

## Chapter 19

# Pacific Women's Network Male Advocacy Programme, Pacific Islands

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### 19.1 Context

The Pacific region is made up of Pacific Island Countries (PICs), which are widely dispersed over the South Pacific Ocean and vary in size, geographical conditions, resources, populations and cultures. Gender inequalities have remained deep and persistent in the region. Women make up just 4 per cent of parliamentarians in the Pacific (the lowest rate in the world), compared to the global average of around 20 per cent. Across the region, there is a large gap between male and female participation in economic activity. Men outnumber women in paid employment outside the agricultural sector by approximately two to one (Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development [no date]). The Economist Intelligence Unit's Women's Economic Opportunity Index (EIU 2012) ranks two Pacific countries – Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (PNG) – in the bottom five of those reviewed globally, just above Yemen, Chad and Sudan.

VAWG is being increasingly recognised as a concern by governments in the Pacific. According to the World Bank's 2012 World Development Report on *Gender Equality and Development*, between 60 and 70 per cent of women in Kiribati, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu experienced some form of domestic violence. In another study conducted in Fiji Islands, 80 per cent of all women reportedly experienced violence within their home sometime in their life. In 95 per cent of these cases, victims were female and perpetrators were male; 41.6 per cent of women who experienced violence also reported being hit while pregnant (FWCC 2001). In PNG, two-thirds of wives have been hit by their husbands and nearly 97 per cent of those have to seek medical treatment (Bradley 2001). In Samoa, 46 per cent of women interviewed had experienced some form of partner abuse – of which 38 per cent was physical abuse, 19 per cent emotional abuse and 20 per cent sexual abuse (United Nations Population Fund and Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2006). In the majority of cases, violence experienced by women and girls was perpetrated by men they knew within the expected 'safe haven' of home and family.

Responding to this high prevalence, the last decade saw the issues of domestic violence gain great visibility and currency in the region. Many Pacific leaders called for legal and non-legal measures to respond to the socioculturally embedded issue of violence and abuse, which disproportionately hampers the holistic participation of women in the public sphere (Lievore and Fairbairn-Dunlop 2007). At the 40th Pacific Islands Forum (2009), the leaders 'acknowledged the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence in the Pacific and the risk it poses to human security' and collectively committed to the 'eradication of gender-based violence (GBV)' (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2009).

## 19.2 Key institutional actors

The Pacific Women's Network against Violence against Women (the Network) has played an indispensable role in bringing issues of VAWG from the periphery to the centre of the public policy agenda, by working in collaboration with several country and regional women's organisations like the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) and Pacific Regional Rights Team.

The Network was born as a result of the Pacific Regional Meeting on Violence against Women and Girls in 1992, which has taken place every four years since then, in collaboration with FWCC (SPC [no date]). Many women's organisations realised that some of the issues relating to gender equality could be effectively addressed through regional approaches, whereby pooled resources and a common approach to this region-wide problem could achieve greater impact (Government of Australia 2014). In the last decade, the Network has pioneered advocacy, activism, campaigning and lobbying for public provision of care and support to survivors of VAWG across the Pacific. It has become the focal point for End Violence against Women and Girls initiatives in the Pacific region, where it continues to identify new and emerging issues and strategize ways for moving forward while addressing issues of VAWG.

The Network comprises more than 28 regional organisations from 13 Pacific Island Countries that share a common goal of eliminating VAWG in their communities.<sup>1</sup> The Network now runs approximately 37 programmes from four regional centres, with a focus on training and capacity building of men and women within formal government institutions to effectively deal with cases of VAWG. FWCC acts as the Secretariat of the Network, and as its clearinghouse for information.

## 19.3 Theory of change

Women's groups in the Pacific region have linked unequal gender relations to cycles of violence that maintain the low status and high levels of victimisation of girls and women. The engagement of men is globally recognised to be a key VAWG prevention strategy, and is increasingly finding popularity as an effective approach within the Pacific. The objective of the Male Advocacy Programme (MAP), established by the FWCC in 2002, is to prevent violence through raising awareness (Mukasa, McCleary-Sills, Heilman, Namy, Brady and Stich 2014). After its success in Fiji, the programme was extended through the Network to the Cook Islands, PNG, Tonga and Vanuatu. MAP addresses two key factors that contribute to VAWG: lack of knowledge of and belief in human rights, and unequal power relations. MAP seeks to increase the knowledge of participants on human rights and women's rights. It also seeks to address unequal power relations, by engaging with men and prompting them to think about privileges and entitlements accrued by inequalities between men and women.

## 19.4 Social institutions and discriminatory norms

**Formal law, policies and accountability:** Unless governments in the Pacific region enact laws and enforce stronger accountability measures, VAWG will continue

unabated in the region. Over the last two decades, the Pacific Women's Network against Violence against Women has engaged in research to identify gaps in constitutional laws, some of which dated back to colonial times (Griffen 2006). With support from the Network, there have been positive developments in the legal framework in the Pacific region. Palau, Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati have all enacted domestic violence legislation. Domestic violence is now treated as a criminal offence in PNG, following the passing of the Family Protection Act (2014). However, government institutions are not immune to gender biases and it is important to work with male advocates within these formal institutions so that they can challenge their own institutional structures and develop policies and programmes to address VAWG.

**Access to resources and opportunity:** Women and girls who experience violence face multiple barriers in accessing protection (i.e. from the judiciary, police) and other support services (UNIFEM 2009). Even if there are strong laws, entrenched gender-based discrimination within these service delivery institutions means that women victims of violence are unable to access the services they need. Amnesty International found that there were severe deficiencies in police responses to violence against women in the Pacific region, including failing to inform women about their rights, failure to consider privacy and safety of victims, and failing to refer women to other support services (Amnesty International 2006). Network organisations have worked hard to train police officers, judges, magistrates and prosecutors on responding to violence against women.

**Informal cultural norms and exclusionary practices:** In many countries around the world, including in the Pacific region, GBV is part of the systematic control of women by their partners and family members. Many officers in the justice system – police, lawyers, magistrates, judges and court staff – share the values and views of their communities, including acceptance of VAWG (Ellsberg, Bradley, Egan and Haddad 2008). Police and community members encourage women to reconcile cases of domestic violence, rather than pursue a formal complaint, to avoid social disruption to the family and community. In the absence of strong legal systems, customary law plays an important role in addressing VAWG; perpetrators often go unpunished in the region because of such practices at the community level. Members of the Network envisaged that by harnessing the support of male advocates within formal and informal institutions – such as the police, *TuraganiKoro* (village headman), youth groups and faith-based organisations – attitudes towards discussing the issue of VAWG in public could be changed. This would effectively challenge existing cultural norms that consider men to be dominant, and address other exclusionary practices that dissuade women from reporting and seeking help.

**Women's and men's consciousness:** The values and attitudes of men and women are identified as significant barriers to gender equality in the Pacific region. Women's lack of agency – or their belief in their own self-worth and ability – limits both what they choose to do and what they expect of others (Government of Australia 2014). It was anticipated that by engaging more men in dialogue on issues of violence and abuse, change could be brought to the mind-sets of people and constructive attitudes shaped; this in turn would help eliminate violence and the threat of violence.

## 19.5 Strategies

MAP was started by FWCC in 2002 and developed over the years, using case studies of best practice from around the world and adapting these to the Pacific context. MAP encourages men to become 'agents for change' and positive non-violent role models in their communities by teaching other men about gender roles, gender equality and masculinity, and advocating for non-violent behaviour.

### Box 19.1 Founding MAP

*'The intention was to set up core groups of men who could then influence other men in whatever sphere of work or social setting they were involved...'*

–Shamima Ali, FWCC Co-ordinator, 2012 (Pacific Women's Network against Violence Against Women 2012)

MAP has the following key strategies:

**Selection of male advocates based on their ability to influence formal and informal norms:** Staff members from FWCC identify potential male advocates through their regional training programmes and other activities. Advocates are selected based on their potential to influence key constituencies or mechanisms. In addition to male advocates, who tend to be local leaders such as police and traditional leaders, the programme is also training community men and boys. Different strategies are used for reaching out to youth and other men. As one expert from FWCC noted: 'We've had some new strategies for outreach among males – we've had young people in sporting teams come in. They ask for sponsorship for their uniforms. We train them and then they raise awareness of violence against women at their tournaments' (Ellsberg *et al.* 2008).

**Training programme that focuses on men's role in perpetuating gender-based discrimination:** The male advocates typically participate in a four-stage training programme, with several weeks of training overall. The first stage is run by Network members, such as FWCC, whereas the final training is conducted by a 'masculinity' expert. The training programme focuses on concepts of GBV, women's human rights and the role male privilege plays in excluding women from exercising their rights. VAWG is positioned as an outcome of men trying to control women to retain the privileges afforded to them through the virtue of being male. As Shamima Ali, the Co-ordinator of FWCC, points out: 'This work is about involving men in efforts to eliminate violence against women from a rights-based approach, and one of the key elements is these men firstly challenging their own behaviour before calling themselves advocates on women's human rights or trying to influence other men' (Ali 2014).

**Accountability to women's organisations:** Male advocates are monitored by the women's rights movement and are accountable to the Network's organisations. Women's organisations have the ultimate say on whether a male advocate is ready to

start work in his community, and several have been dismissed from the programme due to lack of progress or, in some instances, use of violence against women.

**Male advocates apply their learning to real life contexts:** After completion of their training, male advocates apply their learning to influence other men and institutions, with a view to preventing VAWG and improving responses to women survivors. Activities undertaken by male advocates include: providing support to women living with violence; actively supporting the work of women's groups such as FWCC and Vanuatu Women's Centre, including organising and participating in community awareness programmes; advocating for women victims of violence with police officers and village heads, and monitoring and reporting inappropriate responses by other service providers and community leaders; and incorporating a human rights perspective into their own work.

As an example of the last point, police personnel across the Pacific region have also been trained under MAP. Trained male police advocates have then used their position to influence the security sector, to improve the access of victims/survivors to the police. They have also influenced their own systems by changing attitudes and behaviour when dealing with cases of VAWG.

## 19.6 Outcomes to date

Beginning in Fiji, the programme has slowly expanded to the rest of the Pacific region, with workshops in Cook Islands, Kiribati, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Men targeted over the years have been village chiefs, police officers, youth workers, teachers, pastors, priests, policy-makers and other men strategically placed within their communities (Ali 2014). In the period between July 2009 and June 2012, FWCC trained 392 male advocates. Similarly, between July 2007 and June 2012, Vanuatu Women's Centre trained 282 male advocates. Reports indicate that demand for additional training continues to grow. In response to these growing demands, FWCC and the Network produced a handbook for training male advocates in 2011 (Fisher 2014).

According to a 2011 study conducted by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) to examine the contribution of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) towards addressing VAWG in the region since 2008, work with men and boys is the prevention strategy area that has seen the most progress (Ellsberg et al. 2011). The study notes that MAP has been the driving force behind the growth of this strategy in the Pacific region.

Similarly, another ICRW review undertaken in 2014 found that MAP has been effective in bringing about individual and intra-personal changes among participating men across the region. Men who participated in the survey noted that after undergoing the training programme, they shared household tasks more equitably with their partners and also stood up for women's rights in conversations with friends. The review noted that: 'While the review could not definitively conclude what community and institutional level changes are emerging from the program, it did uncover evidence that the program activities are contributing to changes in attitudes and behaviours at the individual level' (Mukasa *et al.* 2014).

**Box 19.2 A male advocate's experience**

*'We are trained male advocates on communicating women's human rights and gender equality in our own respective countries; this we have made personal commitments to through our association with the Pacific Network Against Violence Against Women and Girls and the crisis centres we work with on the ground. This [commitment] can never be taken away from us but to know that the government is also committing to the same thing and supporting gender equality through various agreements and documents – it makes our job that much easier.'*

–Male advocate, Tonga

## 19.7 Lessons learned and the way forward

The experience of the Network in implementing MAP offers many interesting lessons for other countries:

**Engaging men increases the likelihood of success:** The success of the programme has shown that rather than engaging men only as potential perpetrators of violence, programmes to address VAWG are more successful when they are able to leverage men's influence as critical decision-makers and potential agents of change, while at the same time recognising that the gender biases men hold make them more susceptible to inflicting violence on women.

**Synchronise efforts by women and men to promote gender equality:** The programme has also demonstrated that synchronising efforts by women and men to promote gender equality is more effective than conducting efforts in isolation from one another. The programmes are always rolled out in a locality or region after training for women activists has taken place. This ensures that the work of male advocates can be monitored and they remain accountable to the women's organisations.

The partnership between male advocates and Committees against Violence against Women (CAVAWs) in Vanuatu is another example where women's rights activists have worked well with male advocates. In addition to police officers and other local authorities, many traditional chiefs have undergone male advocacy training, which has facilitated dialogue between women activists and local councils of chiefs. It was found that the chiefs involved in MAP trusted their village's CAVAW members deeply and often accompanied them on visits to neighbouring villages for community awareness sessions (Mukasa *et al.* 2014). This has allowed male advocates to participate in a broader effort by playing a leading role in violence prevention in their communities (Ellsberg *et al.* 2008).

**Using a gender-transformative approach in training methods and messages for men:** The male advocacy training curriculum is built upon a gender-transformative approach, which has been found to be particularly instrumental in helping male advocates understand the power relations that exist between men and women. For many male advocates, the training programme is a journey of self-discovery,

by which they are encouraged to reflect on ways that they use male privilege and use it to control women or deny women the opportunity to exercise their human rights (Vlais 2014).

**Regional approach to addressing VAWG can be particularly effective:** The programme has shown that when countries within a particular region face similar challenges on VAWG, it is particularly effective to take a regional approach – where learning from one country can be replicated elsewhere. However, this has to be combined with support to build local coalitions. The Network acknowledges that working through local coalitions is important to support ownership, tap into local understanding, facilitate development of local solutions and build the capacity of local development partners to implement those solutions. It extends the number of partners and resources available to address VAWG.

## Note

- 1 Includes organisations from Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu (Ali 2014).

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