



Gender Assessment

Document Stage: Final
May 2009

PALAU: Country Partnership Strategy (2009–2013)

COUNTRY SECTOR AND THEMATIC ROAD MAP

GENDER

A. Gender Situation and Key Issues

i. Poverty and Social Indicators

1. Palau is comprised of over 340 islands, 8 of which are inhabited by the 20,300 strong population. Government management is divided among 16 states. Palauan citizens make up 74% of the population and are primarily Micronesian with some Melanesian and Malay influence. The remaining 26% of non-Palauans are mostly Asian laborers and domestic workers who represent more than 50% of the economically active labor force. The annual population growth rate is quite slow at 1.4% but the urban populations are increasing steadily as rural inhabitants migrate into the capital. Palau has a Compact of Free Association with the US, which enables Palauans to emigrate easily, and there has been concern about out-migration.

2. There is a limited international social statistics on Palau, its Human Development and Gender Development Index rates are not calculated. While poverty incidents are low, the vulnerability of falling into poverty is high. Although the Palauans' average gross domestic product per capita is \$8,025, many households have high level of indebtedness from high interest informal lending and a low level of saving.¹ Accesses to micro credit for average Palauans is limited and access to credit through the formal banking sector is perceived to be difficult to obtain and costly.

3. Palauans enjoy relatively high standards of health, education and other public utilities which have been provided mostly free or heavily subsidized by the Government. Palauans have constitutionally guaranteed access to 12 years of public education and free or subsidized healthcare. Eighty-four percent of Palauans have access to safe drinking water, while 99% of urban residents have access to sanitation.²

4. However, educational attainment at the secondary level has been declining in recent years. Of the 94% of school age children who attended school in 2005, 97% finished elementary school and only 78% completed high school.³ Only 30% of students seek university level education.⁴ Many students seeking college education go to the US on scholarship, and only a small proportion of graduates reportedly return to Palau. The student-teacher ratio for public schools is very low at both primary and secondary levels, maintaining which has significant budgetary implications.

5. Similarly, health indicators such as a falling life expectancy for women (from 75 years in 1995 to 72 in 2005) and increasing suicide rates among women indicate that there are emerging social challenges which are not being managed proactively. Health conditions in Palau are still among the highest in the region, due to high government priority placed on health and a high level of government health spending (over \$700 per capita). However, the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases undermine many people's quality of life, erode labor productivity, and impose an increasing burden on financial viability of the publicly subsidized healthcare

¹ Otto, J Judy. 2007. *Republic of Palau Social Sector Review (Pre-Final Version)*, page 9.

² Ministry of Culture and Social. 2008.

³ *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, March 2007.

⁴ ADB. Palau Economic Report.

system. Out-of-pocket health care costs, especially cost of medicines and overseas treatment, have increasingly also become burdens for individuals and families. There are informal reports that financial obligations and family debt result in people placing a low priority on health care spending, which undermines prevention strategies and results in more serious health issues.

ii. Gender

6. Palauan society is matrilineal and affords women considerable autonomy and decision-making power at the household level. Palauan women's rights are protected under the constitution but no legislative analysis has been done to see how this translates into legal protection. The following are the analysis on key gender indicators.

7. **Gender Gaps and Opportunities for Girls at Secondary School Level.** This indicator demonstrates issues of human resource capacity and social capital. Inequality in educational opportunity is a contravention of human rights and the resulting inequality of outcomes inhibits development effectiveness from generation to generation. There is little gender differentiation in Palau's gross secondary school enrollment rates of 89% (2001). According to the draft ADB Social Sector Report, more girls than boys graduate from high school, but more men than women have tertiary qualifications. While there is universal enrollment at primary level, there is an obvious attrition through the secondary years. As with other Pacific countries, the curricula do not necessarily meet the needs of the country, conveying little in the way of skills for entrepreneurship and commerce. The Palau Community College has a relatively high intake of secondary school graduates but about 50% transfer to studies overseas mid-way through their programs and 80% of graduates migrate to work overseas.

8. **Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health.** Women's reproductive work is unaccounted for in national accounting systems and their role in ensuring sustainability of social and cultural values is largely unacknowledged in financing for development. If women are unsupported in their sexual and reproductive rights and health, the country is undermined and development will continue to be unsuccessful. Examining indicators for these values facilitates identification of intervention points to stabilize the development process. In Palau, 100% of women have access to skilled birth attendants. The total fertility rates are 1.9 and the adolescent fertility rate is 35/100 births to women aged 15 – 19 years of age. Maternal mortality rates are unavailable, infant mortality is 31/1000 live births.⁵ According to UNFPA the contraceptive prevalence rates are low at 17.2% (modern methods).⁶ Palau is the only country in the Pacific where marital rape can be prosecuted, and while the legal situation vis-à-vis abortion is unclear, the Centre for Reproductive Rights lists Palau as one of the most restrictive countries for abortion rights.⁷ The combination of in- and out-migration and reports of increasingly high risk sexual behavior among youth indicate that Palau needs to maintain a preventative focus on sexual health, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. Currently, UNFPA and UNAIDS are providing support in these areas. Palau has had 8 reported cases of HIV/AIDS, 3 of which were women. This is a ratio of 40/100,00 and due to limited surveillance,

⁵ SPC.2007. Pacific Island Populations. Noumea. Available: http://www.spc.int/sdp/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=42.

⁶ UNFPA. No date. Palau at a Glance. Suva (references year 2000 data). Available: <http://pacific.unfpa.org/Countries/pw.htm>.

⁷ Centre for Reproductive Rights. 2007. *The World's Abortion Laws*. New York. Available: http://www.reproductiverights.org/pdf/pub_fac_abortionlaws.pdf.

these figures are considered to be an under-count, particularly since non-Palauans do not have free access to the health system.⁸

9. **Women's Representation in Political Bodies.** While women in Palau have a base of decision-making power rooted in their matrilineal heritage and play a key role in household and clan decision-making, they are severely under-represented in the political arena. Only 3 of 16 state governors are women, there are no female Congressional members, and the average ratio of male to females for decision making positions is about 3:1. As is the case in many matrilineal societies, women are largely excluded from public political power – undermining an initial impression of gender equality. There is a need to strengthen capacity for gender analysis among male and female Palauan decision-makers at all levels and to integrate this analysis into policy and planning and to ensure effective and efficient development results.

10. Assessing the progress of Palau against the following MDG strategic priorities for gender equality demonstrates areas of inequality requiring strategic action.⁹ While Palau rates better than most Pacific states in key high-level indicators, as noted above, it is weak in the area of gender-balanced political representation.

11. **Violence Against Women and Girls.** Violence against women and girls contravenes their human rights, contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS, negatively impacts mental health, and undermines women's social freedoms, productivity, and contributions to national development. The US State Department report on Human Rights notes that reported cases of violence against women are increasing over the past few years and also that violence is under-reported to police. The Suicide Hotline survey results in 2005 showed that 50% of suicide attempts were linked to domestic violence. Only a relatively small number of cases were reported to the authorities. Alcohol and drug abuse increasingly contribute to this problem. Domestic violence constitutes criminal assault and police will investigate, but due to dependency issues and family pressure, women are often reluctant to prosecute. A bill on domestic violence has been prepared and put before Congress several years in a row, but it has yet to be passed. Violence is a significant mental health issue; the suicide hotline reports that 50% of attempted suicides are related to domestic violence.

12. There were also reports of women being trafficked to the country from the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taipei, China, and the Philippines to work in karaoke bars as hostesses and prostitutes.¹⁰ Female 'guest workers' in the sex trade and other industries, particularly those who have been trafficked against their will face high risks of sexual harassment, exploitation, violence, and risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. As elsewhere in the world, their vulnerable immigration status and lack of citizen's rights make them easy victims of intimidation and coercion. This in turn prevents them from coming forward to seek support services. They are a largely invisible exploited population that needs to be considered in statistical analysis and service delivery. Donors need to advocate with government for attention to this, as it is a significant human rights issue.

13. **Infrastructure that Supports Reduction in Women and Girl's Poverty.** Women in Palau perform multiple roles as household managers, subsistence and cash crop farmers, income earners and as active members of churches and community groups. In all these roles,

⁸ SPC and WHO. 2007. *A Review of Pacific Regional HIV Strategy and Progress Towards Universal Access to Prevention, Treatment, Care and Support*. Noumea.

⁹ UNDP Millennium Project. 2004. Task Force 3 Interim Report on Gender Equality. New York

¹⁰ US Department of State. 2005 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Palau*. Washington. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61622.htm>

infrastructure services are important determinants of opportunity. Palauan women and girls are not particularly constrained by infrastructure shortfalls. Palau's population is concentrated on four main islands connected by a series of bridge and causeways. Road access is good and the bulk of the population is well served with access to improved water, sanitation and electrification. Anecdotal reports indicate that there are some areas where water supply and sanitation infrastructure is not properly installed or maintained resulting in a high proportion of households not having direct access to potable water. This lack of adequate infrastructure creates more time burdens for women who have to find other sources of water and deal with health issues that arise such as skin disease and water-borne disease.

14. Access to Productive and Economic Resources including Women's Property and Inheritance Rights. Focusing on improving women's ability to be economically active and designing methods to increase their capacity has been proven internationally to have a positive impact on development success, family and community stability and economic growth. In Palau, women have less access to productive and economic resources than men. Women's customary inheritance rights to land pass through the female line but are largely controlled by men. There is private land ownership; however, there is little private sector development by Palauans linked to land as an asset. There are no microfinance facilities to support small entrepreneurs and there is limited access to formal credit. High interest rates and debt from informal loans have created high personal debt loads and family stress.

15. Women's participation in the labor force is concentrated in the technical and administrative sectors and in the public service. Although women have the right to work, and pay equity legislation is in place, less than 50% of women are engaged in the formal labor force. This is not surprising as non-Palauans are over 50% of the labor force. There are fewer women than men at senior management and administrative levels. Palauan women have noted that there is workplace discrimination linked to advancement, promotion and organizational culture; as elsewhere women have to overachieve and outperform men to be perceived as equal. In most areas, families participate in limited subsistence agriculture and both men and women share labor. To participate more equitably and account for their dual role as both household managers and formal/informal workers, women still need legislative and policy support in areas such as expanded access to capital for private sector development, licensed child care, and maternity benefits.¹¹

iii. Youth

16. The youth population faces significant challenges including geographic isolation, depression, substance abuse, suicide and interpersonal violence. There is an aging demographic profile caused by youth out-migration and Palau has the highest median population age in the Pacific at 33.2 years.¹² Gender issues among youth are not clearly documented but expatriate Palauan youth in the US have a high incidence of gang membership which entrenches gender discriminatory and exploitive attitudes and values. There is a national youth policy but little evidence of its implementation.

iv. Migration

17. There are more than 4,000 foreign nationals with work permits in the country from the Philippines, Bangladesh, PRC and other Asian countries. They constitute up to 33% of residents

¹¹ ADB 2007. *ibid.*

¹² ADB. 2007. *draft Republic of Palau Social Sector Review*. Unpublished.

and over 50% of the workforce¹³. Most of this work is in low-skilled and low-paying positions. Noncitizens are officially excluded from the minimum wage law (\$2.50 per hour), presumably to ensure a continued supply of low cost labor. There are anecdotal reports of the abuse of foreign workers by employers. The most commonly reported abuses included misrepresentation of contract terms and conditions of employment, withholding of pay or benefits, and substandard food and housing. Since foreign workers do not have the same rights and protections as Palauans, they are reluctant to seek legal redress for fear of losing their employment and permission to remain in the country. The country depends on non-Palauan labor force and there is an urgent need for national strategies to provide appropriate social protection for this vulnerable population.

v. Social Safety Net

18. Along with the country's development, there has been a gradual erosion of the traditional social safety net which creates vulnerability for the elderly, people with disabilities, children, youth and women. This, combined with the reduction of support from the US Government at independence, has also shifted the burden of family to take care of their elderly.

19. Notwithstanding the value and importance in social protection played by the traditional social safety net, there is, in general, a paucity of policies, legislation and programs supporting vulnerable groups. These social issues are relatively new to the country and have previously been supported by United States Departmental programs. While this support is expected to continue, the GoP needs to take greater control of these programs and how they interlink to create a holistic social safety net structure.

B. Government's Gender Policy and Planning Framework

20. Currently, there are inadequate policies and legislation to address social and gender concerns in Palau. The country is not a signatory to the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. The government architecture for women's empowerment is very weak with the Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs managing gender issues through the Belau Women's Resource Centre. There is no national gender equality strategy and there appears to be little, if any, mention of gender analysis in any government documents. There are several specific areas not supported by policies including care for the elderly, child care, and domestic violence.

C. Government's Institutional Arrangements and Capacity for Gender

21. As noted above, government support and budgeting for gender equality is not a priority. The Women's Centre has a weak program and as gender and women's issues are not highlighted in any of governments higher level planning or policy frameworks, it is challenging to build momentum for advocacy and action. Technical capacity to do gender analysis is low and gender equality is not perceived to be a 'problem' despite the growing rates of violence against women, trafficking of foreign workers for the sex trade, and increasing suicides among women. There is a strong need for improved sex/age-disaggregated statistics across all sectors and for both Palauans and non-Palauans. This would support the development of evidence-based rationales for relevant policy dialogue, analysis and programming.

¹³ Otto, J Judy. 2007. *ibid*.

22. There are a number of NGOs that address gender issues as well as women's groups at the community level focused on traditional activities. The widespread base of women's groups would benefit from awareness training on gender and legal rights, such as that offered by the Pacific Regional Human Rights Resource Team (RRRT). This would support informed stakeholder interaction with government and could provide valuable relevant inputs to government planning and service delivery frameworks. There is little political will in government to address gender equality and the organizational culture for mainstreaming is unformed.

D. Role of Other Development Partners in the Sector

23. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) Human Development Program and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat have gender advisors who are available to work with both government and civil society to promote gender equality. Although there are several programs and activities by major donors at regional level, there is no country specific gender program that supports gender issues in Palau. Table 1 summarizes current gender targeted regional level activities by major donors.

E. Indicative Areas for Intervention

24. The ADB Country Partnership Strategy Pre-Assessment mission identified a number of factors that need to be integrated into ADB's analysis on Palau. These are closely related to the MDG strategic indicators discussed above and include i) weak coordination among ministries, ii) lack of sustainable social assistance programming, iii) uneven access to economic opportunities, basic services, and iv) the absence of formalized social safety nets.

25. Given ADB's commitment to work on pro-poor economic policy, there is a clear need for all ADB staff to integrate gender/social analysis into policy dialogue across sectors and at all levels. There is scope to build in age/sex/citizenship-disaggregated data into all studies and to involve ADB Social Development Specialists in the creation of gender features and action plans for Technical Assistance in private sector development and infrastructure.

Regional Level Activities of Development Partners

Agency	Regional Commitments and Activities ^a
Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordination of regional action on gender and development and the empowerment of women through networks of government and NGO focal points - Strengthening government and NGO capacity for gender and development - Strengthening regional awareness on gender and agriculture, land management and fisheries - Capacity building in SPC for gender responsive regional health, HIV/AIDS programming - Capacity building in SPC and National Statistics Offices - Supporting ratification of CEDAW, reporting and action - Management of internet based communications networks for regional information sharing on gender related issues - Technical and advisory support to member governments on request - Community Education and Training Centre courses offered to all member countries with special attention to involving women with disabilities
Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborative programming to advance women's representation in Parliaments: Sub-regional workshops related to reserve seats and quotas in government - Promoting gender mainstreaming in the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific (CROP) - Integrating gender into regional security decision-making - Support to member governments on request
UNDP Pacific Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EVAW: Inventory of Organizations Working with Boys And Men to prevent Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and promote Gender Equality in the Pacific Region. This was initiated to explore also possible joint collaboration between UNDP Pacific Center, UNIFEM, UNFPA and UNICEF for work with men and boys in GBV - Gender and HIV: Mitigating Impacts of HIV/AIDS; Regional support (meetings and media production) on human rights and HIV - Legislative analysis to support governments with CEDAW implementation (in collaboration with UNIFEM) - Governance: Sub-regional Parliamentary Workshops on Women as Representatives; Guides published on (i) quotas for women in elected governments and (ii) Campaigning for Women - Disaster Risk Management: Gender inclusive research and pilot projects; publication of advocacy materials on community-based gender approaches to community security; civil society platform established on gender, peace and security; collaboration with regional partners to mainstream gender issues in regional security - UNFPA/UNDP Pipeline: Gender Policy Analysis, Monitoring and Evaluation of gender indicators from country baseline studies on GBV
UNIFEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender mainstreamed in all programming - 3 thematic programs to (i) enhance women's economic security and rights, (ii) reduce the prevalence of violence against women and HIV/AIDS, (iii) advance gender justice in democratic governance - Constitutional, legislative, and process analysis to support governments with CEDAW implementation and development of legal frameworks to support women's human rights - Support governments to increase gender responsiveness in National Development Strategies and improved mechanisms for planning and implementation of gender equality initiatives - Support to government, civil society, and advocacy networks for integration of gender considerations and promotion of gender equality into formal and informal justice systems. Facilitation of women's access to justice and training for the

Agency	Regional Commitments and Activities ^a
	judiciary - Promotion of Gender Responsive Budgeting at national levels to increase number of budget processes incorporating gender equality - Support to National Women's Machineries and networks advocating for gender equality - Ensuring access of all women to the development process and that women subject to exclusion and/or discrimination can have their priorities recognized and addressed through law, policy and programmes - Support for enabling environments for gender at regional, national and community levels in line with international, regional and national commitments - Support to knowledge development and learning from community-level initiatives, to generate effective models for advancing gender equality and women's human rights
NZAID	- Health: Support to UNFPA; Youth and Mental Health Project with FSPI; Support to regional HIV/AIDS programming; Condom Social Marketing - Governance: UNIFEM CEDAW; Family violence Prevention Programme design study; Support to regional NGOs working on governance and human rights; Fellowship for emerging Pacific Women's Leaders; femLINKpacific Community Empowerment; Support to DAWN and Fiji Women's Right Movement - Support to Pacific women's participation in regional and international events: Midwives triennial conference; Women Parliamentarians and Ministers Conference; UN Commission on the Status of Women
AusAID	- Eliminating Violence Against Women: Regional evaluation on EVAW in Solomon Islands, Fiji Islands, Vanuatu, PNG and Timor-Leste - Political Participation and Leadership: Funding to UNIFEM - Gender and HIV: Support to training and retention of health specialists; funding to South Pacific Reproductive Health and Family Planning Training Project; Pacific Regional HIV Program (including television programming Love Patrol) - Women's Economic Empowerment: Development of evidence-based rationales to support female entrepreneurs in collaboration with World Bank. World Bank undertook a gender analysis in 2008 for selected Pacific countries
Pacific Human Rights Regional Resource Team (RRRT)	- RRRT promotes human rights, provides training and support to develop legal literacy in Pacific countries, and helps build capacity in the region to address poverty and social inequities. RRRT works to obtain increased access to justice for people, particularly the poor, vulnerable and marginalized - RRRT acts as a regional resource to assist countries to ratify and implement CEDAW - RRRT is a project of UNDP and is funded primarily by NZAID and AusAID
femLINK	- FemLINK is a media and communications NGO focused on giving women in the Pacific region a voice to participate in development and peacebuilding. FemLINK is a Fiji-based organization but works around the Pacific region training women in the use of media technologies and supporting them to lobby and advocate for more gender responsive policies and government programs

^a Note that the table attempts to show the main activities of the development partners most active in support of gender equality. Other agencies may also be integrating gender considerations into their activities and/or funding civil society organizations with expertise on gender.