

## The crisis' impact on women's rights: sub-regional perspectives

# The Impact of the Crisis on Pacific Island Women: A Snapshot

By Karanina Sumeo<sup>1</sup>

### Preamble

This series of briefs entitled *The crisis' impact on women's rights*, published by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), includes sub-regional perspectives on the impacts seen to date of the current crisis on women and women's rights as well as those likely to come. These sub-regional analyses are a key input from women activists and analysts to inform development debates and decisions that are being made to respond to the crisis. The series also includes a cross-regional and global analysis.

We know that women are at the center of the fallout from the current crisis, which itself combines interlocking crises: a global economic recession, the devastating effects of climate change, and a deepening food and energy crisis. All of this is compounding the increasing poverty and inequality in different parts of the world, as well as the impacts of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. At the same time, traditional power relations among international players are shifting, the so-called 'middle income countries' with the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) assuming greater power (Brazil and China have become creditors of the United States, and important investors in the International Monetary Fund, and all of them hold some of the most important sources of reserves of the world). The current situation, a result of aggressive free-market capitalism pursued in the past decades, calls into sharp question dominant—and even many of the so-called alternative—models for development. The crisis is not new for most of the developing countries that have struggled with crises in the 70's, 80's, 90's and beginning of 2000's. This crisis, however, reached global proportions when it impacted hegemonic economies and their role in global arenas and put in evidence the interconnectedness of the diverse realities of countries in this globalized world.

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This systemic crisis poses a huge challenge for governments, donors and every development practitioner, activist and policy-maker to reinvent the system in the long term, and reduce the negative impacts in the short and medium terms. In this sense, as many have said, the crisis also represents a historic opportunity to be bold, creative and attempt to right the wrongs of neoliberal development. As the crisis is now a driving force behind many development choices and processes (from the global to the local), and will shape approaches to development for years to come, the role of women and gender equality as a central goal must not be further overlooked. This is not simply because women are among those most negatively impacted by these crises, but also because they are key development players in most communities around the world, as well as relevant and vital actors in proposing effective approaches to mitigate the impacts of the crisis and expand the fulfillment of human rights, environmental sustainability and development commitments around the world. The exclusion of women, gender equality and women's rights as central to these processes is unacceptable and should be used as an indicator of the seriousness of proposed responses.

In preparation for the United Nations (UN) High Level Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development (New York from June 24th to 26th 2009), several women's rights groups expressed their concerns about the impacts of the crisis on women's lives<sup>2</sup> and their rights and the limitations of the actual responses to the crisis implemented or proposed so far. The Women's Working Group on Financing for Development, of which AWID is a member, has been very active and committed to promoting the UN's pivotal role as the legitimate space to address the crisis from a truly inclusive multilateral perspective.<sup>3</sup>

AWID is committed to engaging with and supporting collective initiatives to influence this process, as well as building alliances with actors from other social movements. Solutions that have been defined by the same actors who produced this financial and economic meltdown are unacceptable. Responses to the crisis must emerge from broad processes where both government and civil society engage in dialogue that is both enriching and makes decision-making more responsive to people's needs and the fulfillment of human rights. Both civil society and governments from all countries of the world, including low-income countries, should be central actors included in this global policy dialogue process. Multilateral venues under the UN are the most inclusive and balanced spaces existing in the international system, and the only spaces with clear mechanisms for the participation of developing countries and civil society actors.

Whatever the proposals and responses that emerge from such high level processes - they must be informed by analysis on how these trends are playing out in communities and how the impacts are differentiated among women and men and across different sectors. Allocation of resources for these responses must also be implemented in a way that takes into account the gender dynamics at play, and ensures that key social development sectors, such as health or education, are not the ones to be defunded for the sake of economic growth and financial stability.

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<sup>2</sup> See the statement: The G20 committed to save the global economy at the cost of women, November 17, 2008, 11th AWID International Forum, from [http://www.awid.org/eng/Enjeux-et-Analyses/Library/LE-G20-DECIDE-A-SAUVER-L-ECONOMIE-MONDIALE-AUX-DEPENS-DES-FEMMES/\(language\)/eng-GB](http://www.awid.org/eng/Enjeux-et-Analyses/Library/LE-G20-DECIDE-A-SAUVER-L-ECONOMIE-MONDIALE-AUX-DEPENS-DES-FEMMES/(language)/eng-GB)

<sup>3</sup> Women's Working Group on Financing for Development, Statement from the Second Women's Consultation convened by the WWG on FfD in New York from April 24-26, 2009 from <http://www.awid.org/eng/About-AWID/AWID-News/A-call-for-structural-sustainable-gender-equitable-and-rights-based-responses-to-the-global-financial-and-economic-crisis>



The very social development achievements that have been made in the last two decades, as limited as they are, are currently at stake, if the focus of responses to the crisis is only economic growth and a return to 'business as usual'. In this sense, women's rights and gender equality commitments made by governments and other actors, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action, the Millennium Development Goals must not be trade-offs in the definition of responses to the crisis.

It is in that spirit, that the authors of the briefs included in this series accepted the challenge to explore answers to the following questions:

- Considering the diversity of situations in which women live, what are the main challenges for women in your sub-region in the context of the current crisis?
- Can you identify concrete actions or initiatives (responses to the crisis) that have already had either negative and/or positive impacts on women's lives?
- Are women's groups in your region experiencing increased discrimination as a direct or indirect result of the financial crisis?
- If stimulus packages are not inclusive of human rights and gender equality perspectives then are there any alternatives so that these packages are reshaped in order to include gender and rights dimensions?
- If the governments of the region/sub region (or regional bodies) have not set up any stimulus packages or measures yet: what do you expect will be the impact of not tackling the crisis in a timely way at the national and regional level?
- What are potential future impacts on women in your region in the context of a global recession? Which are the most outstanding weaknesses of the region in regards to the economic crisis?
- The UN Stiglitz Commission<sup>4</sup> and the G20 are trying to identify international initiatives to reduce the impact of the crisis on development. Do you think these global initiatives consider challenges confronted by women, and how to help women in your region face the crisis?

The sub-regional analyses presented in this Series are an initial attempt to contribute to identifying challenges, potential responses and proposals from a women's rights perspective, that builds on the different realities and impacts the crisis is having on different regions of the world. The analyses also aim to contribute to grounding responses to the crisis in gender equality and women's rights and promoting a profound transformation for a more inclusive and democratic international system. Various regions raised common areas of concern that reflect common challenges for women's rights around the world.

A lack of gender equality perspectives in the stimulus packages or policy responses to the crisis at the national level seems to be commonplace, as well as how women are particularly affected because of their strong participation in the informal economy, and the non-recognition of their unpaid and reproductive work, as well as the high levels of discrimination and inequality they face. Amongst other important issues raised, these common findings call for a new understanding of the role of the state and how it affects women in particular through the care economy (in

<sup>4</sup> See the Women's Working Group on Financing for Development Statements on the Stiglitz Commission from [http://www.awid.org/eng/Issues-and-Analysis/Library/Women-s-Working-Group-on-FFD-Contributions-to-the-Stiglitz-Commission/\(language\)/eng-GB](http://www.awid.org/eng/Issues-and-Analysis/Library/Women-s-Working-Group-on-FFD-Contributions-to-the-Stiglitz-Commission/(language)/eng-GB) and the Stiglitz Recommendations from <http://www.un-ngls.org/spip.php?page=cfr>

relation to the key reproductive roles that women play which sustain the current economic system at their peril), but also in terms of advancing the decent work agenda. When the role of the state was reduced, several of the social functions previously performed by the state - healthcare, caretaking and education - were absorbed by women across regions, usually in addition to their paid work. Thus, women have disproportionately shouldered the burden of the consequences of state reduction, particularly as they relate to the fulfillment of economic and social rights (such as housing, health and education).<sup>5</sup>

If a post-neoliberalism era is emerging, the new international system should build on community, national, regional and global experiences of development actors, and on historic women's rights agendas. These longstanding struggles should be reinterpreted and communicated broadly to promote alternative thinking around responses to the crisis.

Today we call for holistic responses to the systemic crisis. In doing so, our own efforts (amongst women's movements and organizations) for building alternative discourses and influencing the international system must be grounded in different kinds of knowledge (informal and formal). Our alternative discourse should also be based on a holistic/cross-cutting approach, ensuring full space for the voices of the most excluded groups.<sup>6</sup>

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## Identity and location

The Pacific island nations referred to in this paper are inclusive of three main ethnic groups in Oceania: Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. The island nations are: Cook Islands, American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia (Tahiti), Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands,

Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Pitcairn Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Fatuna; all are members of the Secretariat for the Pacific Communities (SPC). Hawai'i is not part of the SPC although its indigenous people are Polynesian. The islands are spread across the Pacific Ocean, as the following map shows:



The exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of the collective of nations cover approximately 28% of the world's EEZ total (Secretariat of the Pacific Communities, 2008a). The Oceania region is therefore of strategic economic, political, and environmental significance to the global community.

The collective population of these nations is currently estimated to be around 10 million, although this figure may actually be greater

as some of the statistics used to calculate this amount are a decade old. Individual nation populations vary from 1200 to 6.6 million. Females make up 49% and males comprise 51%. Of the collective population, 58% are between 15 and 59 years of age (SPC, 2009a).

## 1. Challenges in the context of the global financial crisis

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)– combined with the Pacific community's aspirations for a region of peace, prosperity, good governance, democracy, and the defense and promotion of human rights (SPC, 2009b) - are the proclaimed strategic imperatives for addressing the impacts of the global recession on Pacific women. The global economic crisis has exacerbated some of the shared struggles for women in the region, but has also prompted a rethink of traditional attitudes that have hindered women's voices and efforts to better themselves, their communities, their nations, and the Pacific region as a whole.

Most Pacific island nations are a mix of independent nations and territories of developed countries, namely France, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Because of their dependence on foreign aid, nations like Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu and Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, and PNG are directly affected by the impact of the crisis on donor countries, as donor countries may shift aid appropriation. While New Zealand is not a developing island nation, it has been included in this paper because it contains the largest Polynesian population in the world, is residence to more Cook Islanders, Tokelauan, and Niuean people than those nations themselves, and because of its very close social, environmental, and political ties with the Oceania group. French territories like Tahiti and New Caledonia are affected by the impact of the crisis on France. Similarly, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and others are affected by the policies from the U.S.

## 2. Discrimination and abuse of human rights

According to Amnesty International's 2009 report, there is an increase in sexual exploitation and physical violence to women in certain nations within the Pacific grouping as economies

worsen (Amnesty International, 2009). Forced prostitution of females is also alleged to be increasing in port areas, logging company locations, and in rural areas where women are either forced or compelled to engage in sex work (Asian Development Bank, 2008; Pacific Business Online, 2009; Vltchek, 2008). Accompanying this is an increased risk of exposure to sexual diseases. This is an important issue for women, as many nations need aid to fund basic services in health, education, and social services – services that may not be considered productive interventions in times of economic crisis.

Some government responses to the economic crisis have also resulted in discrimination. For example, due to the crisis, the New Zealand government in 2009 decided that it could not afford to address the income gap between men and women. As a result of this, the government disbanded a unit in one of its departments that was specifically set up to research and develop policy to address gender pay inequity across the public and private sectors. This was a major setback to pay equity at work, particularly for women in industries like social work, education, and administrative occupations (Delahunty, 2009).

Fiji's response to the economic crisis – currently compounded by a decrease in tourism due to political instability - involved the slashing of the retirement age for public servants to 55. This policy change has discriminated based on age (Young, 2009) in an important sector of women's employment.

## 3. Global crisis - impact on the ground

On the ground, the crisis continues to impact individuals and families in different and sometimes multiple ways. Due to low wages and limited employment opportunities abroad, for example, most families in the Pacific are affected by decreasing remittances, often the result of job losses and tightening economic circumstances in host developed nations.



Tonga is an example where remittances comprise between 55% and 60% of GDP (AusAID, 2009a). The lack of income for many families - especially in rural areas - compounds stresses for women in their daily roles as caregivers, protectors, and providers, as illustrated by the following example:

*Nasoni settlement in Vunivicui Labasa is still one of the settlements that are still without electricity. The communities continue to live a life of darkness, with candles and kerosene lamps as their only source of light during the night. The women of this community still use charcoal irons and kerosene lamps and stoves, and with the increase of fuel prices, they are finding life very difficult for most of these struggling families (fem'LINPACIFIC, p.16, 2009).*

Providing education for their children is an important aspiration for women and a crucial investment for shifting families out of poverty. A teacher's reflection highlights the impact of these difficult economic times on education:

*Compared to past years this year we have noticed a lot of changes and the first one, the paying of school fees is very low and at the moment 30 to 35 students are still owing the fees and we are giving them time to cope it slowly and for the type of food children are bringing, we can't just force them to bring healthy food because what ever the parents can find they just providing children for the food (fem'LINPACIFIC, p. 17, 2009).*

In another example, a young woman's reflection illustrates the impact of the recession on her caregivers:

*My dad is the breadwinner in the family he is the only one working, so there's not enough for the family. So my parents' first priority is to send me for further education in Suva. When I'm in Suva I usually face problems because when he gets his earnings he usually send it to Suva, because he wants me to go for my education so I can help them back and they usually look for what they eat and*

*what to feed the children back at home, because they send the money for the rent. Sometimes I walk to school because I know I have to struggle just as long I reach school. When I get back from school I'm tired and sometimes don't eat and just go off to sleep (fem'LINPACIFIC, p.17, 2009).*

The longevity of dilemmas such as the above pose disadvantages for girls when patriarchal values in certain communities prioritise education for boys and withdraw girls first from school when extra family income is needed (Pacific Business Online, 2009).

The difficulties for Pacific women in balancing resource commitments to their immediate dependents and traditional or customary collective responsibilities to their communities have become more visible due to the global crisis. Traditional responsibilities include contributing financially and in kind (food, housing, land, clothing, expertise, moral support) to members of the extended family, tribal network, church initiatives and village based projects that cross religious denominations. Speaking of Fiji, Sabita Gandhi of the Poor Relief Society explains:

*Although extreme poverty generally goes unnoticed in disadvantaged countries like Fiji, there is strong evidence that hardship and hunger not only exist but are increasing because of land tenure issues, inadequate resources (including cash) to meet the basic needs of the household, and/or customary obligations to the extended family, village community and/or the church (fem'LINPACIFIC, p.17, 2009).*

In terms of informal social services, 'cultural giving' is a form of social safety net in Pacific communities, where local people through churches provide basic social services such as health and education (formal and informal) based on donations. Decreasing donations as a result of the crisis therefore impact on services that communities informally co-maintain with government (Asia Development Bank, 2008).

Job searching has been noted to increase the number of woman headed households in Kiribati, particularly as men seek employment on fishing boats, resulting in their absence from home. The increasing dependence of families on women becomes more acute when such separations become permanent, or do not result in income flowing back to the family (Asia Development Bank, 2008).

The global crisis has also affected women in the informal sector, as the following comment from Kiran, a market vendor in Ba, illustrates:

*We hope to make plenty but we can't do because this time is very hard, this time the people they have no money and selling in cheap, sometime we sell cost to cost and sometimes we lost. It's impossible to earn the money that we need. Last time people were buying as much cause they have money and everything and this time they got money and they can't afford and they can't buy much and then we can't earn much (fem'LINKPACIFIC, p.16, 2009).*

For women in business, while the global crisis has tightened the availability of finance, it re-affirmed the importance of self-reliance and innovation, particularly using existing assets within Pacific communities. Oxfam's work with communities across the Pacific encourages income generation within rural communities, and helps lessen the dependence on remittances and loss of population to urban centers (Oxfam International, 2009). Support by organisations like Oxfam to link Pacific businesses to overseas markets, particularly with fair trade partners, is important for Pacific women in business. An example is in Samoa where the Women in Business Development Incorporated with assistance of Oxfam, has collaborated with the Body Shop for products locally made in Samoa to be sold in Body Shop venues in international locations (New Zealand Pacific Business Council, 2009; Oxfam New Zealand, 2009). Clearly, existing and ongoing trade arrangements between Pacific countries and larger partners are significant to helping women through and beyond the financial crisis.

#### 4. Economic sustainability

The main welfare-benefit system in many island nations is the pension, so there is little if any financial safety net to help women who lose their jobs or who are unemployed. Population drift to urban areas for jobs leaves people reliant on income for their daily needs. During the recession though, the informal sector becomes an area where, despite limited spare cash among the "middle class", in their usual roles as caregivers, tailors, gardeners, etc. women cover those tasks that cannot be afforded. The other avenue for income generation is agriculture. Here, women who have access to land and/or own it or are part of collectives do have an asset to support themselves and their families in the absence of income.

Rising fuel and food prices for imported goods and, in particular, rice - presently a staple food in many Pacific communities - has resulted in Pacific leaders and others publicly promoting the growing of local foods like taro, cassava, breadfruit, and yams (Singh, 2008; SPC, 2008). Fiji also recently launched a "Plant Five a Day" campaign to encourage people to plant gardens (SPC, 2008). At the Food Summit in Rome in 2008, Pacific leaders asked donor countries to refocus on supporting agriculture as a safeguard for food security, to counter a dependence on purchased foreign foods, and minimise the consumption of cheap goods that degrade health. Australia has recognised the significance of agriculture and rural development in their 2009 aid budget (AusAID, 2009b).

Across the Pacific region, government revenue is expected to decline requiring rationalisation of expenditure. AusAID believes that the countries most at risk will be those who do not prioritise expenditure towards basic health, education, law and order, and the maintenance of national economic infrastructure (2009a). Samoa's 2009 (Ilalio, 2009) budget indicates significant cuts in funding for health and education, both critical areas not only in terms of employment for women but also in services. In addition, nations like Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu,



and the northern states have lost value in their investment funds since 2008, funds that provide much needed revenue (AusAID, 2009a).

## 5. Impact of stimulus initiatives on women

Responses to the crisis by governments have mixed implications for Pacific women. In Samoa, for example, the government stepped in to assist the largest employer in the country save jobs - a significant number of which are occupied by women (Samoa Observer, 2009). Fiji's response to the financial crisis has involved devaluing its currency by 20%, hoping to lift tourism and attract investment; both measures that could support women's employment across the connected sectors.

In 2009, however, New Zealand's aid programme to the Pacific shifted its focus from poverty elimination to economic sustainability in order to better align aid with its foreign policy interests, particularly trade and tourism. Consequently there is concern from NGOs about the potential detriment of this shift to progress made in poverty elimination and gender equity initiatives in the Pacific, with aid primarily servicing the interests of the donor not the recipient (Radio New Zealand International, 2009; Julian, 2009).

Restrictions across the public service affect women across the region. Decreased expenditure in health, education, and the social services sectors threaten the well-being and prosperity of women and their families, both as individual workers and communities. The tightening of public service expenditure in New Zealand, for instance, has resulted in significant staff reductions across the public sector, including in the area of frontline services. Women are currently highly represented in management and governance positions within frontline services; however, this increase may now be reversed. That said, stimulus packages to aid tourism, trade, and associated sectors will benefit women.

## 6. Gender equality perspectives on stimulus packages and measures

While there is currently no obvious sign that stimulus packages in the Pacific are subjected to a gender analysis to ensure benefits are not discriminatory, efforts are mounting.

The Pacific region has the lowest participation rate for women in parliament in the world (Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, 2009). The global crisis has provided impetus for nations to look at governance differently, including how to capitalise on the strengths, skills, and expertise of women. The increasing awareness of human rights violations in the region - as highlighted by women's organisations and donor agencies - has, over time, motivated some governments to address the underrepresentation of women at governance levels. AusAID is maintaining its focus on gender inequality in the Pacific, including support for leadership development for women at local, national, and regional levels (AusAID, 2009b).

Women's groups in the Pacific are calling for the meaningful inclusion of women's perspectives on strategic policy development, budgeting, and response plans to the global crisis (SPC, 2009c; SPC 2009d). In May 2009, the SPC hosted a meeting of its member nations to take stock of gender mainstreaming capacities across all levels of work in Pacific governments. The need to consider gender mainstreaming was identified at the 10th Triennial Meeting of Pacific Women in 2007 (SPC, 2009d). According to SPC's Gender Equality Adviser, Treva Braun:

*When they (women) are given equal opportunities to contribute to their communities and societies at all levels, everyone benefits. By investing in both women and men, a country is not only maximizing its resources, it is also encouraging stronger, healthier and more economically secure societies (SPC, 2009d).*

A number of stimulus initiatives planned in the Pacific involve infrastructure development, mainly in order to facilitate the flow of goods

and services within countries and for trade. However, women tend to be underrepresented in the building and infrastructure sectors; a gender-based approach to stimulus packages is therefore necessary.

Packages in New Zealand have aimed to maintain employment by creating more flexible working hours. While this may be helpful for some, the Human Rights Commission has noted that flexible working hours may disadvantage low-income women who actually need more hours to make ends meet (Human Rights Commission, 2009).

Tightening access to overseas labour markets for migrants is likely to affect Pacific women on temporary work visas such as caregivers and nurse aides in the health sector. Australia's and New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employment (RSE) scheme is targeted primarily at the horticultural and viticulture sectors, drawing a high number of Pacific men. This raises concerns for equitable opportunities for women. Restrictions to the RSE schemes caused by the financial crisis pose barriers to opening up the scheme to other occupations where Pacific women may be more inclined to engage.

## 7. Challenges in order to support Pacific women cope with the global crisis

### *Climate change*

The health of the physical environment in the Pacific is closely tied to the health and wealth of women. First and foremost, in the Pacific, food, shelter, security, and long-term prosperity, whether from subsistence farming and living from the sea or from income, connect to the environment (fem'LINKPACIFIC, 2009). The impact of climate change - particularly for women and families in Kiribati, Tokelau, Marshall Islands, and Tuvalu - is perhaps more pressing than the global financial crisis, and certainly makes coping with the crisis

more difficult. Rising sea levels encroach on land and living space, contaminating water sources, drowning gardens, and creating other consequences. Some root crops can no longer be grown due to rising sea levels (fem'LINKPACIFIC, 2009). Climate change increases the urgency for women and their families living on impacted islands to seek employment and permanent relocation elsewhere (Asian Development Bank, 2008).

### *Sustainable management of resources*

On a regional scale, poverty, corruption, and dependence on aid make the land and natural resources of the Pacific - as well as the Pacific people themselves - highly vulnerable to exploitation by multinationals and nations from the Economic North (Waring in Barlow, Bello, Cassen, George, Kagarlitsky, Keet, Ki-Zerbo, Loach, Petrella, Rodriguez, Tous-saint, Traoré, Vaneigem, Wallerstein, Waring & Ziegler, 2007). The existing and long-term destruction of women's lives caused by these may be more acute than the global financial crisis itself.

While the region is rich in minerals, forestry and fisheries, the nations themselves benefit very little in comparison to the companies that extract and utilize these resources (UNDP, 2009; Vltchek, 2008). Local people of PNG, for example, continue to battle foreign companies and their own governments over forced or unsustainable mining of their lands, from which landowners receive less than 3% of the royalties (Yakham, 2009). In the Solomon Islands, the return to local landowners from logging is estimated to be around only 1% (Vltchek, 2008). Accompanying the abuse of resources is human exploitation. The presence of foreign companies has led to an increase in child prostitution of both genders (Vltcek, 2008). The global drop in commodity prices in the global recession may not therefore be such a negative thing for women and children in light of such abuses.



In the case of PNG, exploitative practices include the burning of villages belonging to those who oppose mining, an instance of which occurred in April 2009 (Catalinotto, 2009). The impacts on water sources, the depletion and poisoning of land, the displacement of people, the loss of men to mining as opposed to farming and other duties, and the increasing reliance on cash to purchase food and other goods all add to the stress for women who continue to carry the primary burden of care for families. In PNG it is common practice to exclude women land-owners from the majority of decision-making forums over the use of land for mining projects; this further limits women's ability to protect their interests and capital assets (Fonseca, 2004). A growing political movement – focused on diminishing the authority of the PNG government over land and returning control back to land-owners (Yakham, 2009) – could assist PNG women to reverse the existing and ongoing destruction.

Island nations are looking to developed nations – those who are causing global warming – to address their activities and seek technological assistance to help populations cope with the impacts of climate change (SPC, 2009e).

### *Access to basic services*

Women's access to basic services – such as clean running water, affordable quality health services, contraception, safety from natural disasters common to the islands, and the ability to own land to sustain families and make a living – are essential to helping women cope with a global recession and should be viewed as basic needs.

### *Youth employment, education and training*

Perhaps one of the biggest weaknesses in the region is the inability to create employment for the large youth population – a worsening trend as more and more young people leave school

with no job prospects. Around 19.6% of the collective Pacific population is between 15 and 24 years, with another 16.6% between 0–14 years (SPC, 2009a). Given the global recession, migration to more developed countries is limited, due primarily to costs, limited skills, and the transferability of educational attainment.

Tied to unemployment is access to quality and transferable education. Access to financial assistance for education – including for schools, community based programmes, vocational training, and tertiary study – are more important during a recession. Success at the tertiary level and the alignment/relevance of that education with the standards and needs of foreign countries are existing barriers for women (ADB, 2008). To compete internationally for employment and study opportunities – given that external markets are already flooded with skills and expertise – is a particularly large obstacle for women.

This paper has highlighted some of the big challenges facing women (young, urban, rural, professional, business owners, and home based) in the Pacific in the context of the global crisis. It is unclear from the Stiglitz Commission and the G20 summit how work on an international financial reserve and monitoring mechanisms, or international trade initiatives, will help women of small island nations cope with the financial crisis. Additionally, questions also arise as to when, how, and to what extent financial assistance will be channeled.

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