



**FORUM ECONOMIC MINISTERS MEETING**

22 - 23 July 2025

Suva, Fiji

**INFORMATION PAPER 3: INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

**Purpose and Summary**

**Purpose**

This paper provides an update on regional efforts to promote inclusive economic empowerment in the Pacific, with a focus on gender equality, youth participation, disability inclusion, and equitable access to economic opportunities. The paper also highlights progress made, challenges faced, and proposed actions aligned to the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (2050 Strategy).

**Summary**

- This paper provides an overview of regional efforts to embed gender equality, youth engagement, and disability inclusion, into economic development policies and practices. It highlights progress in gender-responsive budgeting, with Fiji institutionalising tools under its Public Financial Management Improvement Plan (PFMIP), and Samoa advancing legal and policy reforms to support women’s economic participation. Regional initiatives such as the Gender Inclusive Private Sector Framework, and the Pacific Youth Engagement, Empowerment and Economic Pathways (PYEEEP) Project, reflect growing momentum to tackle structural inequalities through legal reform, capacity building, and inclusive planning.
- The paper also underscores the critical role of inclusive social protection in reducing exclusion and enabling the participation of women, young people, and persons with disabilities, in economic life. Key challenges such as informal employment, limited access to finance, and unpaid care work, persist but emerging models like the Family Farm Teams approach, and public-private-community partnerships, demonstrate innovative, and scalable strategies. The intention is that Forum Economic Ministers will continue to maintain inclusive development as a priority, leveraging regional frameworks and financing mechanisms to ensure that no one is left behind.

**A. OVERVIEW/SUMMARY**

Inclusive economic empowerment in the region is characterised by a plethora of actions undertaken by governments, agencies of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP), regional bodies, civil society, and development partners, to advance inclusive development. These actors participate in multi-layered and sectoral spaces spanning education, social protection, economic development, and climate resilience.

2. The Implementation Plan for the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (2050IP) and other regional development frameworks are important mechanisms for transformative change as they are cross-cutting in nature and provide the impetus for coordinated action that can help to transform fragmented efforts to regionally owned solutions.<sup>1</sup>

3. Throughout 2023-2024, several sectoral ministerial meetings and regional convenings endorsed outcomes that sought to strengthen regional inclusive development, including:<sup>2</sup>

- (i) Strengthening national inclusive economic policies aligned to the 2050IP (2024 Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders Meeting – PIFWLM, Pacific Ministers for Youth Meeting – PMYM);
- (ii) Support to scaling of universal, shock-responsive social protection systems (7<sup>th</sup> Pacific Regional Conference on Disability – 7<sup>th</sup> PRCO);
- (iii) Investment in inclusive infrastructure, technology, and assistive devices (7<sup>th</sup> PRCO, 15<sup>th</sup> Triennial);
- (iv) Improvement of collection and use of gender-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data to inform policy (2024 PIFWLM), 15<sup>th</sup> Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, 7<sup>th</sup> PRCO); and
- (v) Encouragement of collaboration between CROP agencies, regional organisations, and development partners to support national initiatives on inclusive economic development (2024 PIFWLM, 15<sup>th</sup> Triennial, PMYM).

## **B. DISCUSSION**

### **Regional Progress and Initiatives**

#### *Gender Equality*

4. In 2017, the FEMM supported the integration of gender-responsive budgeting into national planning and budgeting processes. In the last three to five years, Fiji has implemented Government reforms under the PFMIP in support of strengthening Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting (GRP). This mainstreaming work is supported by the Gender Transformative Institutional Capacity Development Initiative (ICD) led by the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Protection (MWCSP). The government has operationalised GRP through a suite of tools and guidelines that include gender gap analysis at the programme level, gender-responsive budget submissions, and gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

5. The ICD Initiative continues to play an important role in building the capacity of ministries and agencies to apply GRP principles. The Fiji 2025–2026 National Budget reflects this commitment, with targeted allocations and policy measures aimed at addressing gender disparities and promoting inclusive development outcomes. This institutionalisation of GRP

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<sup>1</sup> The [revitalised Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration \(PLGED\)](#), the [Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights 2018-2030 \(PPA\)](#), the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PFRPD), the Pacific Roadmap for Economic Development (PRED) and the draft Pacific Regional Private Sector Strategy, and draft Pacific Youth Development Framework(PYDF).

<sup>2</sup> These actions reflect ministerial outcomes from previous PIF Women Leaders Meetings, Pacific Triennial Conference of Women, Pacific Ministers for Youth Meeting, and the 7th Pacific Regional Conference on Disability (PRCO).

across the Fiji government aligns with the FEMM's broader regional agenda and demonstrates Fiji's leadership in embedding gender equity into national economic governance.

6. Samoa's National Policy on Gender Equality 2021-2031 aims to accelerate structural reforms and prioritise interventions to promote women's meaningful participation and success in the economy. This includes addressing discriminatory laws and practices, and providing support for women entrepreneurs such as removing barriers to business licensing, and identifying ways to strengthen access to finance, and skills development.

7. [Leadership Matters 2024](#) found that the Pacific region shows considerable variation in the legislative and policy environment supporting women's leadership, such as legal protection against gender-based discrimination and harassment in employment, equal pay, and dismissal due to pregnancy.

8. The Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative (PSDI) has been working with the private sector and governments across the region to bridge this gap through the [Gender Inclusive Private Sector \(GIPS\) Framework](#) that was launched in March 2024. The Framework measures the extent to which the legal, regulatory, and policy environment, is inclusive for women as consumers, employees, entrepreneurs, and leaders, across seven domains.<sup>3</sup> PSDI then works with countries to assess their progress and identify areas where further improvements are needed. Country assessments were conducted for Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and Tonga in 2024. Assessments for Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, and Vanuatu, are currently being undertaken.

#### *Inclusion and engagement of young people*

9. The Pacific region is experiencing a significant "youth bulge," with approximately 3.7 million young people aged 10-35, representing nearly 30% of the total population. This demographic dividend presents both opportunities and challenges for sustainable and inclusive social and economic development. The PYEEEP Project aims to support young people, particularly those that are not engaged in education, employment, or training, in improving their social and economic well-being.

10. The FEMM has acknowledged the socio-economic impacts of skilled migration and labour mobility schemes, which disproportionately affect young people. In response, Ministers have discussed strategies to assess and mitigate these impacts, including through the PRED, which emphasises inclusive labour markets and youth engagement in planning.

11. The PYDF is currently undergoing renewal following the conclusion of its 2014–2023 cycle, and is being designed to strengthen inclusive economic empowerment for young people across the region. Building on its earlier pillars such as securing decent employment and increasing youth participation in decision-making, the updated Framework aims to address persistent barriers like underemployment, limited access to finance, and skills mismatches, by promoting coordinated, youth-centred investments, across sectors.

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<sup>3</sup>The Framework considers legal, structural and cultural barriers that constrain women's participation and economic advancement in the private sector as (i)Gender equality context (ii)Workplace conditions (iii)Business enabling environment (iv)Financial inclusion and access to capital (v)Participation in key economic sectors (vi)Technology and the future of work (vii)Leadership, voice, and consumer rights.

12. The new PYDF emphasises partnerships with national governments, youth councils, and development partners, to co-create pathways for economic inclusion and to support and expand access to vocational training, entrepreneurship, and digital innovation, tailored to the needs of diverse youth populations, including young women, rural youth, and those with disabilities.

### *Persons with disabilities*

13. As early as 2017, the FEMM endorsed the mainstreaming of the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PFRPD) into national development policies. Ministers also supported inclusive economic development approaches that promote livelihood opportunities for persons with disabilities. This reflects a broader commitment to ensuring that economic policies include people with disabilities.

14. For persons with disabilities, inclusive social protection recognises both the barriers they face and their potential to contribute meaningfully to society. This includes disability-specific benefits, accessible service delivery, and support for independent living. In the Pacific, for example, the Pacific Disability Forum advocates for systems that are responsive to the diverse needs of persons with disabilities across the life course. When designed and implemented effectively, inclusive social protection not only safeguards basic rights but also fosters dignity, agency, and full participation in economic and social life. It is a foundational investment in building cohesive, resilient, and just societies.

15. In advocating for social protection as one of the [six preconditions to inclusion](#), countries such as Kiribati, Samoa, and Tonga, have introduced or expanded disability-specific cash transfer schemes, many of which are universal and compatible with employment, helping to reduce exclusion and support labour market participation.<sup>4</sup>

### **Challenges**

16. Persistent barriers continue to limit access to economic opportunities for women, youth, and persons with disabilities. These include high levels of informal employment, limited access to financial services, the burden of unpaid care work, and continued discrimination against persons with disabilities.

17. Following the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, the FEMM and regional partners prioritised inclusive recovery, leading to the development of national and regional strategies that integrate gender, age, and disability considerations. The expansion of inclusive social protection systems is an important approach to advance equitable development, particularly for women, youth, and persons with disabilities. These systems aim to reduce poverty, enhance resilience, and promote social inclusion, by ensuring that vulnerable groups have access to essential services and income support.

18. For women, inclusive social protection can address gender-specific risks such as unpaid care work, maternity, and gender-based violence, while also promoting economic empowerment through targeted cash transfers, childcare subsidies, and pension schemes. For

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<sup>4</sup> The Pacific "six preconditions to inclusion" refer to six key elements considered essential for fostering inclusivity, particularly for people with disabilities. These preconditions are accessibility, assistive technology, social protection, support services, non-discrimination, and Community-Based Inclusive Development (CBID).

youth, such systems can provide pathways to education, training, and employment, helping to break cycles of intergenerational poverty and marginalisation.

## **Opportunities**

19. In spite of the numerous challenges, the Pacific continues to look towards innovative and transformative ways to build the capacity of communities and marginalised groups. Climate finance mechanisms such as the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF) offer inclusive pathways for empowerment and inclusion through targeted investments in small, high-impact projects, that seek to strengthen community preparedness.

20. The "Family Farm Teams" approach, developed by the University of Canberra, is a strategy focused on improving gender equity in agriculture, particularly within the male-dominated farming sectors of Papua New Guinea and Fiji. It emphasises collaboration between family members, including men, women, and youth, to enhance farming practices and livelihoods.

21. Public-private-community partnerships are increasingly recognised in the region as powerful vehicles for advancing inclusive economic empowerment. These collaborations bring together governments, businesses, and civil society, to co-design and deliver initiatives that address specific barriers faced by women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

*Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat  
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