

WOMEN IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Fact Sheet

BACKGROUND

Women empowerment and gender equality play key roles in driving economic progress. Ensuring women have equal opportunities and rights is especially crucial in Fiji where cultural norms and traditional beliefs act as barriers to women being able to participate in Fiji's economic development. Empowering women in economic development involves several aspects, such as providing access to education, opportunities for skill development, and financial resources for operating small businesses. Importantly, promoting gender equality not only improves the well-being and economic status of women but also provides broader societal benefits.

CURRENT STATUS

In Fiji, the government, private sector, development partners, and key stakeholders play a pivotal role in enhancing women's roles and abilities to actively contribute to economic development. The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection is dedicated to empowering women and promoting inclusivity in socio-economic development. The private sector and development partners have played a significant role in empowering women in economic development. These partners include South Pacific Business Development (SPBD), Women Entrepreneurs Business Council (WEBC), Young Entrepreneurs Council (YEC), Fiji Development Bank (FDB) and Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI)

CHALLENGES

1. *The unequal distribution of unpaid care work:* creates a significant burden on women, impacting their ability to fully participate in the workforce and pursue their own career aspirations.
2. *Sexual harassment in the workplace:* Frequency of sexual harassment in certain industries emphasize

the need for targeted interventions, policies, and awareness campaigns to address and prevent such incidents in the workplace.

3. *The absence of suitable day care facilities and easily obtainable childcare:* Limited affordable childcare options impose significant obstacle for women who aspire to pursue their career objectives while also being available for their children.
4. *Need for social care services and work force trained to care for ageing population:* Care for ageing persons in a family often becomes the responsibility of a female member of the family and thus affects women participation in employment and economic activities.
5. *Most MSMEs operate in the informal sector and about one half are owned by women;* Recognizing and supporting this variety of economic activities is crucial for promoting women's empowerment and fostering sustainable economic development.
6. *Land ownership or acquisition of land by women:* The gender imbalance in land ownership and access to land needs to be addressed to increase women participation in agriculture.
7. *Under-representation of girls and young women in STEM education hinders their access to opportunities in these critical fields:* There is need for concerted efforts to encourage and support women's participation and advancement in these fields.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. *Local and international training programs offer women avenues for skill enhancement while the creation of new positions facilitates diverse roles, fostering career growth.*
2. *International and regional engagement fosters collaboration, networking, and learning, aligning Fiji's commitments with global goals.* Adoption of best practices, centralized data systems, and reviewed planning frameworks ensure evidence-based decision-making and inclusivity.

FUTURE POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

➤ **Encourage more participation of women in formal and informal sector employment:**

- ✓ Improve women's access to income-generating activities.
- ✓ Create awareness to promote women's equal access to public and private services.
- ✓ Revise agricultural policies and laws to enable both genders to benefit equally from government support.
- ✓ Advocate better work conditions including address sexual harassment.
- ✓ Avail affordable and quality childcare and aged care
- ✓ Promote women's subsistence farming and fishing in rural communities.
- ✓ Facilitate women's access to productive resources, training and support.
- ✓ Explore the possibilities of dedicated social security through voluntary contribution for women.

➤ **Reduce violence against women and children by implementing coordinated referral networks and responsive policing:**

- ✓ Promote awareness within communities to strengthen and improve policies in response to violence against women and children.
- ✓ Promote counselling related to gender-based violence in schools and tertiary institutions.
- ✓ Develop and implement curriculum to prevent violence and promote gender equality in schools.

➤ **Enhance the presence of women in various tiers of governance and civil society:**

- ✓ Increase opportunities for women to participate in leadership training, mentoring, and coaching programmes (Strengthening women empowerment programme in both rural and urban areas).
- ✓ Promote key constitutional, legislative and policy reforms to support Fijian women's rights.
- ✓ Improve women's leadership and decision-making in areas, such as in the public sector, corporate boards, and community-based organizations.
- ✓ Encourage women to increase their participation in STEM.

➤ **Strengthening of existing policies and legislation:**

- ✓ Revise Women's Plan of Action, National Gender Policy, and Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development Initiative (ICD).
- ✓ Strengthen the Gender Budget Template (Gender Responsive Budgeting).
- ✓ Review and revise teacher education and training programmes.

➤ **Enhancing access to health care facilities:**

- ✓ Improving access to life cycle and reproductive health care for women