

**SUPPORTING INFORMATION FOR ESSAY COMPETITION ON THE TOPIC OF
WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

Issues of Women's Leadership and Political Participation

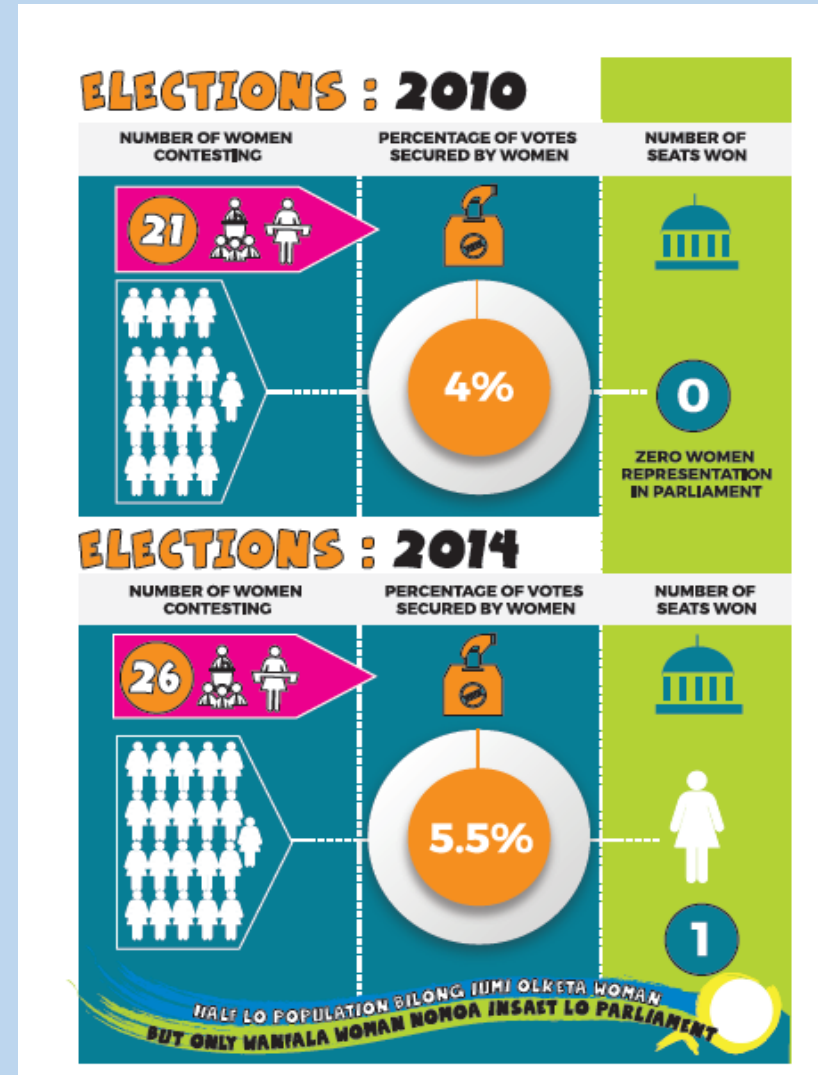
The Pacific region and the Solomon Islands in particular

stand out in global comparison in various gender integration aspects, including through the low level of women's representation and leadership in government, political life and senior administration. Women are under-represented in these areas throughout the region resulting in women's absence from public decision-making spaces. Gender stereotypes and a perception that politics is 'men's work' affect women's representation, both in terms of aspiring women candidates and in terms of voter attitudes towards women leaders.

There have been many commitments and increasingly strong political rhetoric about the importance of gender equality and the realization of rights for women and girls in the international community - but limited real progress in achieving either goal – worldwide and in the Pacific.

The countries of the Pacific have one of the lowest rates of women in Parliament in the world reflecting entrenched commonly held views that leadership is for men, which influences electorates across the region.

Solomon Islands has only one female Member of Parliament and four female members of the Provincial Assemblies of Western Province, Isabel, Malaita and Temotu. There are women holding senior management positions in the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs, Ministry of Rural Development and Indigenous Affairs and in the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs. However, other departments such as the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Office of the Prime Minister or positions such as Speaker of Parliament, Auditor General, Ombudsman and High Court Judges have never been held by women.



1. *Women are around half of the population in every country and should be directly involved in the decision-making processes and leadership at all levels - including senior government and administrative posts as well as elected bodies.*
2. *The countries of the region, including the Solomon Islands, have committed themselves to expanding women's leadership through signing international agreements.*
3. *Not empowering women as leaders deprives countries of half of their people that might be great leaders.*
4. *Not empowering women as leaders allows for continued treatment of women as not equal to men.*
5. *Women are a huge untapped labor pool that can contribute to the prosperity of their communities and nations.*
6. *Empowering more women as leaders creates a different, more inclusive style of discussion and policymaking that produces better policies.*
7. *Having more women leaders may lead to establishing priorities for community or government action improving society and social outcomes.*
8. *Women are seen as less corrupt than men (and in some cases may be less corrupt) and this may lead to better policymaking and policy implementation.*

Other countries in the region have acknowledged the positive impact and contribution of having women in decision-making spaces and are progressively adopting measures to promote women's leadership and political participation.

In political representation, the introduction of Temporary Special Measures (TSM) has contributed to boost women's political participation at a national and local level. These measures are envisaged to progressively increase women's presence in decision-making bodies. In a recent breakthrough, the Samoan Parliament voted unanimously in 2013 the support for a bill to amend the Constitution to reserve five seats for women out of the 49 parliamentary seats. In accordance to the mechanism established in Samoa, if less than five female members of parliament win a seat this triggers the creation of additional seats in order to achieve the minimum 5 seat threshold. The March 2016 parliamentary elections resulted in the election of 4 female members of parliament and therefore a new seat was added to incorporate a fifth female member. In the Autonomous Republic of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, the House of Representatives has three reserved seats for women. In addition, in the 2015 elections, one woman candidate won an open seat. In the case of Vanuatu, the amendment to the Municipalities Act in 2013 allowed for a 30% quota for women's representation within the municipal councils of Vanuatu. Since independence in 1980 (35 years ago), four women have been elected to the Luganville Municipal Council and three women have been elected into the Port Vila Municipal Council. With the introduction of TSM in 2013, five women have been elected into the Port Vila Municipal Council on January 2014 and five women were elected into the Luganville Council on July 2015.

In Solomon Islands, the issue of the possible introduction of reserved seats for female parliament members was discussed during the 2017 February-March parliamentary debate but it did not receive the parliamentary support. At provincial level, it is important to note the initiative adopted by the Premier of Western Province to consider the possible introduction of reserved seats for the provincial assembly.

Making the Case for Greater Levels of Women's Leadership and Political Participation

There are a number of arguments for why there should be greater levels of women's leadership and political participation, including:

It is widely thought that to really benefit from increased women's leadership in government, a sufficient number of women need to be active leaders. A "critical mass" (usually considered a 30%) of women leaders in government is needed at any level to improve processes and policies.

Evidence has been collected and is persuasive on a number of positive benefits that have come with increased women's leadership and political participation in a number of contexts. Some examples of areas to be considered are the following eight numbered assertions.

1. **INALIENABLE RIGHT.** Every human being has the right to participate in decisions that define her or his life. This right is the foundation of the ideal of equal participation in decision-making among women and men. This right argues that since women know their situation best, they should participate equally with men to have their perspective effectively incorporated at all levels of decision-making. Evidence suggests that higher levels of women's representation can increase political engagement among women. Successful female politicians provide younger women with important role models and demonstrate to men and boys the value of having women in leadership that further stimulates additional women's leadership and the political participation of women and girls.

2. **STATE COMMITMENTS.** The principle of equality forms the core of the human rights vision which states that human rights and fundamental freedoms should be available to all human beings without discrimination on the basis of race, sex, language or religion. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948, proclaims in its article 1 that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. The UDHR has acquired the status of a universally recognized norm of customary international law. This principle has been developed by multilateral treaties which, upon ratification or accession, create binding international legal obligations for the State concerned including the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which results in the obligation of the state parties to submit periodical reports on the actions taken to eliminate women's discrimination. The countries of the Pacific in 2012 endorsed the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration committing themselves with renewed energy to implement the gender equality actions of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (2005 to 2015), the Pacific Plan, and the 42nd Pacific Island Forum commitment to increase the representation of women in legislatures and decision making.

3. UNDER-UTILIZATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND TALENT. The persistent under-representation of women means that the political skills and expertise of half the population are under-utilized and that those who are best positioned to advocate women's issues are largely absent from the political sphere. The inclusion of women takes advantage of their experience, skills, and interests in ways that benefit not only women but all society.

4. SOCIAL INCLUSION. Women are discriminated against in many areas of society; promoting women as political leaders and expanding their participation in political life contributes to overcoming other barriers in society that disproportionately affect women (and are bad for society) such as violence against women and children.

5. BETTER GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION OF RESOURCES. Women are good administrators. Muhammad Yunus is a Bangladeshi economist known as the father of microcredit who has been awarded the Noble Prize of Economy. He is the founder of the Grameen Bank established in the 1980's in Bangladesh to lend small loans to poor people. He soon observed that women borrowers had a better track of repayment than men and almost always spent their money in ways that help their families over time and therefore having a positive impact on their communities. Additionally, many large international studies report that companies with a higher proportion of women in boards and decision-making positions perform significantly better than their competitors.

6. DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT. In contrast with leadership teams comprised exclusively or predominantly by men, more mixed groups including women may consider a wider range of issues and use more inclusive decision-making processes and styles. Thus, including more women in governing institutions may promote collaboration across lines of clan, ideology, party, and other social lines of division. When women are involved in the governing process, there is some evidence that they broaden the political debate.

7. WIDER SCOPE OF ISSUES BEING ADDRESSED. There is some evidence that women leaders are more likely to address different issues and social concerns than men. In cases from around the world, women leaders have made important differences through their advocacy and engagement in environmental protection, improved water and sanitation, transportation, and community safety. Under some conditions, women's participation in decision-making has led to increased transparency of government, increased budget allocations for services that benefit women, and more accessible services for women, particularly in local health services and personal safety. Local women government officials in India have been more focused on providing social services than male officials. They have expanded the political agenda to include water infrastructure, children's education, and gender and matrimonial issues. Research from Rwanda shows that women candidates and officials are perceived to be more likely than men to address the social and economic welfare of constituents. An increase in women's leadership in politics has also been found to lead to policies in some countries that support certain objectives that are critical to women – such as using the police to enforce judgements that divorced parents must pay child support to provide for their children.

8. INTEGRITY AND ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR. There is some evidence that the increased participation of women in government is linked to lower levels of corruption (from research on India at the level of local government councils). Research in Rwanda confirms that women are perceived to be less corrupt, particularly at the local or community level.



Glossary of Key Gender Related Terminology

- **Gender** refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female, and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys. These attributes, opportunities, and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context- and time specific and they can change. Gender determines what is expected, allowed, and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies, there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, and decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader sociocultural context. Other important criteria for sociocultural analysis include age, race, ethnicity, class, and poverty level.
- **Gender analysis** focuses on gender-related social inequalities, discriminatory practices, and power relations. Cross-referencing this information and going beyond sex-disaggregation to consider other factors such as ethnicity, age, and place of residence can help identify additional social issues related to excluded or vulnerable groups.
- **Gender balance** is the equal representation of men and women at various organizational levels. The connection between gender balance and performance has been well documented in the public and private sectors. Studies have found that organizations with a balance of women and men in top management teams considerably outperform organisations with fewer women at top levels.
- **Gender equality** refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue, but should concern men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.

- **Gender equity** means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. Being given the same chance does not ensure equality.¹ Women and men should not only be given equal access to resources and equal opportunities but they should also be given the means to benefitting from this equality. This is where the concept of gender equity comes into play. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities. In the development context, a gender equity goal often requires built-in measures to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages of women.
- **Gender sensitive** takes into consideration the diversity of various groups of women and men, their specific activities and challenges.
- **Sex-disaggregated** are collected and tabulated separately for women and men. They allow for the measurement of differences between women and men on various social and economic dimensions.
- **The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** is the international women’s right treaty. It sets the standards in international law for achieving gender equality –both normatively and also more practically in terms of setting out the concrete steps governments need to take to eliminate discrimination against women in their countries. Solomon Islands acceded to CEDAW in 2002².
- **Temporary Special Measures (TSMs)** are specific gender targeted measures taken to accelerate the equal participation of women in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. Given the legal commitment of States to produce de facto or substantive equality of women with men in a timely manner, special measures may need to be adopted for a limited amount of time to enhance women’s electoral and political participation.³

¹ Providing the same opportunities is the first step but there are instances where to achieve gender equality there is a need for gender equity measures. For example recruitment of officers for armed and police forces usually requires that physical tests are different for women and men in order to be adjusted to suit physical differences between genders.

² “CEDAW Pacific - Frequently asked questions.” (UN Women)

³ “Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women’s Participation.” (UNDP & UN Women)