: A methodology

Article in *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* · October 2019

DOI: 10.1111/apv.12235

CITATIONS

7

READS

137

3 authors:



Michelle Carnegie

33 PUBLICATIONS 590 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



Katharine McKinnon

University of Canberra

52 PUBLICATIONS 456 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



Katherine Gibson

Western Sydney University

98 PUBLICATIONS 6,074 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Factors affecting household food insecurity in rural Myanmar: Case Study Central Dry Zone [View project](#)



Reconfiguring the enterprise: shifting manufacturing culture in Australia [View project](#)

Creating community-based indicators of gender equity: A methodology

Michelle Carnegie,^{*}  Katharine McKinnon[†] and Katherine Gibson[‡]

^{*}School of Environmental and Rural Science, University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales, 2351, Australia.
Email: michelle.carnegie@une.edu.au.

[†]Department of Social Inquiry, School Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Bendigo, Victoria, 3552, Australia.

Email: k.mckinnon@latrobe.edu.au.

[‡]Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University, Penrith, New South Wales, 2751, Australia.

Email: k.gibson@westernsydney.edu.au.

Abstract: *It appears that an almost unquestioned development pathway for achieving gender equity and women's empowerment has taken centre stage in mainstream development. This pathway focuses on economic outcomes that are assumed to be achieved by increasing women's access to material things, including cash income, loans, physical assets, and to markets. Gender equity indicators, which measure progress towards these outcomes, cannot escape reinforcing them. We argue that far from being neutral, indicators are embedded in political and ideological agendas that serve as guides to the appropriate conduct of those whose performance or behaviour is being measured. Drawing on participatory feminist, diverse economies and strengths based approaches, we outline a research methodology for developing community-based indicators that recognises women's and men's participation and relationships in all spheres of life, including the 'non-economic'. If indicators are grounded in local meanings and realities, we propose that community members can use them to identify aspirational goals for gender equity, and measure progress towards these goals.*

Keywords: *empowerment, gender equity, indicators, measurement, participatory feminist development; Melanesia*

Introduction

The rise of 'audit culture' has seen the increasing use of indicators to provide evidence of change towards certain goals. Feminist development scholars since the 1980s have championed the use of indicators to measure change with respect to gender equity and women's empowerment. Metrics—such as the female share of income compared to males, female enrolments in school compared to males, or female representatives in parliament compared to males—are used to track progress towards goals such as pay equity, equal educational opportunity for girls and boys, and equal political representation. However, many of the gender equity indicators in use globally are not well suited to revealing the nuances of inequity at the local level or, crucially, reflecting the goals and aspirations of local communities across different places and cultures.

A critical perspective on indicators focuses attention on the way that they single out *certain* aspects of society and foreground *certain* relationships as important markers to gauge change. Indicators assume an aura of neutrality by obscuring 'the socio-political theoretical claims embedded in their construction' (Davis *et al.*, 2012: 87). While appearing to be straightforward, indicators work to 'norm' certain agendas. Waring (1988) has argued that what gets measured and validated and what remains hidden and devalued is a political decision, no matter how unconscious it might be. So, for example, the effect of not disaggregating male and female agricultural labour contributions, led in the past to a blindness to that fact that women perform an estimated 40–60% of farm labour worldwide (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, 2011) and a misplaced focus of policy on the 'farmer' as male. As Law and Urry (2004) note, what gets validated becomes more real: that is, indicators can

have a performative effect – helping to bring into being that which they describe. Of particular concern for some scholars today is that indicators have come to embody, ‘norm’ and perform neoliberal modes of governing. Shore and Wright (2015a, 2015b), for example, discuss how the global shift to using auditing techniques in order to achieve accountability, transparency and good governance has a range of negative effects. Primary among these is a tendency to shape practice only around what is measured.

Gender equity indicators are therefore imbued in a political process. They are commonly used for tracking the things that can yield ‘quick, measurable and quantifiable results’, which inevitably excludes identifying and tracking socio-economic change at the grassroots level. Batliwala and Pittman (2010: 7) argue that proportionately, ‘investment in gender equality has shifted to a handful of “magic bullets” like microfinance and political representation, precisely because the results of these interventions are far easier to assess’. In recent years, the amplified focus on women’s economic empowerment (rather than the more encompassing concept of empowerment) has largely been interpreted as women’s access to cash income and assets, control over these resources, and access to markets and business opportunities. This focus reflects a top-down neoliberal model of change that prioritises the individual and the market. As scholars and practitioners committed to participatory feminist development and who theorise a diverse (more than capitalist) economy, we are not convinced that women’s economic empowerment looks the same everywhere, or that existing indicators are an adequate framework for tracking change or articulating goals (McKinnon *et al.*, 2016). Starting from the position that indicators are not neutral, we were interested in developing a methodology for developing community-based indicators of gender equity that makes transparent the underlying values upon which they are based.

In this paper, we introduce a suite of indicators co-produced with partner organisations and communities in Fiji and the Solomon Islands that complement and challenge more universally derived, top-down indicators of gender equity and empowerment. Our approach is grounded in a commitment to participatory

feminist development that invites community members to have a say in what gender equity looks like from their perspective and in their context. The paper proceeds by exploring in more depth in the following section the role of indicators as technologies of governance, and the possibilities for enrolling indicators in more locally nuanced approaches to achieving gender equity. In the third section we outline the process of the ‘listening to community’ phase of our collaborative research project (Phase 1). The process of indicator development (Phase 2) is outlined in the fourth section. Here we use the representational device of indicator trees to show the relationship between clusters of indicators and discuss a sample of indicators with respect to their similarities to, and differences from, more frequently used, top-down metrics. The conclusion points to how the process of indicator development can be done in such a way as to reflect place-based and culturally relevant forms of gender equity.

Indicators as technologies of governance

Indicators and systems of measurement have increasingly become a tool for monitoring and enhancing the performance of individuals and organisations. The growing critical literature points out that indicators, rankings and measurements powerfully shape the way individuals and organisations conduct themselves ‘according to the criteria and methods used to measure them’ (Shore and Wright, 2015b: 423). Through the acts of naming, simplifying and evaluating, indicators become established as ‘technologies of governance’ (Davis *et al.*, 2012).

Naming an indicator brings into existence the phenomena it claims to measure. Indicators are useful because they reduce complex processes to simple numerical indices and rankings – often for purposes of performance management and control (Shore and Wright, 2015a: 22). The classic example is the intelligence quotient that has come to stand in for intelligence (Davis *et al.*, 2012). We could add the male to female income ratio that is used to define gender equity. As particular measures become instated as indicators, they take on the power to ‘define or shape the way the world is understood’ (Davis *et al.*, 2012: 76). Indicators often reduce

complex phenomena into a single number or ratio, hence simplifying for ease of comparison. The gross domestic product (GDP), for example, reduces the economic capacity of a nation to one monetary measure of output that is used to compare levels of development (not without significant criticism, however). Most importantly, indicators are used for evaluating, in that they establish a standard against which conduct can be measured. As Davis *et al.* state: 'they may measure "success" directly along this axis [of approximation of what a good society is], or they may measure what, from the standpoint of the theory or policy idea, are pathologies or problems to be overcome' (Davis *et al.*, 2012: 77). Often the value judgement in an indicator is implicit, in that it is a normalised and thus unremarkable element of a dominant ideology. So, to return to the GDP example, the implicit view is that the higher the GDP, the more developed a nation is – which is an evaluation that takes for granted that any growth in market oriented commodity production is 'good'.

When indicators are recognised as technologies of governance it becomes possible to see that their formulation is not simply a technical undertaking for audit purposes, but a contestable and political project. Indicators underpin political projects. Feminist development scholars in the 1980s and 1990s were quite explicit about the ideological underpinnings of how to achieve change with respect to gender equity and empowerment. This generation of scholars linked ideals of gender equity to achieving social progress and development via 'an unfolding, iterative process that is fundamentally about shifts in power relations' including 'changes in consciousness and collective power' (Cornwall, 2016: 344, 343). International development objectives began to include gender indicators to measure, and thus encourage, changes that improve the position of women in society (Canadian International Development Agency, 1997: 6).

In the hands of state actors (and supra-state actors such as multinational agencies), as Davis *et al.* (2012: 84) argue, the use of indicators is far from benign: 'Indicators have regulatory effects primarily because they have been embraced as guides to appropriate conduct by actors within the state who shape national governmental decisions regarding national governance'. In any context, it therefore

seems important to ask: Whose behaviours are being regulated and whose conduct condoned? The regulatory effects of the current mainstream development focus on women's *economic* empowerment, is what we begin to unpack here, and then consider what this looks like in the South Pacific context, particularly for Melanesian societies.

Women's economic empowerment is often assumed to be achieved by increasing women's access to markets and to material things, including cash income, loans and physical assets. Gender equity indicators, as part of monitoring and evaluation frameworks that measure progress towards these outcomes, cannot escape reinforcing them. The most commonly used indices for gender equity, including the Gender Empowerment Measure, the Gender-related Development Index and the Gender Inequality Index, focus on income and labour market participation of individuals which serves to norm an individualised (profit maximising) subjectivity and a monetised and marketised development pathway in the formal economy (McKinnon *et al.*, 2016). The way that women's economic empowerment is described, defined, written, depicted and expressed affects, or as Muniesa (2014) notes, *effects*, the way it is enacted. It is what could be termed a 'provocation': 'to have an effect is to provoke, to be an effect is a provocation of reality' (Muniesa, 2014: 23). In other words, mainstream development discourse of economic empowerment could be seen to provoke 'empowerment' as individual, monetised and profit oriented.

In societies across the South Pacific, where the individualised norms of capitalist economies are not uniformly dominant, but intertwined with place-based values of kinship, interdependence and wide networks of reciprocal exchange, such a focus on individual advancement is risky. By ignoring the multiplicity and diversity of women's and men's economic roles in the non-market household and community economy, much of social and economic life is left unexamined with respect to gender equity. We proposed that an alternative pathway to gender equity and gains in well-being (as the ultimate aim of economic development) might be better pursued through a locally defined vision of equity (McKinnon *et al.*, 2016), and thus a locally defined suite of indicators. Our aim was to pioneer a

methodology that would allow indicators to be developed from community-based goals and aspirations for advancing gender equity in the South Pacific. Including local people's views and perspectives in identifying appropriate indicators to measure change in the empowerment and equality arena is certainly not new (see, e.g. Rowlands, 1995: 106), but it is rarely put into practice. Our work sought to develop a methodology for a bottom-up approach to indicator development, demonstrating in the process that place-based values and aspirations can form the foundation for a place-based metrics for equality. It must be noted that while the general contours of the methodology we outline might be used in other places, at a certain point the method of formulating specific indicators becomes uniquely shaped by place-based concerns.¹

Formulating community-based indicators in Melanesia: Listening to community

In 2010 and 2011 we held participatory workshops in the Solomon Islands with women and men in two urban settlements around Honiara and two rural villages in Western Province; and in Fiji in two urban settlements in Suva (with iTaukei Fijians). Our non-governmental organisation (NGO) co-researchers facilitated these workshops in Solomon Islands Pidgin and Bauan Fijian, with the Australian research team members as support persons. In each location we recruited between 10 and 15 volunteer community members with roughly equal numbers of older (40+ years) and younger (18–40 years) women and men. Participants included those who lived in nuclear and extended families, and female-headed households; people who were single and those who were married; those with children and those without. Many of the discussions were initially held in gender- and age-segregated groups with report back sessions bringing everyone together to share insights.²

A central concern of the project was that the indicators would reflect place-based realities and aspirations; hence, listening to community, including how they see the barriers and opportunities to achieving gender equitable relations, was a core aim of Phase 1. In the interests of transparency it is important to state, however,

that in setting up conversations and 'listening', our research team was primed to 'hear' certain things that accorded with a political and ethical interest in (i) the relationality of subjects, which to us meant recognising that the economic empowerment of individual women is situated within broader understandings of livelihoods and well-being for individuals, households and the community as a whole; and (ii) an openness to diverse economic development pathways, which meant a sensitivity to more-than-capitalist imaginaries of future development. Though participating in a co-production process with communities and local NGO actors, clearly the outside research team had a shaping hand in the outcomes we report.

The initial community discussions focused on identifying the gendered nature of livelihood activities across the broad spectrum of market-oriented, non-market, paid, unpaid, business and community activities that contribute to survival and well-being. We sought an exchange between our conceptualisation of a diverse (more than capitalist) economy, and of gender equity, and local understandings, as well as participants' practices and experience (see further discussion in McKinnon *et al.*, 2016 and Carnegie *et al.*, 2013). We encouraged women and men to explore how they understood social and economic well-being and equality, and what they aspired to. From the outset we did not assume that people conceptualised 'economy' or 'gender' or 'empowerment' or 'equality' according to the mainstream development discourse. We approached the exercise in a way that allowed for women and men of different ages and stages in life to freely explore what they thought was important for well-being and in particular, for achieving good relations between the sexes. In this exchange, we listened for and acknowledged the diversity of economic activities in which women and men were involved. These activities contributed to material, cultural and emotional well-being – including practices in the household and customary economy. We also listened for the culturally important and different ways that women and men's contributions are valued in the community, and how this gender difference can be embraced to recognise and realise equality and mutual benefit.

We adapted a strengths-based approach drawing on the method of appreciative inquiry that

encourages conversations focused on appreciating ('valuing the best of what is'), rather than only focused on problems and needs ('insufficiency and lack'). This approach builds on asset-based community development approaches (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993; Mathie *et al.*, 2017). Through participatory and group-based exercises, we encouraged women and men to think about the already existing material and non-material resources and opportunities in their midst. We also encouraged the process of envisioning. That is, for research participants to think beyond their current concerns, towards their future desires and aspirations ('what might be'). This enabled us to listen to how community members foresaw possibilities of cooperation, negotiation and change for the better.

The findings included some important contrasts to the prevailing language of individual women's rights and gender equity pathways. Our shared insights into the nature of the gendered economy highlighted that individuals, households, groups and wider community are implicated in the ways that people create livelihoods and well-being. Disentangling individual women from their broader social and economic relationships through a language of individual advancement and rights made little sense in this context. Women and men, in articulating their own vision for gender equity, highlighted that each gender desired an *equal valuing* of their different contributions for the well-being of households and communities.

The locally meaningful understandings, aspirations and visions articulated by our research participants provided the foundation for consolidating key community concerns for gender equity into distinct categories, or what we refer to as domains. In the next section we outline Phase 2 of the project, in which we continued the conversation about key community concerns in a four-day indicator development and tool trialling workshop with our NGO co-researchers held in Honiara.

Naming domains, creating indicators and developing measurement tools

In Phase 2 of the project, the Honiara workshop for research team members was the first step in brainstorming how to analyse and organise the

Phase 1 findings (and as a basis for then creating indicator trees described below). After shared reflection and analysis of the initial workshop material we identified four domains relating to different, but inter-related, aspects of gender equity. Together we named the domains trying to use language that reflected what our research participants see as important for creating good relations between women and men. These were: (i) *Women 'Come Up'* denoting women's individual agency and access to opportunities; (ii) *Household Togetherness* denoting relations between women and men in shared households; (iii) *Women's Collective Action* denoting the possibilities for mutual support and collaboration between women; and (iv) *Leadership, Say and Role Modelling* denoting consideration of women's opportunities for participation and leadership, and the quality of men's leadership to provide positive role models for each other. Each domain represents a site where individuals, groups, households and community members enact relationships that are relevant to the issue of gender equity. The domains also reflect important components of a diverse economy that support the well-being of women and men across the community.

To communicate the four domains visually, the workshop participants devised an image of a 'river of change' with four different catchments from which water flows into multiple tributaries that join into a single channel, blending and interacting to sustain change (see the visual display of 'River of Change' (Fig. 1)). The four river catchments reflect the cluster of gender equity concerns and aspirations in the four gender equity domains. Importantly, the river system as a whole rests on the inter-relatedness of each catchment and its contingent nature. Working towards change in one catchment is insufficient on its own to achieve change across the multiple gender relations that exist.

The image of the river and water flow also helped to explain the purpose of indicators. We likened indicator collection to the taking of samples at regular intervals from the river and its feeder streams to test out water quality. Just as water samples can indicate if the river is getting cleaner or more polluted and thus help to see what impacts changes in land management practices are having, so indicators of gender equity taken at regular intervals could gauge if

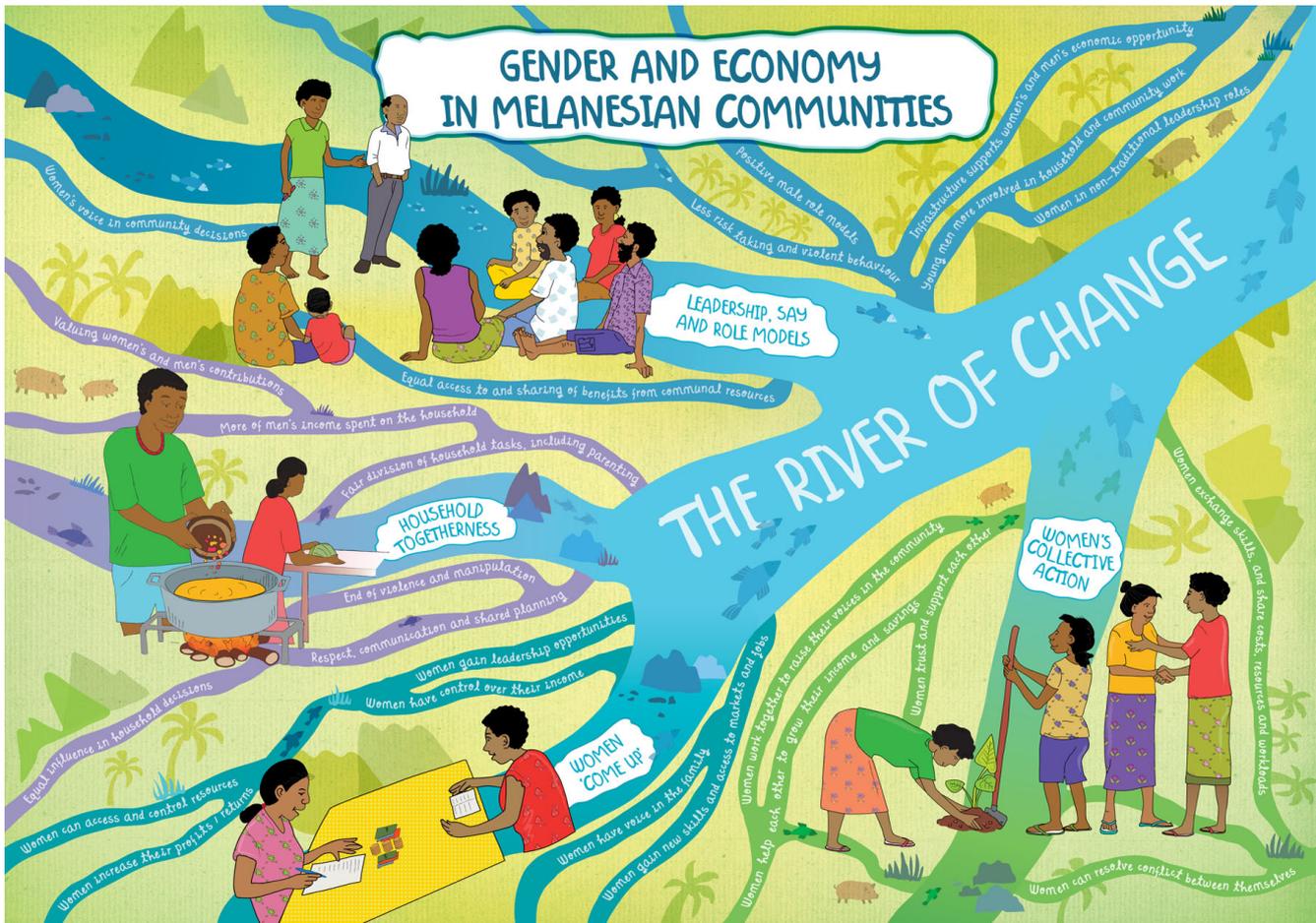


Figure 1. The ‘River of Change’ (Drawn by Nelson Horipua). Enlarged colour figure and comments on the tributaries can be viewed at https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/20130318_RiverPoster.pdf [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

relations between women and men are moving in desirable or undesirable directions. Taking samples (i.e. collecting indicators) helps to track the possible impacts of changes in attitude and behaviour in each domain.

Associated with each of the four domains are clusters of broad indicators that the project team developed based on a range of practices and attitudes that community members felt were important to achieving their vision of gender equity. The research team then identified and discussed more precise preliminary indicators. Following this, the team tested the indicators with groups of local volunteers from nearby villages around Honiara, and then further discussed and refined them.

We also considered what might be the impact of the tools for data collection in the community, with the understanding that the process of gathering indicator data would in itself have impacts on those who participated. The process through which indicators are gathered can create openings for community members to

discuss, and potentially begin to enact, future gender equitable relations. Working with this understanding of the performative power of indicators, we thus sought to develop indices that focused more on assets and possibility rather than lack, and encouraged reflection on positive conduct and desirable behaviours.

The Australian based research team then adapted Mayoux’s (2001) concept of indicator ‘trees’ to create four trees, one for each gender equity domain. Mayoux’s indicator tree concept was used primarily as a thinking and representational device to help organise and visually present and communicate *what* could be measured against the identified goals of each gender equity domain, and *how* a measurement might be made (i.e. whether or not individual women are able to empower themselves; households are achieving togetherness; women are able to organise collectively; women are able to be leaders and have a say in community-level affairs alongside men, or men provide positive role models).

At the top of each of our four indicator trees, we profile the community goals and aspirations understood to be important in achieving gender equity (from Phase 1 findings). Below these are the broad indicators which describe the parameters for judging whether the community goals and aspirations are being achieved, and indicate the direction of change desired. Below these, the precise indicators describe the exact way broad indicators can be measured. When tracked over time, the precise indicators could provide an insight into how and why different parts of the overall system of livelihoods and gender relations change in the desired direction or not.

In making decisions about how change towards the identified goals would be measured, we also had to consider what methods of data collection and analysis would be used, and how do-able they would be for local actors. It was our hope that the suite of indicators could be taken up by local groups and organisations to use independently to support their community work, thus the tools needed to be suitable for people without extensive research training. Some of the precise indicators are derived from numerically recorded survey data, others from qualitative data utilising participatory processes involving storytelling; and qualitative data generated with the use of picture cards depicting different scenarios, and which can be tallied up into numerical figures for comparison. The use of each of these methods is described in detail in *Monitoring Gender and Economy in Melanesian Communities: Resources for NGOs, Government and Researchers in Melanesia*. A CD with a data package was produced to accompany a manual with instructions on how to collate, store, analyse and report results, including simple graphical presentation of quantitative indicators in pre-formatted excel sheets. In the following sections we highlight a sample of indicators, and attend to the possibility that these metrics – although inevitably normative and governing – might also be used to create deliberate performative effect.

Women 'Come Up'

The Women 'Come Up' domain includes some indicators familiar to the concerns of mainstream development, and tracks change in women's individual ability to participate in and

benefit from economic activities. An aspect of this is enabling women's individual agency, which Kabeer (1999) defines as part of a process of empowerment. Agency, a dimension of making choices, is understood as 'the ability to define one's goals and act upon them' (Kabeer, 1999: 438). During Phase 1 of the project, we heard women expressing a strong desire to develop an independent income stream over which they would have more control. This is because, as they related, their husbands limit them having an active role in decision-making over household income, or tend not to allocate enough of their cash earnings to the household as a whole. Women in these communities tend to occupy a position of less power and face difficulties in their attempts to create a livelihood of sufficiency and a life of well-being. Women's and men's opportunities for earning cash differ and hourly rates can be higher for men than for women. Men reportedly earn 'big money' (with more opportunities to earn in the formal sector due to their higher levels of education and social networks) while women earn 'small money' – enough to keep their households ticking over on a daily basis. Some women reported their husbands stealing and/or misusing their money on a regular basis, sometimes involving bullying, manipulation or the use of violence. As a result some women reported hiding their money and lying to their husbands about their amount of their independent earnings.

We have adapted some of the proxies for measuring women's individual agency that are commonly used to measure change in women's empowerment such as access to income, and decision-making control over income, access to education (a contributor to higher income) and increased confidence and voice (see Vaessen *et al.*, 2014). As per Fig. 2, we developed some similar indicators under the grouping of *Control over income* that track (i) *Percentage of women who feel they are in control of their own earnings*, and (ii) *Percentage of women satisfied with their level of control over cash earnings*. We also include (iii) *Percentage of women who experience dishonest and/or bullying behaviour over income*.

While increasing women's individual agency and access to resources is important, there is widespread concern that too much of the focus in mainstream development policy and practice

rests here. The enthusiasm about microfinance is one example that assumes entrepreneurship, accumulation and market integration are primarily what enable women to empower themselves. It highlights the importance of financial security, self-confidence and control over decision-making. But whether microfinance genuinely changes power relations and structural inequalities is being questioned (see Chant, 2016 for a critical review). While microfinance can assist women to economically survive or to accumulate surplus, it may be ineffective unless accompanied with specific interventions that work with both women and men to address structural barriers, including restrictive gender norms and challenging the underlying reasons why the gender inequality exists (Chant, 2016; Cornwall, 2016). Our research

also identified that while women may seek ways to individually empower themselves (such as through earning and controlling an independent income), this is not enough to achieve the broader goal of gender equity. Thus, the other three domains expand beyond a focus on individual women to better reflect the relational and structural issues which also emerged in Phase 1 research findings.

Household Togetherness

Among our research participants there was a strong desire that change be positive for both women and men, and a belief that women and men need to work together within families to create change. Thus togetherness, and relationships between

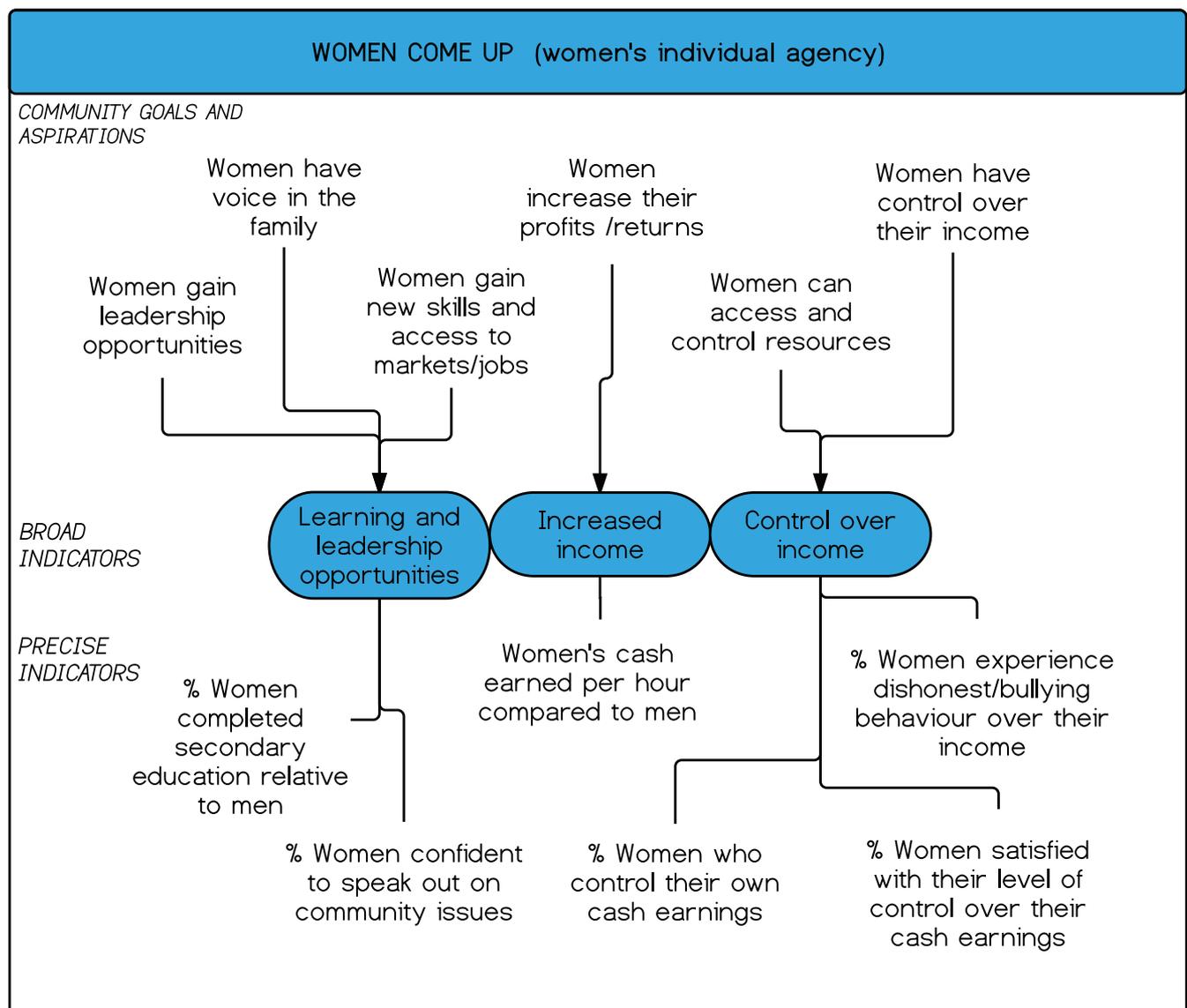


Figure 2. Indicator tree for the domain of Women 'Come Up' [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

women and men in the household, was identified as a domain of gender equity.

Relationships within the household between women and men are seldom considered in mainstream women's economic empowerment narratives. In a critique of mainstream gender analyses, Okali (2012: 2) finds that women are routinely atomised and treated as separate from men based in 'an overly rigid and conflict ridden sense of social dynamics that ignores the nuances and complexity of social relations'. This mainstream narrative therefore tends to assume that women and men are in conflict rather than cooperation (Okali, 2012), thereby overemphasising gendered power differentials (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). In contrast to the assumption of fixedly uneven relationships, our participants identified aspects of intra-household relationships across the cooperative-conflict spectrum, and ways that they could imagine relationships shifting. These informed our selection of indicators.

The fair sharing of household and care work between husbands and wives (or live-in couples) and between male and female siblings was an issue that emerged in the community conversations. In the South Pacific, the research of Fairbairn-Dunlop (1994) and Pollard (2000) shows that, though women's work outside the home has become increasingly important over time, women continue to suffer a disproportionate work burden relative to men with respect to household and care work. The few time-use studies in the South Pacific confirm this, showing women's greater workload in productive work and housework and less discretionary time than men (see Mohamed, 2009). Our Phase 1 findings showed that women perceive that men work less than women do, and that men have more free time (by implication because they have a lesser unpaid domestic workload than women). While women are socialised from an early age to work very hard and have pride in the contributions they make to their households, as Pollard (2000), notes, this does not come without a cost to physical and mental health.

Another part of household togetherness is ensuring a decrease in violence against women, which has a high prevalence in the Solomon Islands and Fiji (see Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2009; Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, 2013). In response to this key issue which was

raised in our community conversations, we adopted a quantitative measure of attitudinal change of violence towards women, a standard indicator used by World Health Organization (WHO) multi-country studies on domestic violence (*Percentage of women and men who think violence against women is ever justified*) (see García-Moreno *et al.*, 2005).

At the same time, the household togetherness indicators (Fig. 3) highlight the potential for positive change in marital relations, which has been a neglected area of intra-household gender research (with the exception of Ahmed's (2014) work on marital harmony and happiness developed with local women in Bangladesh). The desire for better relations among our respondents is reflected in the indicator *Women's and men's level of satisfaction with communication between themselves and their spouse/partner*. This indicator goes some way to capture what it is women and men aspire to, that is, more sense of mutual support, love and communication between husbands and wives. This indicator allows recognition that equality also comes with respectful, loving and caring relationships.

Women's Collective Action

Our Phase 1 findings showed that the mutual support of women was also important, so we included Women's Collective Action as a stand-alone domain (see Fig. 4). When women support one another, and women place value on this mutual support, it can be a catalyst for forming women's groups. Such groups (faith and non-faith based) are widespread in Melanesia (Douglas, 2003; Scheyvens, 2003). Women's groups often address women's practical gender needs (Moser, 1989) whereby women assist each other to get by or to improve their family's situation by sharing and exchanging skills and knowledge, pooling resources and increasing incomes.

Increasingly, women's groups fulfil women's strategic gender needs (Moser, 1989), as they provide opportunities for women to achieve voice and influence at the community level and beyond. As Douglas notes 'Melanesia church women's wings and village women's groups ... provide women's main opportunities for training, leadership, solidarity, networking and wider experience beyond the village and even beyond

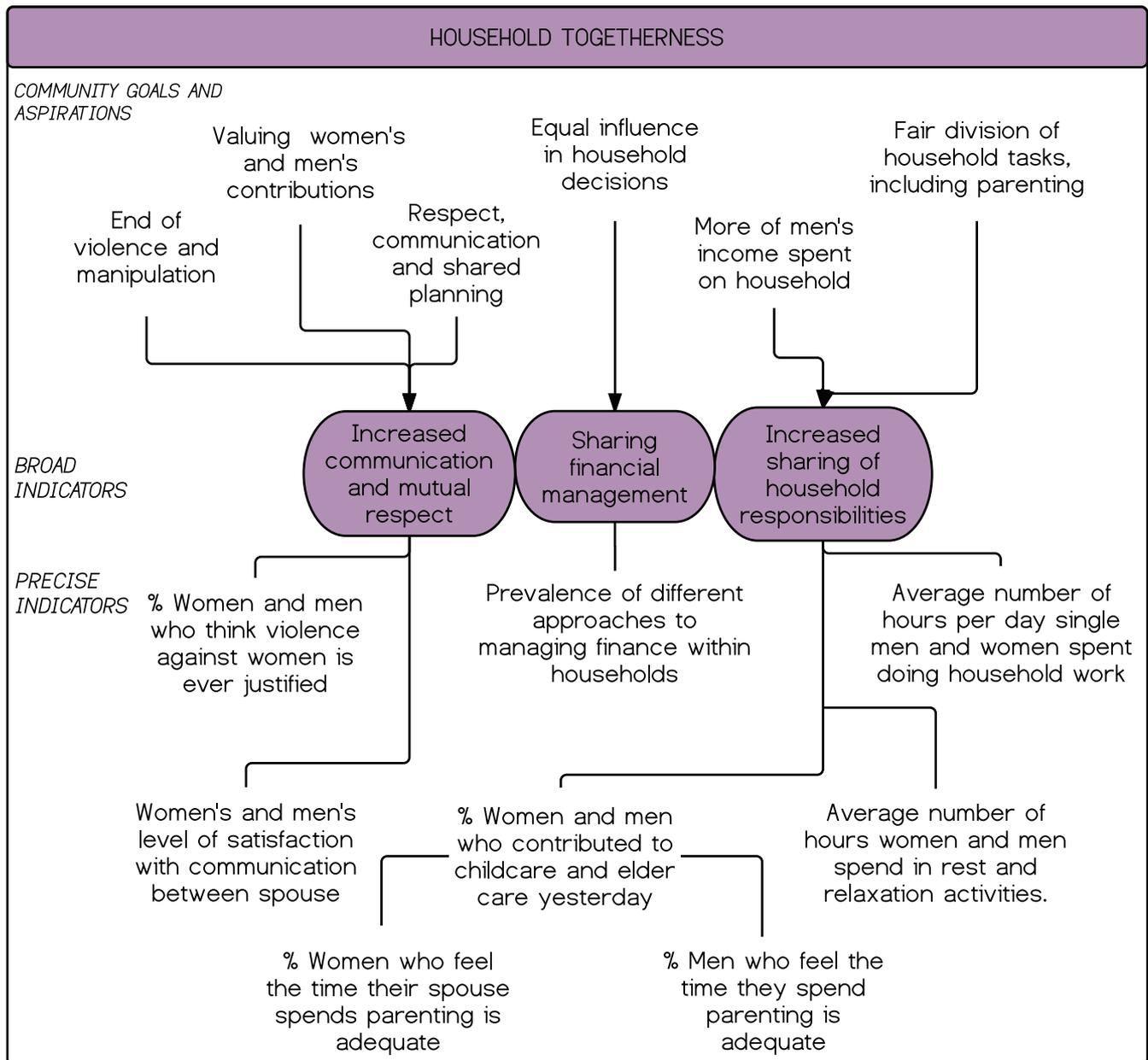


Figure 3. Indicator tree for the domain of Household Togetherness [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

national borders' (Douglas, 2000: 5). Our conversations with women highlighted that such groups enable them to take on leadership roles, build confidence and access wider networks.

The domain of Women's Collective Action includes indicators that provide quantitative community-level data on the number and type of groups, and sex disaggregated data on the group members and their participation. We distinguish participation in same-gender groups and mixed-gender groups because in communities where women express concerns about men exerting influence, and/or women not having an equal say in mixed-gender groups, women may continue to value and purposively maintain

women-only groups. Although women-only groups provide important leadership opportunities for women, some women desired more women's involvement in mixed-gender groups, recognising that these groups often have greater community-wide influence. This issue is further explored in the Leadership, Say and Role Modelling domain.

While women valued the mutual support among women, an issue that emerged was the effect of women's negative gossip within communities. We developed two quantitative indicators to highlight this issue within communities: (i) *Frequency of women undermining each other* and (ii) *Frequency of women supporting other*

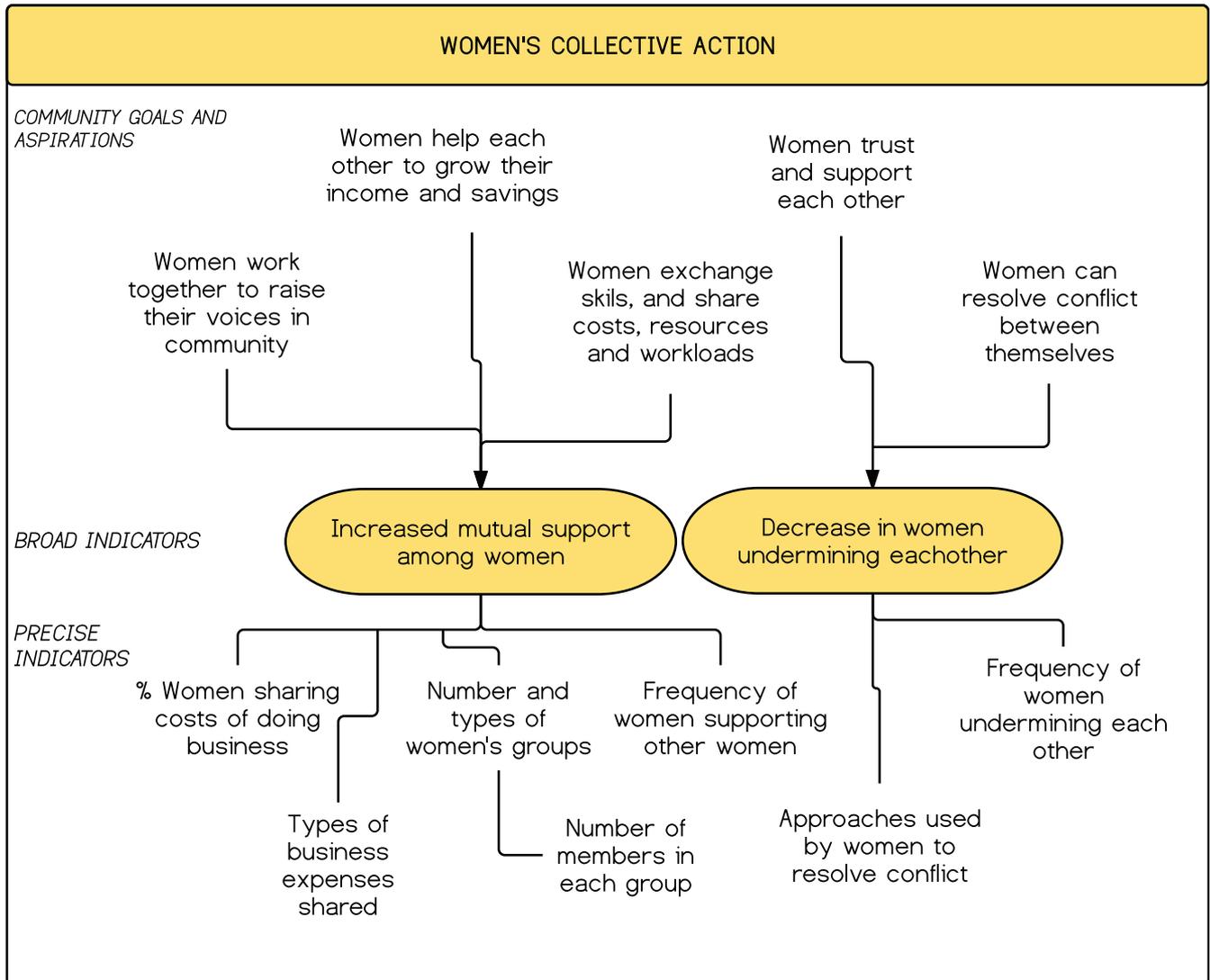


Figure 4. Indicator tree for the domain of Women's Collective Action [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

women. These are complemented by a qualitative indicator generated through discussion in women-only participatory workshops around *Approaches used by women to resolve conflict between women*. The qualitative indicator focuses on creating positive affect, supporting women to acknowledge and discuss both nurturing and damaging behaviours, rather than simply condemning a damaging behaviour. The purpose of including this indicator is to provide a way of keeping track of cooperation and conflict, and resolving conflict, and to build and maintain strong relationships between women.

Leadership, Say and Role Modelling

The issues of community-wide discrimination against women and the need to address structural inequalities come to the fore in the domain

of Leadership, Say and Role Modelling. Two particular issues emerged during Phase 1 research that indicators in this domain address: women's access to leadership opportunities, and the anti-social behaviours of men.

Women in the rural South Pacific have long been prominent participants and leaders in civil society, associated with community-based organisations, non-government organisations and church groups (McLeod, 2015). As noted above, while women often form their own groups, women aspire more opportunities to be included in community-level decision-making roles in groups and on committees that are usually dominated by men and exclude women. A minority of women do successfully take up leadership roles that men traditionally hold, but restrictive social norms that prescribe these roles as unacceptable for women present a barrier.

As well, many women face practical time limitations because of their primary responsibilities for household and care work (hence we included indicators that address this issue in the Household Togetherness domain). To reflect women's desire to take up leadership positions in groups or committees to represent the community, we included two indicators: (i) *Number of women in leadership roles usually held by men*; and (ii) *Women and men's views on the frequency of male support for women in non-traditional leadership roles*.

Addressing the anti-social behaviours of young men was a challenge raised by women and men, young and old in both rural and urban areas, particularly in the Solomon Islands. Anti-social behaviours include those associated with young men's unemployment, substance abuse and the changing nature of youth culture (for research on this topic in the Solomon Islands, see also Allen *et al.*, 2013). Women and men respondents voiced their desire for male elders to act as positive role models for male youth. Many participants believe that older men, including village chiefs in their community governance roles, are not offering enough leadership and mentoring. The role of elder men, as respected fathers and community leaders who offer guidance to younger men, had been greater in the past. The active leadership of male elders is seen as crucial to addressing the anti-social behaviours of young men, and the threat these young men present to the safety and well-being of girls and women, and to themselves.

Positive male leadership is measured by tracking (i) *Percentage of male elders that young men consider to model positive behaviour to young men*, and (ii) *Number of fathers/male guardians that young men consider to be positive role models*. These indicators are based on qualitative data, gained through participatory workshops that engage young and older men in discussion about what men can do to promote positive behaviours. The intent of the second indicator above is only in part to keep track of shifting behaviours. In this case, the method through which data is collected is also intended to deliberately engage performative effect: By speaking about what they are already doing and could do more of, the participatory process itself is designed to increase awareness and

promote greater capacity for young men to make a positive change in their lives. It does so by working within a cultural context that highlights the importance of what elders are teaching. Mainstream gender indicators rarely highlight the contributions made by men in the community. Our inclusion of this indicator was part of a deliberate effort to capture the importance that people place on equality as a shared enterprise, women and men working together to bring about a better life (Fig. 5).³

Conclusion

Commonly accepted approaches to gender equity seek to provide better economic opportunities and more equal benefits for women – ensuring that women get the same pay as men for the same work, ensuring that women have a say in what happens to household income, and ensuring that women have the same access to markets and business opportunities as men. These are important goals, and will remain important in many contexts throughout the world for years to come. In the South Pacific, as in many communities around the globe, however, the focus on individual cash incomes and access to material resources as the key to women's empowerment and the foundation of gender equity is too narrow. We suggest that there needs to be a rethink of what it takes to achieve equitable relations, sufficient livelihoods, and the conditions for *shared* economic and social well-being, beyond the individual. We have outlined a methodology that produced indicators that allow for monitoring of discrete changes within gendered relationships of sociality, exchange and access – in public meetings, during allocations of resources in the home and during collective community actions.

Indicators are one mechanism through which development researchers, practitioners, evaluators and policy makers can strive for a more diverse and community engaged approach to achieving gender equity. Current debates relating to the politics of indicators argue that indicators do not just measure change – they shape our understandings of what needs to be changed and how. Indicators are technologies of governance, with the power to draw attention

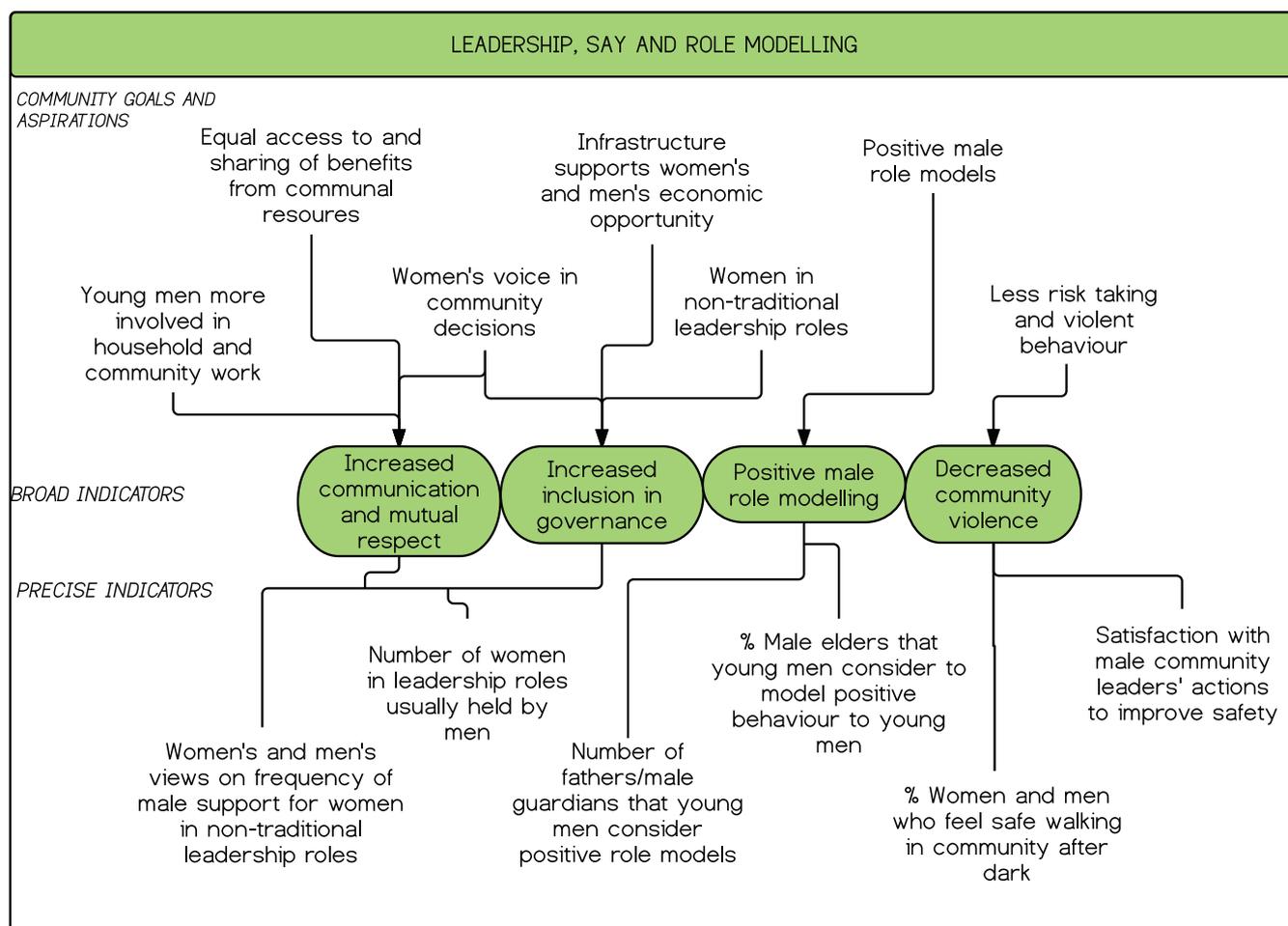


Figure 5. Indicator tree for the domain of Leadership, Say and Role Modelling [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

to specific aspects of gender and economy, and to influence how social policy and aid expenditure is shaped. What we choose to focus our attention on, when we define key indicators and measure change, not only shapes the direction of aid investment. It is enormously important in defining what is of value.

Because the process of measurement is not neutral, we believe that the process of creating and applying indicators ought to be made more transparent and more localised. While some indicators have relevance globally, understanding the range of social, cultural and political dynamics and how they influence local level change is necessary in order to develop indicators that reflect the local context. Developing metrics that are locally relevant across and within diverse societies presents a significant challenge to the gender equality goal (Goal 5) of the 2030 Global Agenda for Sustainable Development. More work needs to be done to bring diverse world views, perspectives and situations into indicator development.

We have outlined a methodology that incorporates a bottom-up process through which indicators can be designed to reflect, and ultimately support, a community-based vision of change. The indicators presented in this paper evolved from women and men in semi-subsistence communities identifying the kind of change they wish to see, thereby creating a space for localised, indigenous perspectives of gender equity to emerge. Systematic testing of the full suite of gender and economy indicators in a series of communities is required in order to explore how women and men at the community level can engage with the indicator agenda in order to shape the kind of change they desire. There is great potential to harness the performative power of indicators towards an equitable future that local people desire and articulate, rather than assuming that a predetermined empowerment pathway is right for everyone. To use Muniesa's term, the way that we record, measure and articulate development goals *provokes* certain realities. Our hope, as these

indicators come into use, is that they might make grassroots values and aspirations for equality more visible, more measurable and ultimately more attainable.

Acknowledgements

The three primary partners for this research were Macquarie University, Western Sydney University and the International Women's Development Agency. In Fiji, partners included the Women's Action for Change and Fiji National University, and in the Solomon Islands, Union Aid Abroad APHEDA and Live and Learn. Independent Consultant Claire Rowland was a co-investigator on this research project and played a central role in the design, implementation, coordination and write up of research outputs, including indicator manual and tools. Di Kilsby, Independent Consultant, assisted with the design and implementation of Phase 2 indicator trialling and formulation workshop. Research Associates, Joanne Crawford and Claire Slatter, provided valuable suggestions, and Laura Hammersely provided research assistance. We gratefully acknowledge all of the women and men in the research sites who volunteered to participate in this research. We acknowledge the contributions of our co-researchers who assisted with data collection, translation and analysis during Phase 1 of the project, and many of whom participated in an indicator trialling and formulation workshop in Phase 2. In Fiji we thank Paula Daveta, Eroni Kacunisawana, Jeet Prasad, Rosi Saumtua, Jona Tawake, Pasepa Toga, Tom Tom Tuisawau, Sophia Vokili and Isimeli Wainiqolo. In the Solomon Islands we thank Bill Apusae, Matti Biara, Helen Kana, Wilton Laufiu, Frank Lave, Margaret, Lume Muse, Stephanie Polyn, Ben Salepo, Elmah Sese, Grayham Tahu, Eva Wagapu and Alex Wateouou. Finally we thank two anonymous reviewers for helpful feedback on this paper.

Notes

- 1 Selected participatory exercises we developed as part of the indicator development process have been used in other Melanesian contexts, for example see Mikhailovich

et al.'s (2015) work in Papua New Guinea, as well further afield in Southeast Asia.

- 2 It is important to note that among the participants there were no individuals who self-identified as Lesbian Gay Bisexual or Transgender. The language we used in the project to discuss gender equity thus remained embedded in a male–female binary as this was the language with which our participants were comfortable. The methodology we describe here could, however, be utilised to discuss a wider range of gender identities and do more to create space for fluid gender identities.
- 3 A further set of indicators related to activities in a diverse economy were also devised but are not discussed here because of length constraints. These indicators are relevant to a concern for different economic development pathways that are not solely focused on market integration as the main route towards increasing well-being. They cut across the four domains of gender equity discussed in this paper and are central to understanding how women and men secure both material and social well-being in ways that extend beyond cash incomes (for further discussion see McKinnon et al., 2016; Carnegie et al., 2013).

References

- Ahmed, F.E. (2014) Peace in the household: Gender, agency and villagers' measures of marital quality in Bangladesh, *Feminist Economics* 20(4): 187–211.
- Allen, M., S. Dinnen, D. Evans and R. Monson (2013) *Justice delivered locally: Systems, challenges and innovations in Solomon Islands*. Research Report prepared for the World Bank's Justice for the Poor (J4P) Program, World Bank, Washington, District of Columbia. Retrieved 3 April 2017, from Website: <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/justice-delivered-locally-systems-challenges-innovations-in-solomon-islands.pdf>
- Batliwala, S. and A. Pittman (2010) *Capturing change in women's realities: A critical overview of current monitoring and evaluation frameworks and approaches*. Toronto: Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID).
- Canadian International Development Agency (1997) *The why and how of gender-sensitive indicators: A project level handbook*. Gatineau: Canadian International Development Agency.
- Carnegie, M, C. Rowland and J. Crawford (2013) Rivers and coconuts: Conceptualising and measuring gender equality in semi-subsistent communities in Melanesia. *Gender Matters*, Issue 2, March. Melbourne: International Women's Development Agency. Retrieved 12 November 2018, from Website: http://www.iwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/20130325_GenderMatters2.pdf
- Chant, S. (2016) Women, girls and world poverty: Empowerment, equality or essentialism, *International Development Planning Review* 38(1): 1–24.
- Cornwall, A. (2016) Women's empowerment: What works? *Journal of International Development* 28(3): 342–359.

- Cornwall, A. and A.-M. Rivas (2015) From 'gender equality' and 'women's empowerment' to global justice: Reclaiming a transformative agenda for gender and development, *Third World Quarterly* 36(2): 396–415.
- Davis, K.E., B. Kingsbury and S.E. Merry (2012) Indicators as a technology of global governance, *Law & Society Review* 46(1): 71–104.
- Douglas, B. (2000) Introduction: Hearing Melanesian women, in B. Douglas (ed.), *Women and governance from the grassroots in Melanesia*. Discussion Paper 00/2. Canberra: State Society and Governance in Melanesia, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University.
- Douglas, B. (2003) Towards an anatomy of women's groupings in Melanesia, *Oceania* 74(1–2): 6–23.
- Fairbairn-Dunlop, P. (1994) Mother, farmer, trader, weaver: Juggling roles in Pacific agriculture, in A.E. Bain (ed.), *Sustainable development or malignant growth? Perspectives of Pacific Island women*. Suva: Marama Publications.
- Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (2013) *Somebody's life, everybody's business! National research on women's health and life experiences in Fiji (2010/2011): A survey exploring the prevalence, incidence and attitudes to intimate partner violence in Fiji*. Suva: Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. Retrieved 31 July 2018, from Website: <http://fijiwomen.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/1.pdf>.
- Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (2011) *The role of women in agriculture*. ESA Working Paper No. 11-02. Retrieved 31 July 2018, from Website: www.fao.org/docrep/013/am307e/am307e00.pdf
- García-Moreno, C., H.A.F.M. Jansen, M. Ellsberg, L. Heise and C. Watts (2005) *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses*. Geneva: World Health Organization. Retrieved 31 July 2018, from Website: <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/24159358X/en/>.
- Kabeer, N. (1999) Resources, agency, and achievement: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment, *Development and Change* 30(3): 435–464.
- Kretzmann, J.P. and J.L. McKnight (1993) *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. Evanston, Illinois: Institute for Policy Research.
- Law, J. and J. Urry (2004) Enacting the Social, Economy and Society 33(3): 390–410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0308514042000225716>.
- Mathie, A., J. Cameron and K. Gibson (2017) Asset-based and citizen-led development: Using a diffracted power lens to analyse the possibilities and challenges, *Progress in Development Studies* 17(1): 1–13.
- Mayoux, L. (2001) *What do we want to know? Selecting indicators*. Unpublished paper. Retrieved 12 November 2018, from Website: https://gamechangenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/TK1_SelectingIndicators.pdf
- McKinnon, K., M. Carnegie, K. Gibson and C. Rowland (2016) Gender equality and economic empowerment in the Solomon Islands and Fiji: A place-based approach, *Gender, Place & Culture* 23(10): 1376–1391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2016.1160036>
- McLeod, A. (2015) *Women's leadership in the Pacific*. Developmental Leadership Program, State of the Art Paper 4. Retrieved 12 November 2018 from Website: http://publications.dlprog.org/Womens_Leadership_Pacific.pdf
- Mikhailovich, K., B. Pamphilon and B. Chambers (2015) Participatory visual research with subsistence farmers in Papua New Guinea, *Development in Practice* 25(7): 997–1010.
- Mohamed, M.R. (2009) *Making invisible work more visible: Gender and time use surveys with a focus on the Pacific and unpaid care work*. Suva: UNDP Pacific Centre.
- Moser, C. (1989) Gender planning in the third world: Meeting practical and strategic gender needs, *World Development* 17(11): 1799–1825.
- Muniesa, F. (2014) *The provoked economy: Economic reality and the performative turn*. London: Routledge.
- Okali, C. (2012) *Gender analysis: Engaging with rural development and agricultural policy processes*. Future Agricultures, Working Paper 026. Retrieved 31 July 2018, from Website: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a7fe5274a31e000062a/FAC_Working_Paper_026.pdf
- Pollard, A.A. (2000) *Givers of wisdom, labourers without gain: Essays on women in the Solomon Islands*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, The University of the South Pacific and the University of the South Pacific in Solomon Islands.
- Rowlands, J. (1995) Empowerment examined, *Development in Practice* 5(2): 101–107.
- Scheyvens, R. (2003) Church women's groups and the empowerment of women in the Solomon Islands, *Oceania* 74(1–2): 24–43.
- Secretariat of the Pacific Community (2009) *Family health and safety study: A study on violence against women and children*. Report prepared for Ministry of Women, Youth & Children's Affairs, Solomon Islands. Retrieved 31 July 2018, from Website: <http://www.pacificwomen.org/wpcontent/uploads/SolomonIslandsFamilyHealthandSafetyStudy1.pdf>
- Shore, C. and S. Wright (2015a) Audit culture revisited. Rankings, ratings and the reassembling of society, *Current Anthropology* 56(3): 421–444.
- Shore, C. and S. Wright (2015b) Governing by numbers: Audit culture, rankings and the new world order, *Social Anthropology* 23(1): 22–28.
- Vaessen, J., A. Rivas, M. Duvendack et al. (2014) The effects of microcredit on women's control over household spending in developing countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis, *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 8: 5–184.
- Waring, M. (1988) *If women counted: A new feminist economics*. London: MacMillan.