

## FIJI COUNTRY SUPPLEMENT

---



## 1 BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

This paper is a supplement to *Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Regional and Global Promising Approaches*, which addresses the issue of violence against women in the region as a whole. The main report describes all promising approaches identified by the team from across the region, and proposes, through a series of recommendations, an action plan relevant to all countries studied. This supplement provides more country-specific information on Fiji, permitting a more nuanced approach to proposed solutions. The regional report and the Fiji report, when read together, provide a comprehensive picture of promising approaches for addressing violence against women, recommendations relevant for all countries and specific direction for where to focus efforts in Fiji.

The process began in 2007, when the Australian Agency for International Development's (AusAID) Office of Development Effectiveness identified violence against women as a major barrier to development in the region, with serious effects not only on the health and welfare of the women experiencing violence, but on their families, communities, and countries (AusAID Office of Development Effectiveness 2007). Following a review of international lessons learned, visits of four to nine days were carried out by the international evaluation team to each of the five countries in the region (East Timor, Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu) during September and October 2007.

Interviews and focus group discussions using a set of participatory exercises were carried out with policymakers, service providers, users of the services, civil society groups and community members. These were continued by locally recruited researchers, except in East Timor, where there was a shortage of qualified individuals, but a number of recent studies.<sup>1</sup> Selection of the potentially promising practices to be reviewed was made in collaboration with AusAID Post personnel and local activists. Local advisory groups of prominent individuals were established in each country in order to provide feedback and direction to the evaluation team, to encourage ownership of the review's findings and to help promote and implement its recommendations. (Annex 1 list advisory group members for Fiji.)

In all, more than 120 individuals were consulted in Fiji, including 60 individuals interviewed and another 60 who participated in focus group discussions. (Annex 2 lists the organisations consulted.) Regional recommendations on the four theme areas (access to justice, support services for survivors, prevention, and multisectoral coordination) were developed during a workshop in Port Moresby in March 2008, which involved all the local researchers and representatives of the advisory groups from all the countries.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The local researchers in Fiji were Roshni Sami and Matelita Ragogo.

<sup>2</sup> Fiji was represented by Shamima Ali of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre.

This is not a situational analysis, nor is it a comprehensive or complete listing of all the good things that are happening in Fiji. Many inspiring examples of work are underway in all parts of the country on violence against women, but only those brought to the team's attention could be covered. The study examined lessons learned and examples of promising interventions that could be scaled up, or applied in other countries. It focused as much as possible on women's own experience of violence, and what does or does not help them in terms of protection and prevention.

## 2 SITUATION OF WOMEN AND CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

The most common forms of violence reported during the review were physical, sexual and emotional violence by an intimate partner and sexual assault, including child sexual abuse. The main information on the prevalence of gender-based violence in Fiji comes from a 1999 survey carried out by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC). According to the study, 66 per cent of women surveyed experienced physical violence from an intimate partner (Fiji Women's Crisis Centre 1999).

A survey of 550 women working in paid employment in Fiji urban centres in 2002 revealed that sexual harassment of women in the workplace is significant, widespread and varied in nature, and offences are predominantly multiple. One in three women interviewed reported being sexually harassed in the workplace in their working life—1 in 5 within the last 12 months and 1 in 7 reported that it was still happening.<sup>3</sup>

International research has shown that violence against women is inextricably linked to women's socioeconomic status overall. Although conditions in Fiji are notably better than in other Melanesian countries, women in Fiji are still disadvantaged in numerous ways relative to men. Fiji ranks 82 out of the 136 countries on the United Nations (UN) Development Programme's gender-related development index.<sup>4</sup> Maternal mortality and infant mortality are both relatively low for the region (75 per 100 000 live births and 20 per 1000 live births respectively). The literacy rate of women and men is very high (96 per cent), and enrolment rates are the same or slightly higher for girls than boys at primary and secondary levels, though somewhat lower for tertiary education.

Women's participation in the formal political process is limited relative to men. After the 2006 election, only 8 out of 71 seats in the House of Representatives (11.3 per cent) were held by women, and women hold only 13.6 per cent of all Parliamentary seats (the 32 members of the Senate are appointed by the President.). While this is lower than the global average of around 16.6 per cent, and may ultimately be threatened in the continuing aftermath of the 2006 coup, Fiji has a high number of women parliamentarians compared to other Melanesian countries. On the other hand, the

<sup>3</sup> Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) report on Tebbutt Research, October 2002.

<sup>4</sup> The greater the gender disparity in basic capabilities, the lower a country's gender-related development index compared with its human development index. Fiji ranks 92 on the human development index.

women's movement in Fiji is vibrant and has extensive experience in activism around violence against women. The evaluation team met with a group of more than 20 leaders in the women's movement to discuss gains and challenges in the area of violence against women, using the 1968 creation of the National Women's Council as a starting point. Among the most significant moments, the following were mentioned:

- > **International landmark events**, such as the participation of women from Fiji in the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing (1995); the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1995); the passage of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000); and the World Council of Churches Decade for Women, which runs from 2000 to 2010).
- > **Government initiatives**, mostly as responses to the advocacy efforts of the women's movement: the creation of the first Ministry for Women (1987) and the 'No-Drop Policy' for police investigations (1995); the formation of the police Sexual Offences Units (SOUs) (1995); development of the National Plan for Women (1997); and the passage of the Family Law Act (passed in 2003, entered into force in 2005).
- > **Milestones in the creation of organisations and networks that protect the rights of women and girls**, such as the FWCC (1984); the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (1986); Women's Action for Change (WAC) (1993); Women's Initiative for Peace (2000); and Fem'LINK (2000).

Of all the countries visited as part of this study, Fiji is by far the most advanced in addressing violence against women, due in no small part to the country's long and active women's movement and the presence of vocal and long-lived organisations such as the FWCC, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) and the Regional Rights and Resources Team (RRRT). These groups were the first in Melanesia to tackle violence against women from a human-rights perspective and successfully harness the power of the media, particularly radio, to create broad community acceptance that violence should be viewed through a human rights framework.

However Fiji has also suffered significant setbacks in addressing violence against women. The most significant have been due to political instability, which has kept Fiji in turmoil for much of the last two decades (Box 2.1), exacerbating poverty and hindering efforts to address violence against women.

**BOX 2.1: IMPACT OF COUPS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

The four coups in recent history, two that took place in 1987, and more recently, the coups in 2000 and 2006, have had a chilling effect on women's rights advocacy and programs. Research carried out by the FWCC and others show that violence against women, both from intimate partners and from strangers, increases during and following the coups, while at the same time, the capacity and willingness of police to respond diminishes. Women were the target of ethnically motivated attacks following the 1987 and 2000 coups, while the increase in poverty following each coup had an obvious impact on women's empowerment.

The coups are also a setback to gains made in reducing tolerance towards violence against women, resulting in a stalling of the relationships built between the women's movement and law and justice institutions. As leaders of the women's movement are also often vocal human rights defenders, women's Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have also been specifically targeted during and following coups, at times resulting in restricting the movement of the leaders of the women's movement and limiting their capacity to continue their regional work in building capacity to address violence against women. Since the 2006 coup, coordination between civil society and government agencies has largely broken down, and rifts have emerged within CSOs, not only around engagement with the interim Government, but also regarding such core issues as the role of a human rights perspective in development. This has meant that a number of key pieces of legislation has been put on hold, with CSOs unwilling to campaign for them to be passed until democracy is restored.

### 3 MULTISECTORAL COORDINATION

Although there is a history of strong collaboration between CSOs and government agencies around violence against women, evidenced by the multiple policies and laws enacted in recent years, the political and economic instability caused by the four coups in the last 20 years has taken its toll. An Inter-Agency Task Force on Violence against Women was convened by the Ministry of Women in order to follow up on Fiji's commitments with respect to the Beijing Platform of Action and the Fiji Women's Plan of Action (1998–2008). This task force, chaired by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Ministry of Justice, facilitated the participation of both government and non-government actors. The task force was discontinued before the 2006 coup and, as a result, there is little systematic coordination between Government and NGOs and between different government agencies. Many participants believe this has contributed significantly to the erosion of available services. The task force was reconvened in the first half of 2008, but with a focus on legislation, rather than coordination. As a result, NGOs and CSOs have withdrawn from the task force, unwilling to sponsor the tabling of key pieces of legislation until democracy is restored. International donors, including UN agencies and AusAID, have also significantly reduced their engagement with the Government of Fiji, and support for some bilateral projects, such as law and justice, has been discontinued or reoriented.

## 4 WOMEN'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Compared to other Melanesian countries, Fiji's formal justice system is further advanced in recognising and addressing violence against women, and Fiji provides many promising example of legal reform and judicial and police training. However, it is important to remember that in common with other Melanesia countries, rural Fijian women, who are the majority of the population, have great difficulty accessing the formal justice system which is largely urban based, and rural women frequently rely on, or are coerced into, traditional justice systems that are overwhelmingly patriarchal and based on notions of reconciliation that provide few options and limited protection for victims of violence.

Over the last 10 years, Fiji has made significant gains have been made in Fiji in terms of increasing women's access to justice for violence, particularly with regard to intimate partner violence and sexual assault. Some highlights follow.

### 4.1 Legal reform

The Government of Fiji, with considerable input from CSOs, passed a Family Law Act in 2003 (put into force in 2005). Two organisations—the FWRM (Box 4.1) and the Pacific RRRT—played a key role in removing 200 years of British law based in discrimination against women.<sup>5</sup> The resulting law, based on a no-fault principle of divorce, uses a compassionate counselling-based system and created a Family Division of the High Court which prioritises children's needs and parental support.

For the first time, the law allows Fiji women to share in matrimonial property, recognises women's non-financial contribution to marriage and asset accumulation, acknowledges various UN conventions affecting the family and accepts the results of scientific tests to establish parenthood. From early results it appears that the Fiji Family Law Act will substantially reduce the cost of engaging lawyers and using legal aid.

*With the injunctions in place, women can leave the home with their personal items as opposed to being chased off without the opportunity to take anything with them. Also, with the provisions of the Act, counsellors can 'negotiate' on behalf of their clients so they coordinate court proceedings, etc.*

(FWCC counsellor)

The RRRT has called Fiji's Family Law Act a model for the region. There is now interest in reviewing family law in Cook Islands, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu.

<sup>5</sup> Implementation of the 2003 legislation in 2005 brought closure to a civil society legislative lobbying campaign that had begun in 1986 with the FWRM community legal education workshops and the government appointment in 1997 of a Family Law Reform Commissioner.

Two other important pieces of legislation for which the women's movement has lobbied are the Domestic Violence Bill and the Employment Relations Bill. These were drafted and ready to be tabled in Parliament just before the coup of 2006. The Employment Relations Bill, which includes some limited protections against sexual harassment, was promulgated in 2007 by the interim regime and put into force in April 2008. The Domestic Violence Bill has been put on hold, and CSOs have decided to wait for a return to democracy before pursuing its enactment. Before the 2006 coup, the women's movement was also lobbying for reform to the Penal Code, particularly the Sexual Offences part. The reform will include harsher penalties for perpetrators, widen the definition of rape and de-criminalise prostitution and abortion. The Penal Code reform had finished its consultation stage and a report was with the Office of the Attorney General for legislative drafting before the 2006 coup. It is not clear whether the reform is a priority for the interim government and women's organisations have decided to push for the reform until democracy is restored.

#### **BOX 4.1: FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

The FWRM is a feminist NGO established in 1986 to redress the imbalances of women's socio-economic and political status through campaigning and lobbying for legislative and attitudinal change in Fiji.

The FWRM played a key role in advocating for the 1997 Constitution which gives women unprecedented equal rights. The movement fought for Article 38 of the Constitution, which protects against discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender, marital status and sexual orientation.

In addition, the FWRM played a significant role in advocating for other key legislative reforms, including the Family Law Act, and in advocating and providing draft legislation for sexual harassment to be included in the Employment Relations Bill.

The FWRM provides a free legal information and referral service for women in Suva and delivers feminist training to groups and organisations, including developing school and institution-based education and awareness-raising programs.

## **4.2 Formal justice system**

All participants agree that transforming laws and policies to strengthen sanctions for offenders is critical, but it is equally important to transform the knowledge and attitudes of the administrators of justice at all levels to ensure the laws and policies are properly implemented. Moreover, women need to be informed about their rights and have the necessary knowledge and tools to demand justice.

The FWCC and RRRT, in particular, have devoted a great deal of effort to training police officers, judges, magistrates and prosecutors on violence against women. The FWCC has also been outspoken in demanding accountability from the justice system, by denouncing cases of police or judicial misconduct or inaction, and by educating the public on basic rights under the law. The FWRM is RRRT's partner and is the primary vehicle for furthering women's legal literacy and knowledge of their rights. The effect of these efforts was evident in the responses of focus group participants.

*I have been teaching at the academy for a while, and the gender component does make a difference; our male officers begin to understand it and talk about it—half of them say they were not aware of these gender perspectives, and some say they had an idea but just never took it seriously. (female police academy instructor)*

In addition to the legal reforms mentioned earlier, another significant achievement of the anti-violence movement in Fiji was the establishment of a police No-Drop Policy in 1995. Before this, women who reported domestic abuse cases to the police often faced severe pressure from family, in-laws, and community members, and often returned to the police station shortly afterward to withdraw their complaints. Under the No-Drop Policy, once a complaint is lodged, the investigation must continue and the case must be sent to the magistrate, regardless of whether the woman subsequently asks to have the charges dropped. This not only takes the burden of continuing a case off the woman, but it also discourages police from taking matters into their own hands and refusing to receive complaints or attempting to reconcile the couple. According to one magistrate:

*The police No-Drop Policy has made a big difference. In cases of domestic violence, the police does not allow the complainant to withdraw, and that tips it to the magistrates. (male magistrate, Suva)*

The No-Drop Policy—the only such policy in force in Melanesia and East Timor—was a groundbreaking effort to strengthen sanctions for domestic and sexual violence and to protect victims from pressure and retribution by other family or community members. By taking the decision out of the hands of women and police, the policy transfers the responsibility for resolution to the courts and reduces the number of cases resolved through supposed reconciliation.

Over the past 13 years, however, implementation of the policy has been inconsistent and has led to unintended effects. Although no one disputes that it has improved police response to violence against women overall, the review team heard stories of survivors of violence still being subjected to insensitive attitudes, and even ridiculed by some police officers.

*I saw a case where a client had been to the police station repeatedly. The officer said to her, ‘You must just like seeing my face, why don’t you just take a photo and keep it at home?’ They are treated like this at the counter, in front of other people there—you see eyebrows lifting right there at the front desk and they start gossiping right there. (social worker, PCSS -Partnership and Client Services Survey)*

Stories from survivors of violence, as well as police officers and magistrates, indicate that some women want the violence to stop, but not necessarily for the offenders—their husbands or partners—to go to prison. In these cases, the No-Drop Policy may act as a deterrent to reporting incidents of domestic violence to the police. As a result, reporting to police becomes a last resort, and the state institutions are not engaged at earlier (less physically damaging) stages of domestic violence. There is also evidence



that the Policy does not always remove the pressure on women. Rather it shifts the pressure. Women either feel they should not lay charges in the first place or they feel pushed by the courts to reconcile with their husbands.

*She might not go to the police because she'll be thinking of her husband and children.*  
(village woman)

Another important milestone was the creation of the police SOUs in 1995, with offices in Labasa, Lautoka and Suva. The goal of the SOUs is to look after the needs of victims of sexual assault. This has been accompanied by improvements in remote testimony and other devices, including use of videos and screens to protect vulnerable witnesses while giving testimony.

Finally, a new program called the Welfare/Employment Services Unit was established within the police force in 2003 to support the welfare of police officers and reduce the stress and trauma within their workforce. The development of the unit was partly the result of scoping work undertaken as part of AusAID's law and justice program which identified police as perpetrators of domestic violence and pointed out that the issue needs to be tackled from within. The program has tackled the problem of domestic violence perpetrated by police officers, and gives their wives an opportunity to report their husbands' violent behaviour to the internal affairs division.

Most of the individuals interviewed agreed that much of the progress made up until 2006 has been eroded after the coup. has been eroded. Training and monitoring of police by the FWCC, WAC and the RRRT has been made more difficult, though the trust and respect that these organisations were able to build up prior to the coup means that relationships have been maintained, and may have acted as a brake on more excessive behaviour on the part of the military. Even so, the increased number of military personnel in leadership positions within the police force—and the high turnover in police staff, with many officers trained in domestic violence and sexual assault being transferred to other positions—has led to a generalised sense that less priority is being given to cases of violence against women. This has led to the perception amongst women's rights activists that impunity has increased, with the No-Drop Policy being less regularly enforced, and activities of the SOUs reduced.

The new laws and police procedures lay greater responsibility on the judiciary to resolve cases of domestic and sexual violence. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) has also been sensitised to the issue of violence against women, and has aggressively pursued stiff sentences for sexual offenders, including cases of marital rape. In one landmark case, the ODPP was able to eliminate the evidentiary requirement for corroboration for sexual assault, which had been a barrier for women to reporting rape and to prosecuting offenders successfully. The use of test cases has proved an efficient path to legal reform, and can be an effective tool for CSOs seeking to fast track legal change.

However, there is evidence that attitudes and practices within the judiciary are still weak. The Criminal Procedures Code provides the judiciary with the option of promoting reconciliation in a number of offences and this has, in practice, been used as justification, along with concerns for the economic impact on women and children, for promoting reconciliation or imposing suspended sentences on offenders, even against the wife's wishes. When abusive husbands apologise to their wives according to traditional custom (*bulu bulu*), the offender's remorse may also be considered as a mitigating circumstance. The result is often, in the absence of counselling or rehabilitative actions, that victims and offenders return to the same situation.

*The wife comes in under pressure. According to the law, you should put him in jail, but if you do that, with the poverty, who's going to feed those five kids? It's a dilemma we go through every day. Personally, we would like to see him go in ...but sometimes she begs us not to send him to prison. (male magistrate, Suva)*

There seems also to be some confusion over the role of the Court in promoting reconciliation. Technically, the Penal Code allows for reconciliation – Section 163 states that the court *may* promote reconciliation but does not mandate it. However the following quote demonstrates that there is a continuing need for the judiciary to undergo legal and gender-sensitising training:

*Assault in the case of domestic violence is reconcilable. We are supposed to promote reconciliation, according to Section 163 of the Penal Code. (male magistrate, Suva)*

Moreover, women seeking justice for domestic or sexual violence cases have a distinct disadvantage, as defendants have access to professional legal counsel, either from the Legal Aid Commission or private lawyers. In contrast, the summary prosecutors who try cases in magistrates' courts are typically police officers with limited legal training and no special training in violence against women. This is a less critical problem for High Court cases, which are prosecuted by the ODPP.

In the relatively few cases in which custodial sentencing occurs, a very high proportion are reversed on appeal. A recent study presented by the FWCC, for example, showed that 90 per cent of sexual assault cases in 2006 were reversed on appeal, compared to 20 to 40 per cent of cases of murder, robbery and other crimes.

### 4.3 Knowledge of laws and rights

All participants agreed that knowledge about the Family Law Act and procedures for obtaining restraining orders remains scarce, and most women still do not know about their legal rights. This leaves them vulnerable to manipulation by insensitive police or magistrates more interested in ‘resolving’ cases through reconciliation than protecting women and children. The FWCC, RRRT and FWRM have devoted great effort towards increasing legal literacy, but much remains to be done.

*‘Women don’t know about the procedures. Earlier, we had a very slow movement of urgent cases being listed. The next problem we have is that after we make the orders, if they are breached, there is a breakdown in communication between the police and our staff. They [victims] should be able to go straight to the police, and the police send the case to us, but it can take three weeks before we hear it—the woman could be dead by the time we hear about it. (female magistrate, Suva)*

*This poor woman is standing there, is not aware that she can get him charged, and so they will just tell her “we will warn him”. If they have had a bad experience with police, they will never return to complain even when things are getting worse. (social worker, PCSS)*

## 5 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS

The FWCC has been the main institution providing psychological, human-rights based crisis counselling and practical support for battered women and children in Fiji. Founded in 1984, with headquarters in Suva and branches in Ba, Labasa and Nadi, the FWCC has a staff of counsellors well trained in crisis intervention (Box 5.1).

Not surprisingly, support services are much more accessible for women living in Suva and other urban centres, which comprise approximately half the population. The scarcity of emergency housing for battered women remains a significant problem in Fiji. Emergency shelters are either owned or administered by NGOs. Four of the seven shelters are run by the Salvation Army. Survivors of violence either voluntarily go to these shelters for help or are referred to them by the State’s Social Welfare Department (SWD) or by women’s NGOs like the FWCC. There are approximately seven homes to which the SWD can refer women or family cases for emergency housing. However, demand typically exceeds availability—for example, a home with capacity for 20 may house 30 women and young family members.

The FWCC has set up constructive working relationships with police, courts, doctors and hospitals, accommodation providers, and welfare agencies to ensure access to services. They have also trained other agencies across the region, both government and non-government, on introductory counselling skills.

**BOX 5.1: FIJI WOMEN'S CRISIS CENTRE**

The FWCC is an autonomous, multiracial NGO established in 1984. It provides crisis counselling and legal, medical and other practical support services for women and children who are sufferers and survivors of violence.

The FWCC works to address all forms of violence against women—including rape, assault and sexual harassment—and abuse of children, and is involved in public advocacy and community education on gender violence. The FWCC's aim is to influence public perceptions on violence against women to counter the culture of silence on the issue. Awareness programs and training provided by the FWCC advocate for recognition of women's fundamental human rights and their contribution to development.

The FWCC also provides technical support for other organisations working in the Pacific region, such as the Vanuatu Women's Centre. The FWCC is the Secretariat for the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women, which meets every four years and carries out regional training workshops for network members, including CSOs and government departments that deal with violence against women. Support is provided through ongoing in-country support visits and the regional training and attachment program, as well as through regular liaison by email and telephone. The regional training program is conducted once a year and is an important aspect of the FWCC's regional services. It provides participants with maximum exposure to a variety of strategies and activities that address gender-based violence. The curriculum is continually reviewed and updated, taking into account the latest regional and international information and practices. People with specific needs are also provided for (for example, upgrading counselling skills, improving centre management, or conducting advocacy campaigns).

A recent evaluation of the FWCC program concluded that former clients and stakeholders agree that service provision is of a consistently high quality and clients of the service are well-supported.

The Australian Government has provided financial support to the FWCC since 1989. The New Zealand Government also has a long association with the centre, although support was initially channelled through the Fiji Government and Oxfam New Zealand. In 2000, New Zealand Official Development Assistance (now the New Zealand Agency for International Development [NZAID]) began providing direct support to the Fiji branches.

## 6 PREVENTION

Globally, much more attention has been paid to law and justice and support services for victims of violence than to preventing violence. In this respect, Fiji is no exception. However, there are numerous examples of innovative programs breaking new ground in violence prevention, either by addressing the traditional norms that encourage violence against women—by reaching out to men and youth to involve them as allies in prevention—or by placing violence against women within a broader context of social change.

Efforts to reduce violence against women are intrinsically linked to women's political, social and economic empowerment, and must be considered within the context of changing gender norms and increasing recognition of women's rights. Programs attempting to address violence without addressing the roots of the problem are unlikely to succeed as they do not challenge men's belief that the violence is justified. Such programs include those that encourage reconciliation and forgiveness or

encourage anger management amongst men. While these approaches are clearly an important part of the suite of approaches for addressing violence, particularly in a post-conflict situation, and while they may address some triggers of violence, they do not aim to change the underlying assumptions that violence is acceptable and, so alone, are unlikely to result in significant or lasting change.

The FWCC and other women's rights NGOs have actively challenged these attitudes through public-awareness campaigns, such as the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, celebrated every year. Using both radio and print media, they have brought the subject of violence against women and children into the public domain, and have kept it squarely on national and regional political agendas. They also carry out educational activities in communities surrounding Suva and the FWCC's branch offices. Data from 2004 to 2006 on referrals to the centre show that more than 85 per cent of FWCC referrals come from the media and friends and relatives of the client. These figures also give a sense of the effectiveness of the FWCC's media campaigns and community education work.

Following are other examples of innovative programs that aim to change traditional gender norms and promote more equitable relationships between women and men.

**Fem'LINK Pacific** is a regional feminist media organisation, set up in response to the 2000 coup and based in Fiji. Fem'LINK began from the need to address the lack of gender initiatives in the mainstream media. Fem'LINK runs the *Radio in a Suitcase* program, publishes a quarterly newsletter and reports on issues in the women's movement. Through *Radio in a Suitcase*, Fem'LINK provides a medium for women to talk about their experiences and the key issues they face. Fem'LINK also has a website with e-talk which focuses on women's roles in preventing, reconciling and avoiding conflict.

The FWCC started the **Male Advocates Programme** in 2002 to engage men as allies in challenging violence against women, and to encourage men to take responsibility for the issue. The first program was carried out among Fijian military personnel and, since then, many other influential male leaders and public figures have participated. Many participants have reported attitudinal and/or behavioural changes since the program's inception. The programme has since been adapted and replicated in many other countries in the Pacific region, including Cook Islands and Vanuatu.

**The Weavers Programme** is a theological training curriculum on violence against women and the church (Box 6.1).

**Women's Action for Change** also carries out theatre and workshops, involving men in examining traditional gender relations and violence against women. WAC was formed in 1993 and has established itself as a radical left wing feminist and human rights NGO with an agenda for change using hands-on activism, including arts and diverse learning.

WAC provides community-based dramas and workshops on diverse issues including child sexual abuse, women's reproductive health and violence against women. Workshops range from day-long activities, sessions when WAC is invited to be a resource at another group's workshop, to two-week processes. Because of the wide range of age groups and the different types of communities, organisations and schools reached by WAC, methodologies vary. Sometimes workshops are conducted immediately after a performance; this is common when working with students. All programs are human rights-based and work on identifying human rights (including women's rights) and providing access to them; hence the parallel focus on restorative justice, mediation and nonviolence.

**Stepping Stones**, an intervention program originally designed to address HIV prevention and gender relations, it targets communities and engages women, men and youth in a series of weekly workshops. The program was originally implemented in Africa and has since been adapted for use in the Pacific and piloted in Fiji. International research, as well as a recent evaluation in Fiji, provides evidence that the program can reduce HIV risk behaviours and gender-inequitable norms (Jewkes, Nduna et al. 2006).

**FWRM's young women in leadership program** engages young women and girls to bring about positive change in their homes, among their peers and in their community. Initiated in 2003, the program focuses on equipping participants with the skills and knowledge needed to challenge gender stereo-typing and norms and to advance women's human rights. It offers a year-long training course called the Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF) for young women between 18 and 25 years. The graduates go on to form the ELF Alumni and many continue to work in human rights and development. Three graduates are now employed in NGOs—one for Marie Stopes International as a community trainer and two at FWRM (one as a researcher and the other as the current Young Women's Officer). Recently an ELF graduate was recruited as a research officer at FWCC. The success of the program has also resulted in requests for technical assistance for development of similar programs in Kup PNG, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

**BOX 6.1: THE CHURCH AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: THE WEAVERS PROGRAMME**

*The standard injunction of male clergy for victims of violence to respond with forgiveness and unconditional Christian love to their perpetrators only encourages more violence, thus avoiding dealing with the destructive consequences of violent behaviours. Churches that continue with this teaching have forgotten that Christian forgiveness must go hand in hand with justice (Felemoni-Tofaeono 2004).*

The Weavers Programme, part of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS), advocates for women in theological education. Weavers has focused on domestic violence against women as part of its core program, designing a curriculum for working with theological schools and faith-based organisations on violence against women in the South Pacific. The course, based on four years of consultations with SPATS member schools, includes a series of readings on violence against women as a human-rights violation and social problem, and also calls for reflection and action against violence against women within Christian communities and churches of the Pacific. One of the program's strengths is that it directly faces such difficult issues as 'the ways in which biblical interpretations and unsound theologies have contributed to the problem of violence against women', by encouraging women to be submissive to their husbands and forgive offenders. One contributor called on communities and churches of Oceania 'to remember the untold, hidden, painful stories of women who have been victims of domestic violence' and 'to plead for a contribution to the call of worldwide Christian activists to overcome all forms of violence against women, as followers of the Christ of peace and love'.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Conclusions

The progress made in Fiji to reduce violence against women is impressive and serves as a testament to the hard work of women's rights and human rights activists over a sustained period. The Family Law Act and the No-Drop Policy are models for increasing women's access to justice for other Melanesian countries. For more than 20 years, the FWCC has led the way in providing Fijian women with high-quality services, and has pioneered an innovative program to involve men as allies in reducing violence against women. Several other groundbreaking initiatives by other organisations to address violence against women in other forums, such as theological training, HIV/AIDS prevention and youth education, have demonstrated how violence can be incorporated in creative ways into a broader social agenda. Particularly noteworthy is the role that many Fiji-based organisations, such as the FWCC, FWRM and the RRRT, have played in strengthening the capacity of CSOs and governments in the Pacific through regional training programs and mentoring other organisations in the region. The success of these programs is also a testament to long-term and sustained support on the part of international donors, most notably AusAID and NZAID, which have provided core support to the FWCC nearly since its inception.

The history of coups, in particular the most recent one in 2006, has caused serious setbacks in the Government's response to violence against women, most evident in the current gaps in coordination among government agencies and the erosion of the

quality of services, particularly with regard to women's access to justice. Nonetheless, Fiji has much to be proud of and much to share with other countries in leading the way for violence reduction in the region.

## 7.2 Specific recommendations for Fiji

When implementing the overarching principles and general recommendations on the themes described in the main regional report, the team suggests a number of priorities for support within the Fijian context. While the current rules of engagement in Fiji limit the role AusAID and other donors can take, there are still opportunities and planning should begin now so engagement can be increased after democracy is restored. As with the regional report, recommendations here are presented in two parts—those that will require a more coordinated response in order to assign priority and responsibilities, and those that can be immediately considered and acted on by AusAID—note however, that *all* recommendations are relevant for *all* actors working in Fiji to address violence against women. Note also that because of the rules of engagement, AusAID is more constrained in the immediate term than it is in other countries studied.

## 7.3 Recommendations for all actors

**Support multisectoral coordination:** This is a sensitive area, given the current political situation in Fiji. However, many participants indicated interest in reviving earlier forms of coordination, such as the Inter-Agency Task Force on Violence against Women. This might provide an opportunity for incorporating activities to address violence against women into other government ministries, such as the ministries of Health and Education. Again, until democracy is restored, multisector engagement may be challenging for the NGO community and donors, however, support should be prioritised for activities that facilitate interagency coordination among international agencies and other actors in this field. As one of the largest donors currently supporting efforts to end violence against women, AusAID should play a key role in harmonising the efforts of international agencies to maximise impact. The Fiji multi-stakeholder committee lead by the United Nations (UNFPA) is already playing an important role here and should be supported.

**Continue support for reforms that strengthen women's access to justice,** including training of police, magistrates, and judges in implementation of laws, both within the constraints of the current rules of engagement and after democracy is restored. Support should include more broad legal literacy and human rights-based training for community members and should recognise the challenge faced by rural and vulnerable women in accessing justice. Care should be taken to ensure that community-based and restorative justice programs take women's needs into account so they do not end up reinforcing attitudes or structures that discriminate or encourage violence against women. All law and justice interventions should be backed by thorough research and evaluation efforts to assess and improve effectiveness.



**Increased emphasis on violence prevention.** Although women's rights organisations in Fiji have extensive experience in public awareness and advocacy campaigns, there is less emphasis on ongoing systematic prevention work at the community level. Programs that address gender norms—such as Stepping Stone—should be scaled up and combined with long-term strategies to establish and sustain community networks to support survivors and prevent violence. In addition, support should be given to multi-media programs that challenge prevailing attitudes about violence, including 'education entertainment' (such as Wan Smol Bag's *Love Patrol* television program in Fiji and Vanuatu).

**Integrate attention to violence against women throughout the health system.** Although survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault receive medico-legal services at hospitals, there is no policy regarding violence against women in the Department of Health. Because violence against women is a significant cause of injury and ill health among women, this area should be made a priority. Integrating violence against women into health services requires establishing policies and protocols that encourage health providers to identify support and referrals for women and girls suffering violence, as well as training and follow-up to ensure programs are implemented effectively. Training for doctors and nurses should be integrated into pre-service and in-service training. Violence prevention should also be integrated into community health programs, including those focusing on sexuality, reproductive health and HIV prevention..

**Address violence against women through primary and secondary education programs.** Policies should be developed and implemented to prohibit sexual harassment and violence against girls in schools—from teachers or students. In addition, schools should address violence and gender equity in their curriculum.

**Support for engaging men and youth as allies in ending violence against women.** The successful work of the FWCC in training and enlisting opinion leaders as male advocates deserves continued support. In addition, AusAID should explore ways to expand working with men and boys at a community level, as well as integrating violence against women and women's rights into programs for youth, particularly in sexual and reproductive health and life skills. Such programs should explicitly aim to challenge the prevailing cultural norms that encourage women's subordination and violence against them.

## 7.4 Specific recommendations for Australia

**Ensure all interventions are delivered within a human rights and gender transformative framework.** AusAID also needs to ensure the needs of rural and vulnerable women are captured during analysis, design and implementation of all activities.

**Target and coordinate support.** AusAID should identify its own area of comparative advantage, so it avoid duplication, and ensure its support is strategic, sustained and

coordinated, both within the bilateral program and with other donors and actors. AusAID should work with other donors to harmonise efforts to support NGO and CSOs with a particular view to reducing the reporting burden on these groups.

**Support research** to increase knowledge about the characteristics of violence. Increase evaluation research to measure impact, particularly the impact of law and justice interventions. Research should also focus on the experiences and needs of rural and vulnerable women. Given the current studies in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu on the prevalence of violence against women, it could be useful to repeat the 1999 study on the issue, using methods that are comparable to other studies in the region. Increasing capacity of local researchers in research on violence against women and monitoring and evaluation are also needed. Other types of research, particularly regarding the effectiveness of interventions such as the No-Drop Policy and training for law and justice sector operators, is also much-needed. While the rules of engagement may prevent immediate action, AusAID should identify the areas that would most benefit from impact evaluation and plan to start these evaluations once democracy is restored.

**Continue support of the FWCC.** There is no doubt the FWCC plays a critical role in galvanising public opinion and action around violence against women, not only in Fiji but throughout the region. This is not to say that support should not also go to other organisations supporting efforts to address violence, but support for the FWCC should be the cornerstone of this strategy. Priority should be given to the position of the FWCC as a regional Centre of Excellence and to strengthening its role as a leader in advocacy for women's rights, as well as its strengths in training and mentoring other groups throughout Fiji and the Pacific region.

## ANNEX 1: ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS

Shamima Ali, Coordinator, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre

Virisila Buadromo, Director, Fiji Women's Rights Movement

Imrana Jalal, Human Rights Adviser, Regional Rights Resource Team

Dr Tokasa Leweni, Director for Women

Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, Howard's Law

Professor Vijay Naidu, University of the South Pacific

Dr Neil Sharma, University of the South Pacific

Dr Lepani Waqatakirewa, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health, Women,  
Social Welfare

## ANNEX 2: ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED<sup>6</sup>

### Organisation

National Department for Women

Fiji Police Force

Prosecutors

Suva Police Academy (focus group involving 13 officers)

Nasova Police Academy (interviews with 5 officers)

Public prosecutors and legal aid counsellors (8 officials)

Magistrates (focus group involving 9 individuals)

Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (interviews and focus groups involving 15 staff)

Women's Action for Change (focus group involving 12 members)

Fiji Women's Rights Movement

Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT)

Fem'LINK Pacific

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

Fiji Association of Social Workers

Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International

National Council of Women

Salvation Army headquarters

Mahaffey Girls Home (focus group involving 8 girls)

AIDS Task Force

FJN+ (Fiji's HIV-positive peoples' network)

Equal Ground Pacifica

Pacific Counselling and Social Services

FRIEND (Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises 'N' Development)

Soqosoqo Vakamarama

Fiji College of Advanced Education

Fulton College

United Blind Peoples' Association

SPATS

AusAID Staff

AusAID Community Justice Program

Pacific Region Policing Initiative

Pacific Regional HIV/AIDS Project

International Labour Organization Programme Office

Men as Partners–United Nations Population Fund

UNIFEM

---

<sup>6</sup> To protect confidentiality, individuals have not been named.