



Introduction

Background

In 2007, AusAID's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) commenced a study to assess the effectiveness of current approaches to addressing violence against women and identify promising practices in five countries: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and East Timor. The research was motivated by a concern that violence against women was a barrier to development in Melanesia and East Timor, with significant negative impacts on women and their families and communities.

The result of this research was the report *Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches*. The report was released by the Hon Stephen Smith MP, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Australian Minister for the Status of Women, on 25 November 2008 to coincide with White Ribbon Day, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The report was also launched locally in each of the five countries included in the study, in partnership with the national governments of those countries.

The ODE study used a participatory approach that focused on women's own experience of violence, and on what does or does not help them in terms of protection and prevention. The research was undertaken by an international team—which included Dr Mary Ellsberg and Dr Christine Bradley, and AusAID staff Andrew Egan, Amy Haddad and Barbara O'Dwyer—and by local consultants from Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu. The work was also supported by local advisory groups of knowledgeable and highly respected women and men in each country. The research involved consultations with more than 700 individuals, including representatives of government, non-government organisations (NGOs), community groups, service providers, users of services, community members and international organisations.

Findings of the ODE report

The ODE report found that violence against women is severe, pervasive and constrains development in Melanesia and East Timor. It causes trauma to women and their families and communities. It severely limits women's social, economic and political participation in their communities. It also creates a significant financial cost for countries, with increased spending required for health care, social services, policing and the justice system.

Violence and the fear of violence severely limit women's contribution to social and economic development, thereby hindering the achievement of important national and international development goals, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and improving maternal and child health.¹

ODE's consultations, supported by previous research, found that the most common forms of violence against women are physical violence by husbands/partners against wives/girlfriends, and sexual violence against women and girls.

The ODE report sets out a *framework for action* at the national level to respond to violence against women. The framework is based on *three main strategies* that have proven successful in reducing violence against women within the region and internationally:

- > improving women's access to justice
- > increasing women's access to support services
- > preventing violence against women.

Central to this framework is a recognition of the need for an *integrated approach* that involves coordination and cooperation among the multiple actors working to end violence against women.

About this report

This report sets out Australia's initial response to the ODE report *Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches*. It examines Australian activities and advocacy that have been undertaken at the country level and the principles and priorities that AusAID will use to guide future work. The Australian Government recognises that ending violence against women will require a long-term commitment. AusAID is committed to intensifying its efforts to address violence against women, recognising that these efforts will need to build over time.

The report consists of:

- > a *regional report*, which provides an overview of AusAID activities and advocacy efforts in the five countries examined in the ODE study
- > five *country reports*, which provide more detailed information on AusAID activities and advocacy at the country level.

The structure of the regional report and the country reports reflects the framework for action recommended in the ODE report, with sections on women's access to justice, women's access to support services, prevention of violence against women, and efforts to support an integrated approach.

Each of the country reports includes an assessment of the situation in that country and of that country's national government priorities, in order to set the context for AusAID's support and in recognition of the need for AusAID's activities to align with national government priorities.

The Australian Government recognises that ending violence against women will require a long-term commitment.

¹ Australian Agency for International Development Office of Development Effectiveness (2008), *Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches*, Canberra: AusAID Office of Development Effectiveness, p. 4 (ODE report).

Principles and priorities

The ODE report identified a range of principles and priorities structured around a framework for addressing violence against women. AusAID will use this framework and a set of four key principles to guide its contribution to ending violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor.

A framework for action

The box below sets out AusAID's vision, our aim and the outcomes we will strive to achieve within the framework recommended by the ODE report.

A framework for ending violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor

Vision:

Women in Melanesia and East Timor are able to live free from violence and the fear of violence.

Aim:

To work in partnership—with national governments, civil society, international partners, and men and women—to increase efforts to reduce and respond to violence against women.

Outcome:

Women have access to justice

Outcome:

Women have access to support services

Outcome:

Violence against women is prevented

Principles and priorities that will guide Australia's work

Principle 1: Australia will make a long-term commitment to ending violence against women

Australia is committed to addressing the issue of violence against women over the long term as part of its international development assistance program. AusAID recognises that this is particularly important in changing community attitudes to violence and in strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations to respond to violence. Long-term commitment will also be needed to integrate measures to address violence against women into sectors where this issue has not previously been considered, or where the response to the issue has been relatively weak.

Equally important is the need for long-term financial commitments, including the provision of core funding for organisations and activities, to ensure continuity of support services, adoption of promising practices, strengthened capacity, and expansion of services beyond urban areas.

Principle 2: Australia will promote gender equality as a central principle of its international development work

AusAID recognises that promoting gender equality and empowering women are key to reducing violence against women. Improving the status of women in society will assist in changing community attitudes to violence against women and enabling women to respond to situations of violence. Preventing violence against women is essential for women to realise their rights and participate fully in economic, social and political life.

Australia is committed to ensuring that the needs, priorities and interests of women, as well as those of men, are considered in all development activities and at every stage of the development process in order to achieve effective development outcomes.



The Hon Stephen Smith MP, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, receives an MDG3 Champion Torch from Suzanne Shine, the Ambassador of Denmark to Australia (left)—in recognition of Australia's commitment to women's empowerment. Photo: AusAID

Principle 3: Australia will work in partnership with key stakeholders and align with partner government priorities

Australia recognises that responding to and preventing violence against women requires a concerted response involving the combined actions of many institutions and individuals—national governments, civil society, NGOs, international partners, and men and women in the community.

AusAID will continue to work in partnership with key stakeholders, including partner governments, civil society groups, and regional and international organisations, to eliminate violence against women across the region. In particular, AusAID will:

- > work with and support the priorities of partner governments in their efforts to end violence against women. This will include raising the issue of violence against women in high-level policy dialogue with partner governments
- > continue to support NGOs and civil society, recognising the important role that these groups play in preventing and responding to violence against women in the community
- > ensure disability-inclusive approaches are a central principle of our work, and seek to promote an active and central role for people with disability in responses to violence against women
- > continue to actively working with other Australian Government partners to ensure a coordinated whole-of-government response to these issues, including through key strategic partnerships with the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Attorney-General's Department
- > advocate for greater coordination on this issue among donors, and with regional and multilateral organisations.

Principle 4: Australia will adopt an integrated approach

AusAID recognises the importance of an integrated approach in responding to violence against women, and the need for greater coordination across sectors within our own programs—particularly in law and justice, health and education.

AusAID will support partner governments in their efforts to achieve a coordinated and comprehensive response to end violence against women. This will include working with partner governments to integrate measures to address violence against women across the range of sectors where we provide support and ensuring effective monitoring processes are put in place.

Women have access to justice

Rationale

Ensuring women have access to justice is key to responding to and preventing violence against women. A country's justice system, including formal, customary and community-based systems, should provide protection for women against violence, should act as a deterrent to possible offenders, and should impose consequences on those who commit domestic violence and sexual assault. This requires adequate laws, proper implementation of those laws, and knowledge throughout the community of the laws and how they operate.

Wife-beating happens every day, but only the brave ones come to us.
(Police officer, Papua New Guinea)²

The ODE report found a need to reform legislation and strengthen its implementation in order to provide effective protection for women who have experienced violence. This requires strengthening the police response to violence against women; ensuring women are treated fairly by justice system personnel when it comes to enforcing laws on violence against women; and increasing women's participation in the justice system. There is a need to increase support to community organisations that assist women in accessing the legal system and obtaining information about their legal rights. Customary and community-based justice systems also require support so that they more effectively meet the needs of men, women and children, operating in partnership with the formal justice system.

Australian support for women's access to justice

Australia's commitments

AusAID will support partner countries to increase women's access to justice by:

- > supporting governments to review, implement and monitor laws and policies that address violence against women, including through formal, customary and community-based justice systems
- > supporting civil society organisations that assist women to access justice, including by increasing women's knowledge of their rights and of the legal system
- > supporting improved police practices in responding to violence against women, in partnership with the Australian Federal Police.

² Field work for the ODE report.

In Vanuatu, the introduction of domestic violence orders is a promising approach. In the Port Vila vegetable markets a young woman reads about her rights. Photo: AusAID



Legislative and justice system reform

Legislative reform that increases women's access to justice is a major priority of a number of the national governments of Melanesia and East Timor. In Vanuatu, the government has passed the Family Protection Act, which significantly improves legal protection for women who have experienced violence. In East Timor, the government has made domestic violence a public crime in the Penal Code and is drafting domestic violence legislation. In Solomon Islands, the Law Reform Commission is conducting a review of the Penal Code, including its provisions relating to domestic violence and sexual assault.

Consistent with the priority that national governments in Melanesia and East Timor are placing on increasing women's access to justice, this is a major area of focus for AusAID. AusAID will increase its support in coming years, with the focus increasingly on the implementation of the legislation that has been enacted.

AusAID is actively working with other Australian Government partners to ensure a coordinated whole-of-government response to these issues, including through key strategic partnerships with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Attorney-General's Department. A whole-of-government framework for all Australian law and justice assistance to the Pacific is currently being developed by AusAID, the Attorney-General's Department, the AFP and other relevant Australian Government agencies. The framework is expected to be finalised by the end of 2009.

AusAID is working with partner governments to strengthen formal justice systems, including increasing their capacity to respond to violence against women. For example, the Papua New Guinea – Australia Law and Justice Partnership is working to strengthen the courts to better assist victims of violence. The program is supporting the Magisterial Services to implement national guidelines on family and sexual violence, including Practice Directions that help victims of violence understand the steps and processes in court proceedings. This type of support aims to improve the ability of the justice system to respond to cases of violence against women and, consequently, increase public confidence in the ability of these systems to appropriately respond to and prevent violence against women.

AusAID is also committed to supporting customary and community-based justice systems, in recognition of the critical role they play in providing justice services to the bulk of the population in Melanesia and East Timor. For example, in Papua New Guinea, AusAID is working with the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, and partners at sub-national levels, to increase the number of women magistrates in village courts and to support ongoing training programs for village court officials in issues of criminal jurisdiction, human rights, and HIV and AIDS. Across the region, AusAID is also working in partnership with the World Bank through the Justice for the Poor program. This initiative uses locally driven research and pilot projects to build a greater understanding of the relative roles

and capacities of formal, customary and community-based systems in providing access to justice for the poor and marginalised, including women.

The Australian Attorney-General's Department also works with Pacific Island countries in the region to address criminal and policing legislation and legal frameworks to assist police and governments to address issues such as domestic violence.

Civil society organisations assisting women's access to justice

Australia actively supports civil society organisations to improve women's access to justice. This includes support for organisations such as the Vanuatu Women's Centre and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, which provide women with information about their legal rights and support women in applying for protection orders and taking cases to court.

In the past, female victims [did] not feel very comfortable and easy coming to the police station to make their complaints. However, today, with much awareness and information provided to the communities, many victims will choose to go to the police station because they usually feel safer with the police than with the chiefs or the churches. (Police officer and male advocate, Vanuatu)³

The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)⁴ Law and Justice Program provides financial support to the Women in Law Association of Solomon Islands, which advocates for women's legal rights and provides a network of support for female legal practitioners.

This support to civil society organisations complements AusAID's assistance to the law and justice agencies, by ensuring that women are aware of their legal rights and are supported to participate in and access formal, customary and community-based justice systems.



Richard Moore, AusAID's Gender Advocate, with the Hon Maxine McKew MP and Ermelinda da Costa Monteiro, a UNIFEM Peace Scholar, at a UNIFEM Australia and Alola Foundation event in Canberra to raise awareness of the issues facing women in East Timor.
Photo: Andrew Taylor/EUREKA MEDIA

East Timor Justice Sector Support Facility

A Justice Sector Support Facility has been created by a bilateral agreement between the governments of East Timor and Australia to support both institutional and civil society initiatives to improve access to justice for men, women and children in East Timor.

AusAID will contribute approximately \$10 million over five years (2009–13) for the civil society component of the facility, which includes a civil society grants scheme.

The civil society grants scheme will directly promote gender justice outcomes, including measures to respond to and prevent violence against women. The ODE report's recommendations and findings will guide priorities in funding. One key area will be preventing and dealing with violence against women and girls. Another will be supporting women's access to justice in rural areas, through traditional law and the formal justice system.

Policing response

An effective police response to violence against women is also a crucial part of ensuring that women have access to justice. For women who have been subjected to violence, the police may be the first point of contact with the formal justice system. Australia recognises that it is important that police have the capacity to respond to cases of violence and that formal systems are in place for dealing with these cases.

³ Field work for the ODE report.

⁴ RAMSI is a partnership between the government and people of Solomon Islands and the contributing countries of the Pacific region, including Australia.

The Australian Federal Police is the lead agency for support to policing through Australia's international development assistance. It plays a key role in Australian support for strengthening justice sector responses to violence against women. In Vanuatu, for instance, the AFP is working in coordination with the New Zealand Police to train the Vanuatu Police Force on their responsibilities under the new Family Protection Act. In Solomon Islands, the AFP is working as part of the RAMSI Participating Police Force to support the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force to develop family violence policies and assist with coordinating provincial police Family Violence Coordinators.

In November 2008, the Australasian Police Commissioners, including the AFP, released a policing strategy to address family violence. The strategy identifies reducing family violence as an Australasian policing priority. One of the aims of the strategy is to improve frontline policing responses to family violence, including as part of the international work of these police forces.

As community leaders, the Australasian Police Commissioners will not tolerate family violence and are committed to protecting all victims. Family violence is a serious crime that damages our community at all levels ... The Australasian Police Commissioners are committed to reducing and preventing family violence through strong, consistent, and compassionate responses.⁵

⁵ Australasian Police Commissioners (2008), *Australasian Policing Strategy on the Prevention and Reduction of Family Violence*, p. 4. Accessed at http://www.police.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/145434/australasian_policing_strategy_prevention_reduction_family_violence.pdf.

Women have access to support services

Rationale

Women who have been subjected to violence have an immediate need for support. This can include access to a safe place to stay, access to medical services, and access to counselling. Women also need information about their options in responding to experiences of violence.

The ODE report found that civil society organisations play an active role in Melanesia and East Timor in providing support services to women who have experienced violence.

Women want peace of mind and rest. When we enter this place they are like friends to us. They are like family. They love us and feed us three times a day. (Resident of Haus Ruth Hostel, Papua New Guinea)⁶

ODE's recommendations for strengthening support included increased resourcing for organisations that provide this support; capacity building to improve the quality of formal and informal support; and better coordination among services. It also pointed to the need to extend the reach of available services to rural areas. The ODE report particularly pointed to the need to increase women's access to safe havens and psychological, medical and legal support, and to strengthen the response to violence against women through the health and education sectors.

Australian support for women's access to support services

Australia's commitments

AusAID will support partner countries to increase women's access to support services by:

- > supporting civil society organisations that provide counselling, legal and practical support to women who have experienced violence, including women's safe havens
- > encouraging governments to improve health sector responses to violence against women
- > supporting responses to HIV and AIDS that include consideration of women's vulnerability to gender-based violence.

Civil society services providers

AusAID recognises the major role that civil society plays in supporting women who have been subjected to violence. The ODE report found that civil society organisations were often the key source of support for women in these circumstances, particularly in rural areas. It noted that a recognition by these organisations of the equal rights of men and women was crucial to their work having a lasting impact.

⁶ Field work for the ODE report.

In line with ODE recommendations, AusAID will continue its direct financial support for civil society organisations. AusAID provides funding for safe houses for victims of domestic violence such as Centro Esperansa ba Feto (Hope Centre for Women) in East Timor. AusAID supports organisations that provide counselling and support services to survivors of gender-based violence. In Papua New Guinea, for example, Australia is providing support so that the reach of Stop Violence Centres can be expanded through four additional centres. These centres provide medical assistance, counselling and legal support to women who have experienced violence, and have close links with the police. AusAID will need to give further consideration to support for shelters and emergency accommodation, in light of the ODE finding that there is a shortage of these services in Melanesia and East Timor.

Shamima Ali, Coordinator, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. The centre provides training for organisations in Fiji and across the Pacific to improve services provided to women who have been subjected to violence. Photo: AusAID



Australia will continue to provide multi-year core funding to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (funding of \$4.87 million over five years beginning in 2004-05) and the Vanuatu Women's Centre (funding of \$3.7 million over five years beginning in 2007-08).⁷ These centres are the main source of support to women who have experienced violence in Fiji and Vanuatu. The centres provide practical support and counselling to women and work with other agencies such as the police, courts, doctors and welfare agencies to ensure that women can access these services. AusAID will need to give consideration to opportunities to extend multi-year core funding to other organisations that provide support services to women who have been subjected to violence.

AusAID will also look for opportunities to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to respond to violence against women. For example, in Solomon Islands, AusAID is supporting training and capacity building to improve formal and informal services available to women who have been subjected to violence. This includes supporting Oxfam to work with the Family Support Centre to improve its counselling and referral services. It also includes funding for training in Solomon Islands, to be conducted by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, for informal providers of shelter to victims of violence on minimum standards and procedures for referrals to services.⁸

⁷ AusAID has provided financial support to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre since 1989 and to the Vanuatu Women's Centre since 1994.

⁸ The training is part of a broader project, the Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study, being carried out by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community in partnership with the Government of Solomon Islands, with funding from AusAID and the United Nations Population Fund.

Support for capacity building

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Pacific has established a Facility Fund⁹ to address the specific needs of local organisations in Pacific Island countries in responding to violence against women. The Facility Fund will help to strengthen the financial and organisational capacities of these organisations to manage projects and programs. This will be achieved through the establishment of a grants scheme and a capacity-building program. The countries covered by the Facility Fund are Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Samoa, Kiribati, Tonga, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, Marshall Islands, Cook Islands, Palau, Nauru, Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu, Niue and Tokelau.

In 2008-09, AusAID contributed \$600,000 to the Facility Fund.

In response to the ODE report's recommendation to support capacity building, \$200,000 of AusAID's contribution will go to supporting staff from civil society organisations from Melanesia to participate in training and exchanges during 2009 and 2010. This will include participation in formal training programs conducted by key agencies in the region such as the Regional Rights Resource Team and the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. Training will cover practical skills such as counselling, data collection and administration. It will also increase service providers' knowledge of international human rights law and theoretical issues associated with violence against women. This support will assist in improving the quality of services provided to women who have been subjected to violence.

The remaining \$400,000 of AusAID support will be used to provide grants to organisations working to end violence against women in Fiji. The funding will support Fijian organisations for core and project activities to eliminate violence against women, and build the capacity of organisations to promote gender equality and women's rights.

In 2009-10, AusAID will contribute \$200,000 to the Facility Fund to support grants to organisations working to end violence against women in Papua New Guinea. AusAID will also consider providing additional funding to the Facility Fund in future years to support the ongoing provision of grants to civil society organisations in Fiji.

Government health services

The ODE report found that violence against women is a significant cause of injury and ill health among women in the countries studied. It identified a significant gap in the health sector when it comes to providing services for victims. AusAID will make increased access to health services for survivors of violence a priority. AusAID will seek to work with partner governments to increase the capacity of the health sector to recognise and support women who have experienced violence, as part of the support that AusAID provides to strengthen the health sector and basic health services across Melanesia and East Timor.

In Fiji, AusAID will provide funding that will support training for health professionals, developing policies and protocols for handling sexual offences in the health system, and developing data collection systems.

In Papua New Guinea, AusAID, through its Capacity Building Service Centre, is playing a lead role in working with the Papua New Guinea National Department of Health to raise awareness of gender issues, including the health impacts of sexual and gender-based violence. This includes provision of a domestic violence project officer within the department in 2009, to scale up efforts to address violence against women.

9 The Pacific Facility Fund in Support of Actions to End Violence Against Women.

Effective responses to HIV and AIDS require comprehensive approaches to address the gender issues that are involved in HIV transmission and impact.

In this area, AusAID will seek to build its support over time, working with partner governments to incorporate measures to respond to violence against women into support to the health sector, including through sector-wide approaches.

Australia's international development strategy for HIV and AIDS

Australia's new international development strategy for HIV and AIDS, *Intensifying the Response: Halting the Spread of HIV*, was launched by the Hon Stephen Smith MP, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, on 7 April 2009. The strategy sets priorities that will guide Australia's international development assistance in tackling the growing epidemic in the Asia-Pacific region.

One of the strategy's priorities is to improve the way that violence against women is considered and addressed through AusAID's programming on HIV and AIDS. Effective responses to HIV and AIDS require comprehensive approaches to address the gender issues that are involved in HIV transmission and impact. Programs need to consider women's vulnerability to gender-based violence as part of the response to HIV and AIDS. AusAID's support for this work will build over time as these priorities are incorporated into its programming on HIV and AIDS.

In the Pacific, HIV and AIDS responses will need to address the gender inequality that is associated with significant physical and sexual violence against women and women's lack of empowerment.

The men always blame the woman [for sexually transmitted infections], even if they know they were running around themselves. The women usually know they got it from their husband, but they can't accuse him or they'll get bashed up. (Nurse, Vanuatu)¹⁰

As part of its HIV strategy, Australia will provide support to governments to review and improve the laws and policies that address gender inequality and promote the empowerment of women, particularly regarding sexual violence and inheritance laws.¹¹

When a man dies, his family will only keep the children and send his wife back to her people. (NGO worker, Solomon Islands)¹²

In Papua New Guinea and Pacific Island countries, Australia will also support programs that address women's vulnerability to violence and poverty as part of efforts to intensify HIV prevention.

¹⁰ Field work for the ODE report.

¹¹ Laws that prevent women from inheriting from their fathers and husbands increase women's economic vulnerability, which in turn can put them at increased risk of exposure to HIV and AIDS.

¹² Field work for the ODE report.

Violence against women is prevented

Rationale

Preventing violence against women from occurring in the first place is the ultimate goal of any actions to end violence against women. Central to this is changing community attitudes that see violence against women as being acceptable or a private matter. Increasing the status of women in society and promoting gender equality also have a key role in ending violence against women. Challenging violence against women requires a community response, involving all parts of the community, including both men and women.

The ODE report identified a number of innovative programs in Melanesia and East Timor that are aimed at preventing violence against women and changing community attitudes. The report made a series of recommendations to strengthen violence prevention. These included supporting efforts to raise community awareness of violence against women and promoting women's rights, including through community-based activities and the media. The report identified a need to involve a broad range of actors in efforts to prevent violence against women, including those that have not traditionally been involved. Key decision-makers, churches, faith-based organisations, traditional chiefs, and men and boys—all need to be involved in efforts to prevent violence against women.

Australian support for preventing violence against women

Australia's commitments

AusAID will support partner countries to prevent violence against women by:

- > supporting and working with a broad range of civil society organisations to conduct community awareness and advocacy to end violence against women, including women's organisations, Disabled Peoples Organisations, faith-based organisations, and men and boys
- > supporting prevention activities through the education sector
- > supporting women as peacemakers
- > recognising and promoting the rights of women with disability
- > upholding gender equality as a guiding principle of Australia's international development assistance program and supporting activities to empower women, including promoting women's leadership and economic empowerment.

Working with civil society to prevent violence against women

Community advocacy and engagement

If people hear back in the villages that a woman has been raped, they talk about her as if she was wrong or dirty. So she doesn't feel safe. She feels like she has no friends, she's not a normal person anymore. (Male advocate, Vanuatu)¹³

She will hide it [rape] for a long time, because she's a student she should have decided not to join these people at the party, so her being raped is her own doing. (Village woman, Fiji)¹⁴

A major part of preventing violence against women, as recognised in the ODE report, is changing the attitudes of those who view violence as acceptable, and encouraging advocacy that promotes an end to violence against women. The report found innovative examples of civil society organisations in East Timor and Melanesia working to engage with communities to change community attitudes to violence against women.

AusAID provides financial assistance to a broad range of civil society organisations throughout Melanesia and East Timor to support their community awareness-raising and advocacy work on preventing violence against women.

AusAID provides financial assistance to a broad range of civil society organisations throughout Melanesia and East Timor to support their community awareness-raising and advocacy work on preventing violence against women. AusAID's support is consistent with the ODE report's recommendation to prioritise initiatives that have an emphasis on transforming gender norms. In particular, these programs are working at a community level to promote attitudes that support equality between men and women and condemn violence against women.

For example, AusAID supports Wan Smol Bag, a theatre group in Vanuatu, to raise community awareness on violence against women through an innovative program that combines community theatre, media and workshops.

With these activities, we are able to create an open and conducive atmosphere whereby young people interact with peers and many of whom are themselves offenders or victims of violence so they can understand, accept and change their behaviour to violence. (Member of Wan Smol Bag, Vanuatu)¹⁵

In Solomon Islands, AusAID is supporting Oxfam to work with two groups—Family Support Centre and Western Province Council of Women—to reduce gender-based violence in Honiara and Western Province. Oxfam's work with these groups will have a strong focus on sustained engagement with existing cultural norms in an effort to shift attitudes and beliefs about violence against women in the community, particularly among men.

There are opportunities for AusAID to engage with a broader range of groups to end violence against women, including through our existing civil society and governance programs.

¹³ Field work for the ODE report.

¹⁴ Field work for the ODE report.

¹⁵ Field work for the ODE report.

Addressing violence against girls and boys

AusAID has committed to playing its role in addressing violence against girls and boys with the launch, in March 2008, of its Child Protection Policy. The overall goal of the policy is to protect girls and boys from all forms of abuse in the delivery of Australia's overseas aid program.

The policy covers all aspects of the agency's operations and applies both to AusAID staff and to all contractors and NGOs funded by the agency.

The policy is based on four guiding principles: zero tolerance of child abuse, recognition of children's interests, a risk-management approach to child protection, and sharing responsibility for child protection.

An innovative aspect of AusAID's Child Protection Policy is the inclusion of mandatory child protection compliance standards for all contractors and NGOs funded by AusAID. Contracting firms and organisations must have their own child protection policies and must obtain criminal record checks for personnel who work with children.

AusAID will not fund any organisation or individual without appropriate mechanisms in place to protect children from all forms of abuse.

Other key elements of the policy include enhanced codes of conduct for AusAID officials, consideration of risks to children when designing development activities, clear procedures for raising concerns about child abuse, strengthened recruitment and screening processes, and child protection training for all staff.

Working with men and boys

Strengthening partnerships with men to prevent violence against women, was one of the key recommendations of the ODE report. The report found that men and male youth generally have not been engaged in efforts to prevent violence against women, even though they are critical partners in effecting long-lasting change.

People think that gender is an issue for women only. When we go out and run workshops for men, a lot of men have come up to us and said: 'Why do you talk about this? This is women's stuff. Let the women talk about it.' (Member of Association of Men against Violence, East Timor)¹⁶

AusAID recognises the importance of involving men and boys in working to end violence against women. AusAID will seek to support the work of community organisations to engage with men and boys to prevent violence against women. This includes providing support to organisations such as the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and Vanuatu Women's Centre, which conduct a Male Advocates Program to engage men to influence community attitudes towards violence against women.

As a chief I can talk to other chiefs ... I answer the questions in meetings because many of the questions are critical. Men always want to put women down. So I always do my best to explain the rights of women and children. (Chief and male advocate, Vanuatu)¹⁷

In response to the ODE recommendations, AusAID also provided financial support to Asosiasaun Mane Kontra Violencia (the Association of Men against Violence—AMKV) in 2008-09. AMKV runs a community-based education program in East Timor that seeks to raise awareness and change the behaviour of men and youth towards women.

¹⁶ Field work for the ODE report.

¹⁷ Field work for the ODE report.

The involvement of men and boys is an issue that AusAID will consider in supporting partner governments in their design and delivery of services to support women who have experienced violence. For example, the role of men and boys is an important consideration in ensuring women are able to access health services, in ensuring women have access to justice, and in ensuring appropriate police responses to violence against women.



The Pacific delegation present to the 'Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys to Achieve Gender Equality'. The delegation will participate in the development of a regional strategy for engaging with boys and men for violence prevention and the promotion of gender equality, to be led by UNDP. Photo: UNDP Pacific Centre

Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys to Achieve Gender Equality

AusAID partnered with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pacific Centre in supporting a Pacific and East Timorese delegation to attend the 'Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys to Achieve Gender Equality', held in March 2009. This support enhanced the skills and capacity of the Pacific and East Timorese delegates. It enabled them to network with others working in this area, and to showcase the innovative work that is happening in the Pacific to increase men's engagement as advocates against violence against women.

Delegates have been sharing their learnings with other community organisations and strategic policymakers in their countries since the symposium. The delegation will also participate in the development of a regional strategy and initial plan of action for engaging with boys and men for violence prevention and the promotion of gender equality, to be led by UNDP. AusAID sees this partnership with UNDP as a key step in strengthening our work in the region in engaging with men and boys to prevent violence against women.

Working with faith-based organisations

The ODE report found that churches and faith-based organisations play a significant role in delivering support services to women who have experienced violence. The report recommended strengthening partnerships with churches and faith-based organisations to prevent and address violence against women and to promote equality between men and women. This is important given the key role that churches and faith-based organisations can play in shaping community attitudes to violence against women and the fact that they are often the first point of contact for women who experience violence.

AusAID is a Principal Partner to the International Women's Development Agency initiative 'Asia Pacific Breakthrough: The Women, Faith and Development Summit to End Global Poverty'. The summit will be held in Melbourne in December 2009, in the lead-up to the World Parliament of Religions. It will bring together faith-based, women's and development organisations from across Asia and the Pacific to discuss opportunities to work together to advance gender equality, including ways to end violence against women. An ongoing Women, Faith and Development Alliance for the region will be launched at the summit.

AusAID also works at the country level to support the work of churches in responding to violence against women. In Solomon Islands, AusAID funds the Church of Melanesia's Inclusive Communities Program, which aims to rehabilitate prisoners and includes the topic of gender-based violence in its training syllabus. In Papua New Guinea, AusAID's Church Partnership Program includes support for churches in developing community-based plans to respond to, reduce and prevent violence against women. There are opportunities for AusAID to do more to prevent violence against women through its existing programs to support faith-based organisations.

Prevention activities through the education sector

In school, I couldn't talk to friends because I was ashamed. No, I didn't tell any of my friends. (Rape and incest survivor, Fiji)¹⁸

The ODE report recommended a role for schools and the education sector in preventing violence against women and girls. This included preventing violence in schools, teaching boys and girls about the negative impacts of violence and the importance of equality between men and women, and mobilising communities to support women's and girls' safety and rights.

AusAID, through its support to the education sector, has the opportunity to raise these issues with partner governments and to improve the capacity of the education sector to respond to violence against girls. For example, in Vanuatu, Australia will investigate opportunities to provide training on gender-based violence through its support to the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education in Port Vila, which provides training to all teachers working in Vanuatu. Training may help teachers prevent violence in schools and influence young people's attitudes to violence against women and gender equality.

This is an area where AusAID can do more in future years. There are opportunities to address the issue of violence against women at all levels of the education curriculum, from early childhood education through to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and tertiary level.

Addressing the issue of gender-based violence early on, including in early childhood education, can assist in changing attitudes to violence. Schools can play a role in widespread public-awareness campaigns on raising the profile and knowledge among the community of the issue of violence against women and support mechanisms that are available. This approach is supported by established research which recognises that women in particular receive information through their children and schools. Similarly, there needs to be a focus on the tertiary/TVET sector, where the threat of violence may in fact be acting as a deterrent to many women attending post-secondary courses.

Addressing the issue of gender-based violence early on, including in early childhood education, can assist in changing attitudes to violence.

Supporting women as peacemakers

The ODE report highlighted the crucial role that women have played in the past in resolving armed conflicts and acting as peacemakers in Melanesia and East Timor.

In our culture, we women should not stand up and walk around talking to people, so we had to break this culture ... In the end, the men came to listen to us and we told them, 'If you want to kill us, rape us or do whatever you like, do it ... We are here to find ways to stop the fighting so we can live peacefully'. (Member of Kup Women for Peace, Papua New Guinea)¹⁹

The report noted the link between violence against women and social violence. These links are formally acknowledged through UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and Resolution 1820 on ending sexual violence in conflict.²⁰ These resolutions recognise that violence against women escalates during conflict, can continue at higher rates in post-conflict situations and can be a barrier to their participation in peace processes.

¹⁸ Field work for the ODE report.

¹⁹ Field work for the ODE report.

²⁰ UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000. It is the key international framework that addresses the links between the protection of women from violence and the promotion of women's participation and leadership in peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts. Resolution 1820 was adopted in 2008. It addresses the issue of sexual violence in armed conflicts and post-conflict situations.

Even after the tensions, the men went back to the villages and were abusing their wives because there was nothing for them to do. (Trauma counsellor, Solomon Islands)²¹

The actions recommended by these UN resolutions are aimed at protecting women's rights and ensuring that they are equal participants in the maintenance and promotion of peace.

AusAID recognises the important links between violence against women, social violence and the role of peacebuilding activities in preventing violence. Since 2002, AusAID has supported a range of activities aimed at implementing Resolution 1325 to address these issues. Current AusAID activities to support women's role as peacemakers are set out below. These activities are consistent with the ODE report's recommendation for support for women's peacebuilding activities as a way to strengthen violence-prevention activities, especially where women are mobilising to end conflict and foster peace and reconciliation in their communities.

To further guide our approach to women's peacebuilding, AusAID is commissioning research on the impact and challenges of implementing Resolution 1325. This research will be conducted by the University of South Australia from mid 2009. It will focus on two in-depth case studies of Fiji and East Timor to highlight best practices, provide transferable lessons and make practical recommendations on how AusAID can measure, evaluate and advance the participation of women in peace and security issues.

AusAID provided funding to support a joint research project by UNIFEM Pacific and the UNDP Pacific Centre on sexual and gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. The research will make recommendations on how the implementation of Resolutions 1325 and 1820 can be supported by various actors to reduce the high levels of sexual and gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, as well as other Pacific Island states. The findings of this research are expected to be released in 2009.

In East Timor, AusAID provided support to the 'Women for Peace' conference. The conference was held in March 2009 in Dili and was hosted by the Alola Foundation. The conference strengthened awareness of women's roles in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, focusing on women and youth as positive forces for change and building regional networks to achieve sustainable peace and stability in East Timor. AusAID funding contributed to a 14-week roadshow exhibition of art and theatre that was produced as part of the conference, providing outreach to the districts and enabling widespread engagement with conference themes and outcomes.

In the Pacific, AusAID partners with femLINKpacific to support the Regional Women's Community Media Network on Women, Peace and Security (AusAID provided \$235,000 to support the network in 2008-09). The network raises awareness and supports the implementation of Resolution 1325 through regional media initiatives including publications, a website and radio campaigns. This work also supports the institutional strengthening and improves the media skills of a regional network of partner organisations in Fiji, Bougainville, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

AusAID supports the 'Peace Talks' initiative of the International Women's Development Agency (\$85,000 in 2008-09). The initiative raises awareness on implementing Resolution 1325 in the Pacific through training for civil society organisations from Solomon Islands, Tonga, Bougainville and Fiji. This work supports training for a core group of regional women's organisations to engage with regional policymakers during the annual Forum

²¹ Field work for the ODE report.

Regional Security Committee meeting as well as in regional security planning processes.²² In addition, it manages a regional secretariat of women to support regional and national government commitments on Resolution 1325 and prepares policy documents.

Recognising and promoting the rights of women with disability

Australia's new disability-inclusive development strategy, *Development for All: Towards a disability-inclusive Australian aid program 2009–2014*,²³ was launched by the Hon Bob McMullan MP, Australia's Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, on 25 November 2008.

One of the strategy's six guiding principles is to 'take into account the interaction of gender and disability'. The strategy recognises the significant barriers faced by women with disability and the need to take account of the interaction of gender and disability in policy and programming design, monitoring and evaluation. This includes recognition that women and girls with disability often face multiple forms of discrimination due to their gender, disability and economic status and often face a greater risk of abuse and violence. The strategy's primary outcome is to support people with disability to improve the quality of their lives by securing better access to the same opportunities for participation, contribution, decision-making, and social and economic well-being as others. It also contains measures to provide capacity development support for Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs).

AusAID recognises that women and girls with disability face not only greater risk of violence and abuse, but also face particular barriers in accessing information about their rights, and accessing the justice system and appropriate support services.²⁴

Consistent with AusAID's disability-inclusive development strategy, AusAID will seek to promote an active and central role for people with disability in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies and programs dealing with violence against women, will actively support leadership of people with disability (both men and women) in addressing violence against women, and will seek opportunities to build country and regional knowledge and disability-inclusive responses in this area. We will also seek to foster and encourage links between DPOs and civil society organisations active in the area of violence against women to work effectively together to adopt disability-inclusive practice and share information.

AusAID, through the Pacific Public Sector Linkages Program, is supporting the Australian Human Rights Commission to partner with the Pacific Disability Forum to progress disability issues in the Pacific by delivering training in nine Pacific countries.²⁵ The training will bring together members of DPOs and government representatives to build their capacity and knowledge of disability rights in order to progress disability issues.

AusAID recognises that women and girls with disability face not only greater risk of violence and abuse, but also face particular barriers in accessing information about their rights, and accessing the justice system and appropriate support services.

22 The Forum Regional Security Committee is part of the Pacific Islands Forum. The committee meets annually to set the regional security agenda and to identify priorities for enhancing the capacity of members to respond to security threats. Members of the Pacific Islands Forum are Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, New Zealand, Tonga, Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Niue, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and French Polynesia.

23 Available at www.ausaid.gov.au/keyaid/disability.cfm.

24 A UNDP report, *Pacific Sisters with Disabilities: At the Intersection of Discrimination*, released in May 2009, identifies the higher risk of violence faced by women with disability and the barriers they face in gaining support and access to services. The report makes a range of recommendations to address the discrimination faced by women with disability.

25 The training will be conducted in Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

This support recognises the key role of DPOs in advising and working with government and the public sector on the rights of people with disability and achieving the progressive realisation of these rights. A key focus of the training will be on engaging with women with disability in order to build their knowledge and capacity. This training will enable women to become more active participants in DPOs, and to ensure effective representation of the needs of women with disability.

AusAID supported the attendance of nine women with disability from the Pacific and two representatives from East Timor at the Pacific Regional Forum on Women with Disabilities and the Pacific Regional Disability Conference in Vanuatu on 20–23 April 2009. One of the key components at these conferences was discussion of the sensitive issue of violence against women with disability.

Gender equality and empowering women

Gender equality is a guiding principle of Australia's international development assistance program.

Gender equality is a guiding principle of Australia's international development assistance program. The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that the needs, priorities and interests of women, as well as men, are considered in all development activities and at every stage of the development process.

In Tuvuvur, Papua New Guinea, women participate in a training workshop to empower them with skills to enter parliament.
Photo: AusAID



Skilling up for a more effective aid program

AusAID recognises gender integration as a key instrument for improving the impact, scope and effectiveness of its international development assistance program.

Pivotal to this goal is the need for strong staff capacity to:

- > drive and implement an extensive gender integration agenda
- > put in place institutional arrangements to support it.

The purpose of AusAID's 'Gender Integration for Development Effectiveness' training program is to provide participants with an introduction to the concepts and tools of gender analysis and gender sensitisation for direct application to all of AusAID's work.

The training program is designed to improve the knowledge and skill sets of staff. Key areas of focus are:

- > improving understanding of gender relations and how they affect access to resources and assets, and the opportunities and benefits created through development work
- > improving understanding of the links between gender integration, poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals
- > improving understanding of the costs of gender inequalities
- > improving understanding of the principles of gender analysis and their implications for, and application to, development work
- > developing practical approaches to improve gender integration in high-level policies through to reporting on results and outcomes
- > developing practical tools for the implementation of gender integration principles and frameworks into design, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation for all forms of aid
- > building gender advocacy skills for stakeholder engagement.

In this three-day intensive training program, a strong emphasis is placed on practical adult learning methodologies. This includes using case studies that cover a range of priority issues identified by AusAID. The case studies are based on local contexts and issues as much as possible. This approach gives participants the opportunity to apply their learning to scenarios that are very real to them. The program has proven to be effective and empowering, and feedback from participants has been consistently positive.

Ending violence against women has been identified as one of the priority areas for AusAID in promoting gender equality, and is highlighted in the training. It was introduced into the training as a direct response to the ODE report.

In the training program conducted in Dili in May 2009, one of the key issues that surfaced repeatedly was domestic violence. Participants explored issues relating to access to support and services for victims of violence, ranging from institutional and legal frameworks through to informal support services. Participants discussed the role of men in challenging community attitudes about gender-based violence and the opportunities for anti-violence messages in cultural contexts.

In addition to integrating the promotion of gender equality into development activities, AusAID also supports activities that are specifically targeted at empowering women.

On 8 March 2009, the Hon Stephen Smith MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs, announced that Australia would increase its core funding to UNIFEM to \$17.7 million over four years as part of Australia's international commitment to advancing greater equality between men and women. This funding will support UNIFEM's work in more than 100 countries to reduce women's poverty and exclusion, end violence against women, reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS among women and girls, and support women's leadership in governance and post-conflict reconstruction.

Following are some of the main initiatives that AusAID is supporting in Melanesia and East Timor to promote gender equality and empower women.

Women's leadership and decision making

We are still tied to our traditional culture, where men are dominant and where they control the family and the village. We still have the problem of that mentality. (Woman activist, East Timor)²⁶

Australia is providing \$6.2 million over five years from 2007-08 for the Gender Equality in Political Governance Program, in partnership with UNIFEM. The primary focus of the program is to improve women's leadership and access to decision making at a local and national level in the Pacific. The program will train women at a local level in governance and leadership issues, undertake research on the barriers and successful pathways to women's leadership, and develop communication and training materials for use in the region.

The program will contribute to:

- > more women understanding their rights and responsibilities and being active as citizens and leaders in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu
- > support for women standing for elections²⁷
- > increased support for women's leadership and participation in government by broad and diverse sectors of Pacific societies, including governments, civil society organisations, male advocates, the media, electoral bodies and political parties
- > an increase in government structures, operations and procedures that support women and men and are more accessible by women.

In Solomon Islands, Australia is supporting a women in government strategy through the RAMSI Machinery of Government Program in partnership with the Solomon Islands Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs. The Strategy for Advancing the Position of Women in Government aims to increase the number of women in government, at both administrative and representative levels, and to increase the opportunities for women to realise leadership potential.

In East Timor, AusAID is providing funding through UNIFEM for the Integrated Program for Women in Politics and in Decision Making, which supports the development of a political vision of women as citizens and decision-makers.

²⁶ Field work for the ODE report.

²⁷ This support will be provided in up to 15 Pacific countries in which UNIFEM operates (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu).

Women's economic empowerment

Women say, 'If I report my husband for what he did, I won't get any money from him when he's in prison'. So only a woman who has a job can come forward and do something about it. But most don't have jobs, and need the husband so they'll have money for school fees and things for the children. (Female police officer, Solomon Islands)²⁸

AusAID, in collaboration with the International Finance Corporation and the World Bank, is undertaking a series of Gender and Investment Climate Reform Assessments in East Timor, Tonga, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. The assessments will result in a 'gender toolkit' that will be released later in 2009. The aim of the toolkit is to show policymakers and business organisations how to ensure that improvements in the business-enabling environment take gender issues into consideration, and that both men and women can participate in and benefit from private sector development. A team of economists and legal experts will visit each country to trial the toolkit and to liaise with government officials, NGOs, business service providers and female entrepreneurs.

This project builds on previous work that AusAID has supported in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Samoa that examined gender-based barriers in a number of business-related areas. These included gender-based barriers to basic investment-climate reform; business start-up; business licences; access to alienated land and enforcement of property rights; and access to justice and alternative dispute resolution.

²⁸ Field work for the ODE report.

An integrated approach

Rationale

The ODE report found that piecemeal and isolated activities had limited impact in ending violence against women and could result in duplication of effort. In contrast, a more coordinated response will ensure that funds are targeted where they are needed, that good practice is shared, and that links are created across sectors to meet the range of needs of women who have been subjected to violence.

The report made a number of recommendations to improve coordination of efforts at the country level to end violence against women. It pointed to the need for a strong and shared evidence base on violence against women to inform policy decisions. It also called for mechanisms—such as national action plans and interagency taskforces—to facilitate coordination not only within government but also between government and civil society, and between the national government and donors and international agencies.

Australian support for an integrated approach

Australia's commitments

AusAID will support partner countries to take an integrated approach by:

- > engaging in high-level policy dialogue with our partners to raise the importance of addressing violence against women
- > encouraging partner countries to develop mechanisms—such as national action plans and policies—to coordinate and monitor national responses to violence against women
- > actively participating in interagency taskforces that bring together stakeholders to better coordinate and monitor responses to violence against women
- > supporting research on violence against women—including on the prevalence of violence, promising practices in responding to violence, and gaps in services—in order to inform future responses.

Coordination mechanisms

Better coordination between sectors and among partners is critical to maximising the impact of interventions to address violence against women. Australia is actively engaging in high-level policy dialogue with our partners in Melanesia and East Timor to improve coordination of responses to violence against women. In Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and East Timor, Australia is working with government, NGOs, multilateral organisations and donors to address violence against women and promote gender equality. For example, following the release of the ODE report, AusAID was invited to be a member of the Gender Thematic Working Group in East Timor. This group brings together representatives from government, UN agencies, international development agencies and international NGOs to improve coordination efforts. In Vanuatu, AusAID will support the planned national taskforce on violence against women to implement the Family Protection Act.

In line with ODE recommendations, interagency taskforces in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands and East Timor are helping to raise the profile of violence against women as a priority issue. They also assist in ensuring that AusAID support and activities are coordinated with and complement other work occurring in the country to maximise the impact of interventions to reduce violence against women. There is potential for these taskforces to play a greater role in monitoring national responses to violence against women.

Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women

The fifth regional meeting of the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women was held on 5 to 12 June 2009, on the theme 'Prevention Strategies'.²⁹ The meeting brought together 60 practitioners from 12 countries to share information on current activities to respond to violence against women, and to develop resolutions for future activities. Participants were from Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The meeting brought together men and women who work in the area of violence against women, and included representatives of crisis and counselling services, women's organisations, perpetrator programs, police, education, human rights organisations and HIV/AIDS programs. This broad representation facilitated sharing of information across sectors and development of strategies that take a multisectoral approach in order to inform future work to end violence against women.

The network provides a valuable information-sharing and support mechanism for practitioners across the Pacific. It enables sharing on best practice models and lessons learned to facilitate effective programs and improve services available to women who have been subjected to violence. In addition to meeting face-to-face every four years, the network maintains ongoing contact. The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, secretariat of the network, acts as a 'clearinghouse' for members on information on violence against women in the Pacific.

The meeting was facilitated by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and supported by AusAID and UNIFEM Pacific.

²⁹ Resolutions from the meeting are available at www.fijiwomen.com/images/regionalmeeting.pdf.

The fifth regional meeting of the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women brought together practitioners to share information on current activities to respond to violence against women, and to develop resolutions for future activities. Photo: Fiji Women's Crisis Centre



AusAID recognises the role that regional mechanisms, such as the Pacific Islands Forum and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, play in the Pacific in sharing information and leading change. These organisations provide the opportunity for governments to collectively advance efforts to address violence against women in the Pacific. For example, the Pacific Islands Forum Regional Security Meeting, held in June 2009, discussed the issue of sexual and gender-based violence as a risk to the human security of communities and societies. The meeting supported action at the highest level to raise awareness of the seriousness and impact of sexual and gender-based violence on the Pacific. The issue of sexual and gender-based violence will also be considered at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting in August 2009, with a side event to be held on this issue to enable discussion between officials, international agencies and practitioners on strategies for responding to violence against women.

Australia's work to reduce violence against women involves programs of support in a number of sectors. Efforts are under way to promote coordination across our own programs, although more work needs to be done. One means of tracking our progress in delivering support and achieving greater multisectoral coordination will be through assessments of AusAID activities at a country level through annual program performance reviews, and at an agency level through the annual thematic program reviews.

Strengthening the evidence base

Another important aspect of maximising the effectiveness of interventions is ensuring a strong and shared evidence base on the prevalence and forms of violence against women. Australia is actively supporting the creation of such an evidence base across Melanesia and in East Timor. In Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, for example, AusAID has provided financial support to the Vanuatu Women's Centre and to the Secretariat of the Pacific Community³⁰ for national surveys on gender-based violence. Both surveys use World Health Organization methodology. The surveys will produce robust data that will inform future activities at a country level, and because the data produced will be comparable with that

³⁰ This survey is being carried out by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community in partnership with the Government of Solomon Islands, with funding from AusAID and the United Nations Population Fund.

of other countries, the surveys will also contribute to the international evidence base on violence against women.

National action plans

As part of our dialogue with partner governments, AusAID will also seek to raise the issue and support the development of national mechanisms, such as action plans and policies, as a means of coordinating and monitoring national responses to violence against women. For example, in Solomon Islands, AusAID is providing financial support to the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs to develop a National Policy and Plan of Action on Gender-based Violence.

The Australian Government has a 'zero tolerance' policy on violence and has taken significant action domestically to improve our own response to violence against women, including the development of a National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women.

In May 2008, the Australian Government established the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children to provide the government with expert advice on a national action plan for Australia. On receiving the council's report, *Time for Action*,³¹ the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, announced that the Australian Government will take *Time for Action* to the Council of Australian Governments³² with a view to having a nationally agreed approach, by early 2010, to reducing the incidence and impact of violence against women and their children.

The practical importance of national action plans in guiding a country's response to violence against women is underlined by statements by the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Australia's Minister for the Status of Women.

*We need a clear road map that will set time lines, allocate responsibilities and use the best evidence available to us to build a future in which violence becomes unthinkable. I want a national plan that gives us clear guidance and concrete strategies to reduce violence, to support victims and survivors and to change the behaviour of perpetrators.*³³

The work of Australia's National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children provides opportunities for Australia to share with partner governments in Melanesia and East Timor the lessons we have learned in developing a national action plan.

³¹ The council's report and the Australian Government's response are available at www.fahcsia.gov.au/about/news/2009/Pages/TimeforActiontoReduceViolenceAgainstWomenandChildren.aspx.

³² The Council of Australian Governments is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia. It brings together leaders from Australia's three levels of government—the Prime Minister, State Premiers and Territory Chief Ministers, and the President of the Australian Local Government Association.

³³ The Hon Tanya Plibersek, Minister for the Status of Women quoted in the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2009), *A Snapshot to Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009–2021*, Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, p. 15.