

Creating pathways for change

the role of faith-based actors in women's
economic empowerment in
Papua New Guinea



Creating Pathways For Change: the role of faith-based actors in women's economic empowerment in Papua New Guinea

Report by Caritas Australia, November 2023

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Acknowledgements

Caritas Australia would like to thank the following individuals who generously shared their time, experience and insights with us for this scoping study:

Agnes Titus	Geoff Shepherd	Dr. Josephine Caffery
Antoinette Ropa	Helen Mark	Josephine Mill
Prof. Barbara Pamphilon	Jacinta Ankus	Josephine Saul Maora
Catherine Highet	Rev. James Shri Bhagwan	Fr. Philip Gibbs
Dr. Damian Spruce	Lana Hanley	Richelle Tickle
Dr. Elizabeth Kopel	Leigh Mathews	Roslyn Kuniata
Fredah Wantum	Lucy Lavu	Sophie Jenkins
Frank Elvey	Nicol Cave	

They have contributed significantly to this report through one or more of the following ways: participating in a key informant interview, providing advice and information, connecting us with other stakeholders, and/or reviewing drafts of this report. We are deeply grateful for their support. Please note that inclusion in these acknowledgments does not indicate endorsement of the contents of this report.



In the spirit of reconciliation, Caritas Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community.

We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island readers should be aware that this publication may contain images or names of people who have since passed away.

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Table of Abbreviations

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ARoB	Autonomous Region of Bougainville
BCEP Program	Building Community Engagement in PNG Program
BCfW	Business Coalition for Women
CAN DO	Church Agency Network Disaster Operations
CPP	Church Partnership Program
CSEP	Comprehensive Strategic and Economic Partnership
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australian Government)
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ELCPNG	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea
EYF	Empowering Youth and Families
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FFT	Family Farm Teams
GET	Gender Equality Theology
IDP	International Development Policy
KII	Key Informant Interview
MAPS	Mama Bank Access Points
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
MTDP	Medium Term Development Plan (of PNG)
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PFIP	Pacific Financial Inclusion Program
PFRPD	Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNG BAN	PNG Business Advocacy Network
PNGCC	Papua New Guinea Council of Churches
SARV	Sorcery Accusation Related Violence
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TDRCC	Theology of Disaster Resilience in a Changing Climate
UN	United Nations
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States of America
VCE	Volunteer Community Educators
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WMBL	Women's Micro Bank Limited (a.k.a. Mama Bank)

Executive Summary

There is an extensive body of research and many initiatives on women's economic empowerment in Papua New Guinea (PNG). However, the body of published literature that specifically explores the contribution of faith-based networks on this issue is limited, despite the fact that faith-based actors represent a highly influential and trusted societal presence, provide a large proportion of health and education services in PNG and have extensive local community networks including in remote areas.

For this reason, Caritas Australia has undertaken a scoping study to better understand the contribution of faith-based actors to promoting women's economic empowerment in PNG. Our study comprised a literature review and some key informant interviews. It is intended to be the precursor to further research and collaboration in this area.

Our key findings on women's economic empowerment and the contribution of faith-based actors in PNG are as follows:

Defining Women's Economic Empowerment in Papua New Guinea

- The term women's economic empowerment has many definitions but is a holistic concept that commonly encompasses these elements: the ability, agency and power to make and act on economic decisions; access to resources and opportunities for paid work; self-identity and personal freedom; and support from a social or peer network.
- In PNG, economic empowerment initiatives often include both women and men (rather than women only) and typically focus on the concept of family and shared family goals. These approaches are culturally and contextually appropriate given the centrality of family and community cohesiveness within PNG society.
- Women's economic empowerment can take on different meanings in PNG. Interpretations vary from the process of assisting women to achieve financial inclusion, creating safe spaces for women to learn new skills and find courage in their shared experiences, promoting respectful family relationships where women share decision-making, or supporting women to discover their self-worth and dignity.

Barriers to Women's Economic Empowerment in Papua New Guinea

- **There are many barriers to women's economic empowerment in PNG.** These include discriminatory social norms that cause high levels of gender-based violence and inequitable divisions of labour, oppress women's agency to participate in decision-making at all levels and place a stigma on women's involvement in certain activities, such as using mobile phones.
- **Other barriers for both women and men include:** poverty; low levels of education, literacy and financial literacy; limited access to electricity, mobile phone service, banking services and credit; lack of formal identification; limited road infrastructure which hampers transport; and the exacerbating impacts of climate change on these existing barriers. Social norms mean that these barriers are higher for women than men.

- **There is a need to strengthen and scale up initiatives** on: improving literacy, financial literacy, digital literacy and livelihood skills; better access to banking services and credit schemes that are accessible to women without collateral, formal ID, literacy or mobile phones; improved access to electricity and mobile phones; and safe transport and access to markets. It is essential that any initiatives take a Do No Harm approach.
- Climate change presents a significant and growing challenge to PNG. Research shows that **gender equality and climate resilience are intrinsically linked** – women are disproportionately affected by climate change, yet they can be powerful agents of change if empowered to participate in climate resilience initiatives. Gender-inclusive climate resilience strategies and initiatives are essential both for maximizing PNG's response to climate change as well as promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

Contribution of, and opportunities for, faith-based actors in promoting positive social norms:

- **Many faith-based actors are contributing to changing individual consciousness and oppressive social norms** in relation to gender equality and women's economic empowerment, through awareness and training initiatives as well as community-level advocacy.
- **Faith-based interventions on gender equality often begin with conversations using biblical/theological interpretations of gender equality.** These conversations have been strategic and effective entry points to challenge harmful social norms and have prompted positive shifts in attitudes, despite critiques in research literature which note that some theological approaches can essentialise gender roles and perpetuate traditional and binary gender stereotypes.
- Examples of transformative initiatives that have changed attitudes and behaviours include those that encourage individual and group reflection on gender 'roles' and the division of labour within households. Women have found a space for collective agency where they realise their self-worth outside of the family and gained confidence and skills. For some women this has also been a pathway to showing they are capable leaders and business owners. Workshops that provide men with opportunities to reflect on their identity and roles in society have also prompted changes towards positive masculinity.
- **Churches are recognized as active sites for women's social participation, collective action and leadership at a community level,** especially through women's groups. Some churches and faith-based actors also run formal programs to promote women's leadership. However, scholars also note that the patriarchal structure and/or conservative norms of some churches act to reinforce or exacerbate gender inequality.

Contribution of, and opportunities for, faith-based actors in promoting women's financial inclusion and empowerment:

- **Faith-based actors are key contributors to the provision of training on literacy, financial literacy and livelihood skills in PNG. However, there is a need for development pathways and initiatives** (by both faith-based and non-faith-based actors) to transition people who complete these literacy, financial literacy and livelihood training programs into sustainable livelihoods and micro-enterprises. There is also a need to help them overcome the systemic barriers to accessing finance.
- **Faith-based actors have engaged with government to improve service delivery and policies**, including on gender-based violence and sorcery accusation related violence. However, the Church Partnership Program partners have recognised that the capacity of the seven mainline churches to engage with government for better service delivery is relatively untapped, hence the current phase of the program has been designed to prioritise support for advocacy by the churches.
- **Opportunities may exist for churches to assess how they can support women to participate in some of the more lucrative, value-added activities within agricultural value chains**, such as the sale of high value crops.

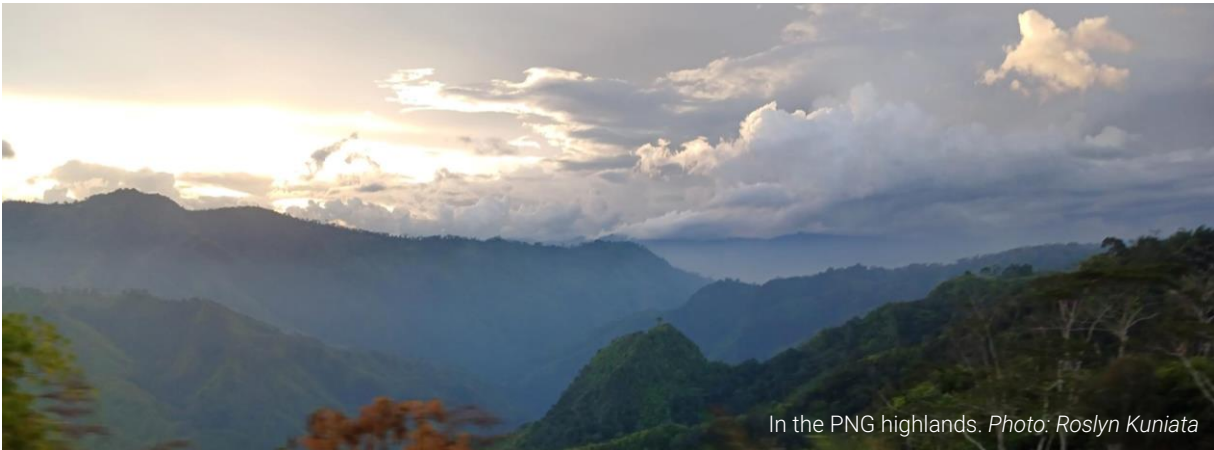
Additional opportunities for faith-based actors in scaling up reach and impact of women's economic empowerment initiatives:

- **There is a clear need to strengthen and scale up initiatives that both transform harmful social norms and increase financial inclusion and empowerment.** This will require:
 - **Stronger coordination and linkages between faith-based actors and other key stakeholders** including government (including economic divisions of government) and other civil society actors.
 - **Greater financial investment.** Resourcing is a major challenge to scaling up initiatives on gender equality and women's economic empowerment. This was raised as an issue by almost all the key informant interview participants.
- **Faith based actors could explore their role in attracting more finance for women's empowerment initiatives.** To increase resourcing for initiatives on gender equality and women's economic empowerment, more private investment is needed to complement public investment. Barriers to private investment in PNG include high transaction costs and small investment sizes related to the Pacific's lower population density, remoteness and nascent private markets. There could be value in exploring the role that faith-based actors could play in using their unique social capital and infrastructure in PNG to act an intermediary and aggregator between global investors and the many dispersed communities in PNG who need finance.

Recommendations for further research

These findings helped to identify potential opportunities for faith-based actors to expand or strengthen their support for women's economic empowerment in PNG. We recommend that the following topics be considered for further research. In each case, a follow-on question would be: how can the governments of PNG and Australia, as well as faith-based allies in Australia, support the achievement of these goals?

1. Where are the synergies and opportunities for a more systematic and strategic collaboration between churches, other civil society actors and government on initiatives for women's economic empowerment? This research could include a detailed mapping exercise to identify existing linkages and opportunities.
2. How can faith-based actors strengthen their contribution to improving women's access to financial inclusion, especially in rural and remote areas of PNG? This research could consider how faith-based actors can help reduce the social, cultural, resource and infrastructure-related barriers to accessing banking, and the social and cultural barriers that discourage women from owning a bank account or mobile phone, accessing credit or operating a business improving their literacy and financial literacy; using bank accounts, mobile phones and credit; or sustaining a business or livelihood.
3. How can faith-based actors further leverage their health and education networks to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment?
4. How can faith-based actors facilitate cooperation/collaboration of communities, churches and government in childcare entrepreneurship to increase accessibility of affordable and quality early childhood care and education, reduce the burden of unpaid care work, and provide employment opportunities for women?
5. How can faith-based actors provide development pathways and ongoing support to people who complete their training programs on literacy, financial literacy and livelihoods? How can they work with other stakeholders to create economic pathways out of their training programs?
6. How can women be economically empowered to access and benefit from participation in some of the more lucrative, value-added activities within agricultural value chains, and how can faith-based actors and governments support them?
7. How can faith-based actors use their extensive physical and social infrastructure to support communities to access reliable, clean, affordable electricity?
8. What are the opportunities for faith-based actors in PNG and Australia in attracting innovative finance with a gender / climate lens, to bring in more funding for women's empowerment projects and to resource the opportunities identified above? Such research could examine how faith-based networks could use their unique attributes to reduce the barriers currently perceived by potential private investors.
9. What are the emerging opportunities for faith-based actors to promote women's economic empowerment through gender transformative climate resilience initiatives and through gender-inclusive climate finance? In what ways can faith-based actors find convergence between theologies of gender equality and disaster resilience to promote gender transformative and climate resilient approaches to women's economic empowerment?



1. Introduction

Women play a vital role in PNG's communities, cultures and societies. Yet they experience chronic marginalisation, exclusion from decision-making, lower access to resources and opportunities, and some of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world. There are many inspiring examples of women's resilience as they navigate these complex terrains, advocate for their rights and contribute to the country's social and economic development. However, there is still much work to be done to achieve gender equality, including on women's economic empowerment.

Women's economic empowerment – including women's ability, agency, voice, power and access to resources and infrastructure to make and act on informed economic decisions – is a key part of achieving gender equality in PNG and has intrinsic links with addressing gender-based violence. There is an extensive body of research and many initiatives on women's economic empowerment in PNG. However, comparatively little of this research and literature focuses specifically on the contribution of faith-based networks, despite the fact that faith-based actors, especially churches, are highly influential in a country where over 97% of the population is Christian. The seven mainline churches of PNG are also key providers of PNG's health and education services, and play a significant role in addressing gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

To address this knowledge gap, Caritas Australia has undertaken a scoping study on the contribution of faith-based actors to promoting women's economic empowerment in PNG. Our study comprised a literature review augmented by key informant interviews.

This report examines the language and framing of women's economic empowerment used by various stakeholders including women and faith-based actors in PNG. It provides an overview of current initiatives to address gender equality and women's economic empowerment, particularly by faith-based actors. It considers where opportunities exist for faith-based actors to play a greater role in supporting women's economic empowerment, and finally recommends a number of areas for further research which we hope will be of interest to other stakeholders working on women's economic empowerment in PNG.

This scoping study was conducted between August and October 2023, in parallel to a related feasibility study that Caritas Australia is conducting in the second half of 2023 to explore innovative finance opportunities with a gender and/or climate lens in several countries including PNG, once again with a particular focus on the role that faith-based networks can play.

2. Methodology

For this scoping study, the faith-based actors we considered included the seven mainline churches¹ and their development agencies; religious congregations; and any institutions or services that these churches and congregations auspice, including safehouses and universities.

Our research questions were:

- What is the current context for women's economic empowerment in PNG, including:
 - What are the key issues, opportunities and barriers, particularly for women-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs)?
 - How is women's economic empowerment being measured in PNG?
- How do a) women in PNG, b) the governments of PNG and Australia, and c) faith-based actors in PNG, understand the term 'women's economic empowerment' and what do they perceive as the barriers and opportunities?
- What approaches are currently being used to promote women's economic empowerment in PNG, especially by faith-based actors? How do they support a holistic approach to women's empowerment?
- Given the unique strengths of faith-based communities in PNG, what other opportunities exist for faith-based communities to promote women's economic empowerment?
- What are the governments of Australia and PNG currently doing to support faith-based actors to promote women's economic empowerment in PNG?

The study comprised a literature review and 13 key informant interviews (KIIs) with a total of 15 stakeholders based in PNG, Australia or other countries, conducted in August and September 2023. The KII participants were representatives from organisations that provide services and/or undertake research on issues relevant to women's economic empowerment and gender equality in PNG. There was no engagement with community members.

KIIs were semi-structured and were conducted over online meeting platforms, Whatsapp calls or in-person, depending on the preferences of the KII participants. The typical duration of each interview was about one hour.

Ethics documents for this scoping study were developed in line with the Research for Development Impact Network Principles for Ethical Research and Evaluation in Development as well as Caritas Australia's policies.

Limitations of this scoping study included the relatively short timeframe to conduct the study, which significantly restricted the number of KIIs we could undertake as well as the depth and breadth of our literature review. While our study sought to encompass the broad range of faith-based actors in PNG, with the exception of Pentecostal churches, there was a skew towards Catholic organisations given Caritas Australia's existing connections. Another limitation was that search functionality for the literature review was limited to open-access sources. The findings and recommendations of our scoping study should be considered in light of these limitations.

3. The framing and language of women's economic empowerment

3.1 Conceptual framings of women's economic empowerment

The various framings of women's economic empowerment we will discuss below are all informed by conceptual definitions of women's empowerment.

Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as a process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices -- decisions that individuals make to live the lives they want (for example, choice of livelihood, whether or not to get married, how many children to have and when to have them, etc.) acquire such an ability. For Kabeer, this process necessitates a changing of power relations in favour of those who exercise little power over their own lives. She defines power as having control over resources, as well over beliefs, values and attitudes. This process requires change at the personal and relational levels, as well as in the broader context of an individual's life. This means change in how people see themselves, their roles in society and those of others, their confidence in making decisions and taking actions that concern themselves and others (Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment also means changes in power dynamics within households, and communities, and as well as systemic changes including shifts in social norms, attitudes and beliefs, and more formally, in policies and laws (Lombardini et al., 2017).

Similarly, Mosedale (2005) defines four aspects of empowerment. She notes that to be empowered means one must have been disempowered - women are disempowered relative to men. Second, she emphasises that empowerment is not something that can be bestowed on individuals, rather it is something that is claimed by those who would be empowered. Third, she notes that most definitions of empowerment include "a sense of people making decisions on matters which are important in their lives and being able to carry them out." These decisions are a result of a process of reflection, analysis and action that can happen on an individual or collective level. The fourth aspect of empowerment is that it is an ongoing process rather than an end result or product (Mosedale, 2005).

3.2 The framing of women's economic empowerment in international contexts

The **United Nations Secretary General's High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment**, in its 2018 report, *Leave No One Behind: A Call to Action for Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment* recognises that while women's active and meaningful participation in the economy is a "uniquely potent way for women to achieve greater control over their own lives," they continue to face many barriers to be "dynamic economic actors (UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, 2018, p. 3)". These barriers include four overarching-systemic constraints: adverse social norms; discriminatory laws and lack of legal protection, the failure to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid household work and care; and the lack of access to financial, digital and property assets. To address these, the report identifies seven drivers of women's economic empowerment:

1. Changing adverse social norms and promoting positive models
 2. Ensuring legal protections and reforming of discriminatory laws and regulations
 3. Recognising, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work
 4. Building digital, financial and property assets
 5. Changing business culture and practice
 6. Improving public sector practices in employment and procurement
 7. Strengthening women's visibility, collective voice and representation
- (UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, 2018, p.4)

UN Women defines women's economic empowerment as the ability for women to access secure and decent work; the ability to accumulate assets, as well as to influence institutions and public policies on growth and development. UN Women also pays particular attention to unpaid care work and initiatives to reduce and redistribute this responsibility to enable women to engage in productive work. There is also emphasis on earning higher income, having better access to, and control over resources, as well as ensuring greater security, including protection from all forms of gender-based violence (UN Women, 2013).

The **Asian Development Bank**, in its 2023 report on Women's Economic Empowerment in the Pacific Region, conceptualises women's economic empowerment as women "having the ability to succeed and advance economically, and the power to make and act on economic decisions to enhance their well-being and position in society" (Asian Development Bank, 2023, p. 2). It cites three main domains for women's economic empowerment:

1. Women's access to economic assets, services, networks and opportunities including financial, physical, technological, and knowledge-based assets; as well as access to capital, training, business opportunities and markets.
2. An enabling environment including policies, laws and regulations at the market and state level; as well as norms practiced in formal institutions, and at the household/family and community levels that facilitate women's access to, and control over assets.
3. Women's voice and agency including capabilities, self-esteem, confidence and sense of self-worth.

(Asian Development Bank, 2023, p. 2).

3.3 The framing of women's economic empowerment in the Pacific

The varying conceptualisations and definitions of women's economic empowerment discussed above align with regional and national approaches.

The 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration outlines the following commitments to women's economic empowerment:

1. Remove barriers to women's employment and participation in the formal and informal sectors, including in relation to legislation that directly or indirectly limits women's access to employment opportunities or contributes to discriminatory pay and conditions for women,
2. Implement equal employment opportunity and gender equality measures in public sector employment, including state owned enterprises and statutory boards, to increase the proportion of women employed, including in senior positions and advocate for a similar approach in private sector agencies,
3. Improve the facilities and governance of local produce markets, including fair and transparent local regulation and taxation policies, so that market operations increase profitability and efficiency and encourage women's safe, fair and equal participation in local economies, and
4. Target support to women entrepreneurs in the formal and informal sectors, e.g. financial services, information and training, and review legislation that limits women's access to finance, assets, land and productive resources (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2012).



Showcasing products at the 2023 World Food Day celebration in Buka, Autonomous Region of Bougainville.
Photo: Roslyn Kuniata

The **Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Rights** (2018-2030) was endorsed by the Pacific Ministers for Women in 2017. Its goal is 'to accelerate the implementation of gender commitments at all levels in order to achieve gender equality and the promotion and protection of the human rights of all women and girls, in all their diversity' (Pacific Community, 2017). The document details priorities on women's economic empowerment that are aligned with the priorities of the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. These are focused on "strengthening women's financial capability and ensuring expanded pathways to economic opportunities for all women of all diversities, and increased financial services. The document outlines five pathways for implementation. Specifically for women's economic empowerment, this means:

1. Increasing knowledge on economic pathways, the impact of macroeconomic policies and trade agreements on women; and scaling up data collection, particularly on unpaid care work
2. Mainstreaming legal and policy frameworks to ensure that barriers to women's economic participation are removed, and access to inclusive financial services and markets. Laws should be mainstreamed to guarantee gender-responsive workplace policies, equal employment opportunities, and equal pay, and measures to support employment and entrepreneurship of young women and girls
3. Strengthening partnerships between, and with, governments, private sector, businesses, education and training service providers, civil society and women's rights organisations; and supporting women's participation in decision-making at all levels
4. Realigning resources to better support women's economic empowerment initiatives, including towards the effective implementation of social protection programs that alleviate burdens of unpaid care work.
5. Strengthening economic structures and access to resources towards equitable employment, and non-discrimination and to foster work and family life balance (Pacific Community [SPC], 2018)

Similarly, the **Pacific Islands Forum 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent**, while not explicitly using the language of women's economic empowerment, acknowledges the importance of empowering women "to be active participants in economic, political and social life, and recognise the importance of creating accessible services and infrastructure to enable all Pacific peoples to participate and benefit from development outcomes" (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2022, p.6). More specifically, in the section on *Resources and Economic Development*, the strategy points to the need to "increase opportunities for all Pacific Peoples, including women and girls, to engage in economic activity including in the management of their resources and further development of MSMEs" (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2022, p. 23).

In the Pacific, a major initiative to advance gender equality and women's empowerment was the **Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program**, funded by the Australian Government. This was a ten-year (2012-2022) initiative to improve opportunities for the political, economic and social advancement of women and girls in the Pacific region. It's long-term and multi-dimensional approach was outlined in four intended outcomes: Leadership and Decision-Making; Women's Economic Empowerment; Ending Violence Against Women; and Enhancing Agency (Tabualevu et al., 2020, p. iv).

An evaluation of the program found that **while there has been steady progress in country-specific initiatives, collective, regional progress has been modest**. The evaluation also found **that more focus should be given to address harmful social norms towards transformational change** (Tabualevu et. al., 2020). As a response, the program was redesigned to take into consideration lessons learned, particularly given the adverse socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls, and that the context for gender equality in the Pacific is deeply rooted and changing.

In 2021, the program was re-launched as the Pacific Women Lead Program 2021- 2026 with the end goal that “Pacific women and girls, in all their diversity, are safe, and equitably share in resources, opportunity and decision-making with men and boys” (DFAT, 2021, p. 3). It is funded by DFAT and the Pacific Community (SPC) is the key implementing partner. In 2022 a new governance board was established, composed of a majority of Pacific women leaders including representatives from the Pacific Community, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, DFAT and ten independent members (Pacific Community, 2022).

Pacific Women Lead has three broad end of program outcomes:

1. Women’s leadership is promoted
2. Women’s rights are realised
3. Pacific regional partners increase their effectiveness of regional gender equality efforts (DFAT, 2021, p. 3).

While women’s economic empowerment is not explicitly mentioned in these overall outcomes, the design framework includes in its discussion of the Pacific context information about the barriers to women’s economic empowerment. These include the lack of employment and productive opportunities; limited access to safety, education, sexual and reproductive health services; as well as societal expectations and social norms that perpetuate gender division of labour, and limit women’s access to economic development opportunities to improve productivity, to financial resources and labour force participation (DFAT, 2021). The same document also recognises the need to integrate women’s economic approaches to priority areas such as climate change, agriculture and fisheries, coastal management and migration. Women’s economic empowerment is discussed in greater detail under Outcome 2 where women having “more equitable access to resilient economic opportunities and increased voice in economic decision-making” is prioritised.

In the Pacific, almost 15% of the population is estimated to live with a disability. Economic empowerment for people living with a disability is specifically addressed in the **Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: 2016 -2025** (PFRPD). It envisions “An inclusive, barrier-free, and rights-based society for men, women, and children with disabilities, which embraces the diversity of all Pacific people” (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, n.d. p.11). Aligned with the priorities of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the Incheon Strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals, the PFRPD recognises the “multiple and compounding” discrimination that women and girls with disabilities in the Pacific experience.

3.4 The framing of women's economic empowerment in Papua New Guinea

Commitments by the Government of Papua New Guinea to women's economic empowerment are reflected in the country's *Medium Term Development Plan* (MTDP) for 2023-2027. This includes economic empowerment, particularly of youth, as a Deliberate Intervention Program for sustainable population; and prioritises women's empowerment by committing to address "issues affecting women by creating fair and equal opportunities in education, sports, arts, employment, business activities and political representation" (Government of Papua New Guinea, 2023, p.41).

The PNG Government also sees women's economic empowerment as an important aspect of addressing gender-based violence. PNG's *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender Based Violence 2016-2025* specifically notes the importance of providing economic empowerment interventions to facilitate more effective reintegration of survivors into society. This includes the provision of income generating programs and skills training to enable survivors' financial independence.

Eves and Titus, in their report on *Women's Economic Empowerment Among Coffee Smallholders in Papua New Guinea* (2020) highlighted that **women's lived experiences of empowerment and disempowerment must be understood in a way that does not alienate women from the social and intimate relations that define their everyday life**. They note that in PNG, "intimate relations within the household have a crucial impact on women's economic agency and broader empowerment" (Eves & Titus, 2020, p.1). Similar to Kabeer, the authors identify increased power and agency as important components of economic empowerment but emphasise that this must happen alongside what they call economic advancement, which is the process of women gaining increased income, access to employment and other activities that increase their resources. They note the crucial need to "see empowerment as part of a process of social change towards greater equality" and to understand agency to be transformative, and having the "potential to challenge and destabilise inequalities, rather than forms of agency that simply express and reproduce inequalities" (Eves & Titus, 2020).

Their report measures women's economic empowerment based on the following indicators inspired by conceptual definitions of empowerment:

1. Ability to make and influence decisions such as involvement in decisions about income spending, the provision of family housing and food, and children's education
 2. Self-Perception-- for example, on women's educational equality and gender roles and attitudes to violence
 3. Personal freedom-- for example, freedom of movement, to choose who to vote for, to use family planning, etc.
 4. Access to, and control over resources including land and property, extent of role in managing and keeping family's cash and independent income and savings
 5. Support from social networks as in the existence of, and participation in community groups
 6. Access to, and decisions about services such as health services, markets and expertise like training and information
- (Eves & Titus, 2020, p. 5-6)

From a faith-based perspective, theological interpretations of biblical teachings that support gender equality have proven useful in PNG. The most well-known of these is the Gender Equality Theology (GET), developed by UnitingWorld with the support of the Australian Government and the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program. For some church partners in the PNG Church Partnership Program (CCP) the GET is a strategic entry point to challenge harmful views and practices deeply embedded in predominantly Christian communities resistant to the language of human rights, while also bringing to light theological interpretations of biblical teachings that support gender equality. Whereas the international gender agenda begins with individual rights, GET begins with “God as the creator of male and female who have equal value” (Anderson, 2012). It is part of a holistic integral human development approach which ensures that all individuals live life in all its fullness. Women and men are created equally by God, and so must exercise mutual dominion in the Christian community (Bird & Carroll, 2016). One interview participant noted that the use of GET varies within each church in terms of the extent and way it is contextualized, based on their doctrines and their development programs.

For another of our interviewees, using this framework, and infusing it with the language of human rights has been particularly helpful in their work to support victim-survivors of gender-based, and sorcery-accusation related violence. As the interviewee described their approach, they talked about how they are a faith-based organisation but operate as an NGO:

“We abide by national and international human rights law in dealing with survivors but we amalgamate it with our Catholic beliefs...we explain [to the communities] that we are made in the image and likeness of God. That is a well-known saying to all Christians...we are all equal in the eyes of God. Even the laws of human beings uphold this meaning of dignity... We found that when we went to the communities with human rights info, they did not easily accept human rights. They thought it was a foreign concept. Now when we go out to communities, and we amalgamated the Gender Equality Theology, that is very well accepted in the community, because everyone is part of a Christian community.”

While theological interpretations on gender equality are an effective tool for the interpretation of gender rights into contextually and culturally appropriate framing, some literature points to how some theological interpretations of gender can oversimplify the complexities of gender and perpetuate discriminatory behaviour against women and girls. For example, Eves (2012) points to how some theological teachings still allude to the “traditional model of the man as the head of the family” (p.4). Hermkens (2011), in her research about religion and gender ideology during the armed conflict in Bougainville, describes how religion essentialised women’s roles as “reproducers and custodians of land and culture,” and men as defenders and protectors of their nation and people. Hermkens, Kenneth and McKenna (2022, p. 314) noted that some theological teachings in PNG advocate “for a particular status quo by essentialising gender relations” and reinforce traditional and binary notions of gender. At the same time however, Hermkens and colleagues also recognise the significance and effectiveness of these theological teachings in advancing women’s rights and gender equality in Papua New Guinea (Hermkens et al., 2022).

Initiatives by faith-based actors that provide women with increased access to resources and skills to participate more actively in the economy have incorporated these perspectives during training and awareness raising activities. **Reflections from the experiences of different faith-based organisations bring to light an emphasis on working within family structures to bring about transformative change.** Discourses developed around the concept of the family as the basic social unit in communities have shaped a more relatable language on justice and equity, and have allowed family members, to construct common goals around family and for decision-making to be more equitably shared between couples (Pamphilon et al., 2019).

For example, several participants interviewed emphasised the critical importance and effectiveness of using theological and/or family-values-based framing when initiating discussions on women's economic empowerment. Interview participants told us that where rights-based language was used, it was either blended into an overarching theological framing and/or brought in at the very end of a course of training after trust and relationships had been established between the trainer and trainees. In such situations where family-based approaches are used, the term 'women's economic empowerment' is not used. As one interview participant said:

“Once men hear this term ‘women’s economic empowerment’, they think it’s women-only activities and some men do not support their wives [to participate].”

The interviewee noted that if solely women trainers are used for family-focused training, some men will also interpret that to mean that the training is only for women.

Some faith-based actors draw from both a theological and human rights-based approach. For example, the Nazareth Center for Rehabilitation sees itself both as a faith-based organisation and as a non-government organisation. In discussing their approach to women's rights, one interview participant said:

“Our standard operating procedures take into account all of those international and national laws, for example the Family Law Act, CEDAW and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We amalgamate these with our Catholic belief. We are a Catholic organisation under the Catholic Sisters of Nazareth. We are a faith-based organisation in one way, but we operate as an NGO in another way.”

Women's economic empowerment takes on different meanings for faith-based organisations.

From various interviews that were done as part of this study, women's economic empowerment initiatives take on various forms such as the provision of financial support or grants, facilitating market access where women can sell their goods; the conduct of skills training on various trades such as cooking, tailoring and sewing, backyard gardening, farming, and on financial and numeracy literacy, among others. While initiatives vary, they are most often focused on supporting rural women. In many cases, the trainings provided are part of a holistic approach to uphold the dignity, self-worth and freedom of women, particularly of survivors of gender-based and sorcery associated violence.

Anderson (2012, 2015), as she explored how gender was being translated in early stages of the Church Partnership Program, highlights the meanings that program participants attached to the spaces created by the different skills training. On one hand, it is a space where women learn new

skills that could enable them to start their own small businesses, on the other, it is one where women were able to feel safe in conversations about gender and power in family and community relationships (Anderson, 2012). She notes that the **trainings have facilitated women's collective agency**, becoming a space beyond the family where the women "subjectify themselves as citizens with responsibilities to the other members of the group, and to the broader Christian community." (Anderson, 2015, p.1365).

3.5 The framing of women's economic empowerment by the Australian Government

The Australian Government has committed to advance gender equality and women's rights not only domestically but also through its foreign policy and international development efforts. In 2016, Australia released a *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy*. It described gender inequality as:

a result of unequal power distribution between women and men, exacerbated by ongoing discrimination, weaknesses in laws, policies and institutions, and social relations that normalise inequality. This strategy sees gender as a power relation. Work on gender equality therefore aims to address unequal gender norms that constrain women and men, as well as transgender and intersex people.
(Commonwealth of Australia, 2016).

The strategy prioritises women's economic empowerment through the creation of better jobs for women, investing in women's entrepreneurship, promoting economic empowerment through trade, and supporting the creation of an enabling policy environment.

In August 2023, the Australian Government released a new *International Development Policy* (IDP), which places "gender equality, disability and social inclusion at the centre of Australia's development program" (DFAT, n.d.b.). With the high-level strategy now set by the IDP, the government is now developing three closely related strategies: "a new International Gender Equality Strategy, a dedicated LGBTQIA+ Human Rights Engagement Strategy and a new Disability Equity and Rights Strategy to help make the region more secure and inclusive" (DFAT, n.d.b.).

The IDP reinstated a target for 80% of all development investments to address gender equality. There is also a requirement that any new investments of more than AUD\$3 million must include gender equality objectives (DFAT, 2023a).

A new *International Development Performance and Delivery Framework* was released by DFAT at the same time as the IDP. In this framework, gender equality and women's economic empowerment are key indicators. Progress against gender equality will be evaluated using the Global Gender Gap Index Framework, which looks at four interconnected pillars: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Opportunities, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2023). Economic empowerment will be evaluated by the 'Number of women entrepreneurs provided with financial and/or business development services' (DFAT, 2023c, p.15).

4. The wider social context in PNG and how it affects women's economic empowerment

4.1 Population and geography of PNG

PNG has a population of around 9.4 million¹. Most of the population (85 - 87%) live in rural communities, and about 80% depend on subsistence farming and small-scale cash crops for a living (FAO, 2017; UNCTAD, 2023; UNDP, n.d.). PNG's population is also characterised by a youth bulge, with 60% of people aged under 25 years (PNG Climate Change Development Authority, 2020).

Poverty is a major factor in PNG - 37.5% of the population live below the poverty line (World Bank, n.d.b, 2017 figure). According to the UNDP's 2020 Human Development Report, PNG was ranked 155th out of 189 countries. Malnutrition remains a major problem - approximately 29% of children under 5 years old are stunted (Schmidt, 2019) and it is responsible for an estimated 33% of all child deaths (Landi et al., 2016). Only 16.6% of the population has access to electricity (ranging from 57% in urban areas to 11.4% in rural areas) (National Statistics Office PNG, 2019).

Alongside these sobering statistics there are many examples of the resilience, generosity and compassion of Papua New Guineans. This includes the pivotal support provided by 50,000 PNG citizens to Allied forces during the Second World War (see section 4.10); PNG civil society's support for refugees detained on Manus Island by Australia, as well as displaced people from West Papua (Catholic Leader, 2019; Caritas PNG, 2020); and the support from the government and citizens of PNG to Australia during the 2019/20 catastrophic bushfire season, including the offer of 1,000 PNG soldiers and firefighters to combat the fires as well as a donation of AUD 61,000 collected by the community of Lae City in Morobe Province, PNG (The Diplomat, 2020; ABC News, 2020a; ABC News, 2020b).

Papua New Guinea's landmass consists of the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, the islands of Manus, New Britain, New Ireland and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, as well as another 600 smaller islands and atolls. It is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, with over 800 different cultures and languages. PNG is also one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, containing 7% of the world's biodiversity (World Bank, 2021).

¹ PNG's last census was in 2011. Estimates of PNG's current population vary from a 'conservative' estimate of 9.4 million in 2022 (National Research Institute PNG, n.d.), 11.7 million (National Statistics Office PNG, n.d.) and a much higher estimate of 17 million by the UN Population Fund in an unreleased report, although there is doubt about the accuracy of that figure (Laveil, 2023). Another population census is due in 2024.

Figure 1: Map of Papua New Guinea



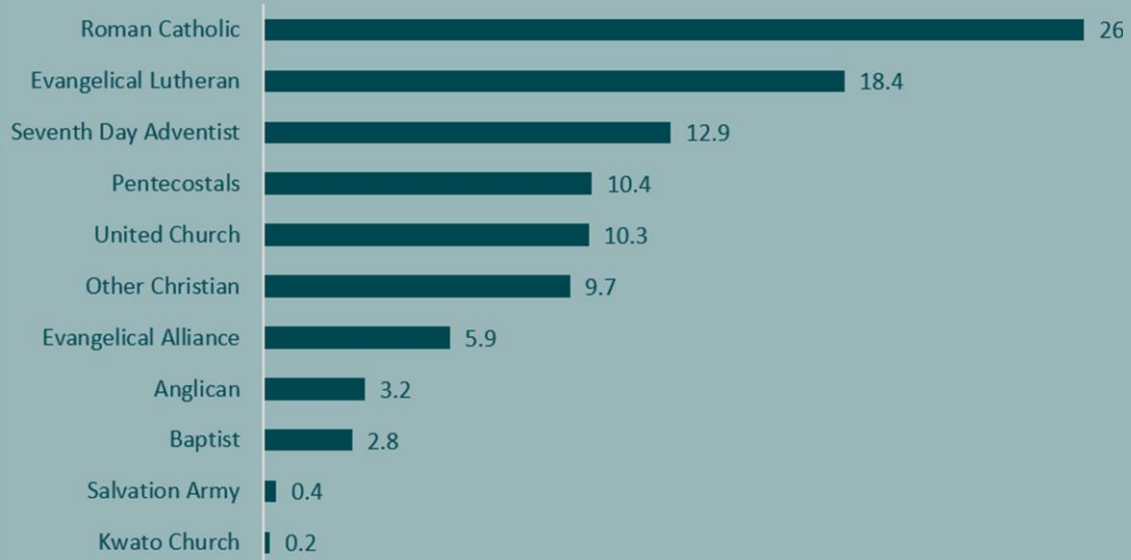
Source: The United Nations (2004)

4.2 Faith-based actors in PNG

According to PNG's latest census in 2011, 95.6% of PNG's population identified as Christian (National Statistics Office PNG, 2011), and churches are widely recognised as highly influential actors in PNG society.

PNG has seven mainline churches which, according to the 2011 census, represent 74% of the population (National Statistics Office PNG, 2011) and deliver over half of PNG's health and education services, including in rural and remote areas where government services are limited. They include the Anglican Church of PNG, Baptist Union of PNG, Evangelical Lutheran Church of PNG (ELCPNG), Roman Catholic Church, The Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church and the United Church of PNG. In this report, our focus and analysis on churches is on the seven mainline churches. We have not included Pentecostal and smaller Christian churches in our analysis.

Figure 2: Religious identification amongst individuals in PNG who identify as Christian. Data taken from 2011 census (National Statistics Office PNG, 2011).



According to the 2011 census, the Catholic Church has the largest following (26% of the population), followed by the ELCPNG (18.4%) and the Seventh Day Adventist Church 12.9%) - see Figure 1. There are regional variations in the spread and concentration of the seven mainline churches across different parts of the country, which is likely due to historic missionary influences (National Statistics Office PNG, 2011; CPP Phase 4 Design Document, 2022). According to the CPP Phase 4 Design Document (2022), the Catholic Church and Lutheran Church have a presence across the country, and that the SDA have a strong presence in the highlands and are also found in most towns. There are particularly high concentrations of individual denomination in some areas, including the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (68% Catholic), Morobe province (67% Evangelical Lutheran) and Northern Province (61% Anglican, 61%) (National Statistics Office PNG, 2011).

PNG churches have been described as “the largest and most prominent components of civil society” (Asian Development Bank, 2015) and are key service providers, particularly in health and education. They provide about half of PNG’s health services, run about 40% of primary and secondary schools, and run two of PNG’s universities (Asian Development Bank, 2015). Faith-based health and education networks are discussed in more detail in section 5.5.1.

The mainline churches differ in their organisational structure and mechanisms for service delivery. In their report *Ringing the church bell: The role of churches in governance and public performance in Papua New Guinea*, Hauck et al. (2005) note that the larger churches, particularly the Catholic, Lutheran and SDA churches, have relatively strong coordinating offices while others are more diverse and widely spread. However, while the Catholic Church is led by the Catholic Bishops Commission for PNG and Solomon Islands, based in Port Moresby, their 19 dioceses across PNG’s 21 provinces each have a certain autonomy in implementing initiatives in their diocese. One interview participant noted that in their experience, this decentralised structure was an asset in

working with the Catholic Church as it provided multiple entry points for collaboration on programming.

There is also variation in mechanisms for service delivery amongst the churches. Hauck et al. (2005) note that:

Some have a variety of related entities, while others carry out functions, such as social services, through a single organisation. The Catholic Bishops Conference, for example, works through Caritas PNG, which engages in justice, peace and development activities. The Catholic Church also has agencies for education, health and family life. The Anglican Church, for its part, has the Anglican Health Service, the Anglican Education Division, the Youth Ministry and Anglicare - a trust of the Anglican Diocese of Port Moresby that engages in HIV/AIDS-related activities. The SDA operate through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA PNG), which sees itself as a development agency operating independently of the church (Nichols, 2003). Other churches, like the United Church and the Lutherans, provide services directly under their own name.

The seven mainline churches collaborate through a range of forums, networks and joint programs. One of the most significant programs is the Church Partnership Program (CPP), where the seven mainline churches work in partnership with Australian NGOs from their sister Australian churches, as well as the mainline churches 'peak body' the PNG Council of Churches (PNGCC) and the PNG and Australian Governments. More information about the CPP is provided in Section 5.1.

The mainline churches also collaborate through the Melanesian Institute. The Melanesian Institute was established in the late 1960s by Catholic actors but they were later joined by other mainline churches of PNG. The Melanesian Institute's core services are "social research, teaching and publishing to help all churches, NGOs, government agencies and even individuals from all walks of life to speak more clearly to the needs of all people in Melanesia" (Melanesian Institute, 2023).

Other churches in PNG include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, a growing number of Pentecostal Christian religious groups, and members of the Baha'i Faith, Islam and Judaism. According to Boston University's 2020 World Religions Database, an estimated 3.3% of Papua New Guineans hold indigenous beliefs. Many more individuals are thought to integrate their Christian faith with indigenous beliefs and practices, including animism (US Department of State, 2022; DFAT, 2022; PALM Scheme, n.d.).

In conducting the key informant interviews, the authors gained the impression that there is a distinct difference between how the mainline and non-mainline churches in PNG are perceived. These perceived differences arose in the context of different issues, including tithing and sorcery accusation related violence. One of our learnings has been the need to be more specific about which faith-based actors in PNG we are discussing, and the importance of clarifying that our focus for this scoping study is on the mainline churches of PNG.

4.3 Social norms

Despite recent advances, PNG is a patriarchal society with highly gendered roles for men and women and high levels of gender inequality. As noted by the Government of PNG in its 2010-2030 Development Strategic Plan, “gender disparity is evident in many aspects of society, from education, employment and political representation to mortality and cultural norms” (PNG Department of National Planning & Monitoring, 2022).

On the United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index (a composite metric of gender inequality based on three dimensions of reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market), PNG ranked second lowest (169 of 170 countries) in 2021 (UNDP, 2022a). Gender inequalities are driven by social norms deeply rooted in PNG culture.

Pacific Women Lead (2021) identified ten harmful gender norms in PNG:

- When women are subservient to men in their families and their contributions are undervalued
- Most married girls are expected to move to their husband’s tribal home, limiting their access to resources and education.
- Sorcery-accusation related violence is more severe against women than men
- Men control family income, especially of higher value crops
- Women are under-represented in all levels of leadership
- Half as many women as men work in wage earning or salaried positions
- Women’s isolation during childbirth limits access to health care and contributes to maternal mortality
- Almost 1 in 4 women have no formal education and have lower functional literacy than men
- Bride price² is now widely used to give ownership and control of women to their husband and his family.
- The high level of acceptance of men’s violence against women

In subsequent sections, we unpack some of these norms.

At a policy level, **Papua New Guinea’s legislation on gender equality is spearheaded by the National Women’s and Gender Equality Policy 2011-2015**. This is an overarching framework for advancing development priorities and ensuring equal opportunities, equal treatment and equal entitlement for women to achieve full human development. It draws on the PNG Constitution and is founded on several national strategies such as Vision 2050, the PNG Development Strategic Plan 2010-2030, the Midterm Development Plan 2010-2015, and the PNG National Platform for Action: A Decade of Action for Women Towards National Unity and Sustainability 1995-2000. It is guided by the country’s commitment to the Convention of Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the MDGs, and the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender Equality 2005-2015 (Department for Community Development, n.d.).

Its overall objective is “to facilitate the development and implementation of a gender equality and women’s advancement programmes which will be founded on the principles of equality of all

² a payment from a groom’s family to the bride’s family

persons, particularly women and men, as enshrined in the constitution” (Department for Community Development, n.d., p. 20). Towards this end, the policy aims to create an enabling environment for the realisation of government commitments to gender equality through policies, programs structures and mechanisms to empower women and transform gender relations within government and the larger society (Department for Community Development, n.d.).

4.3.1 Women’s participation in decision-making

Patriarchal attitudes mean that women are often marginalised from decision-making. At a household level, the extent to which women are involved in household decision-making (such as how money is spent and how labour is divided) varies between regions and individual households (Eves et al., 2018), however it is common for both men and women to hold the belief that the husband should be the head of the household (Eves et al., 2018; Eves and Titus, 2020). Gibbs (2016) noted that “in most cases the decision-making process in the household could best be called ‘patriarchy in the last instance’, where the man makes the final decision when an accord cannot be reached”. This was supported in a later study by Gibbs et al. (2021a) examining social perspectives amongst different groups in a remote community in Madang province: “When asked about their perception on women being involved in decision making and airing their views, participants in the questionnaire all agree that women should be involved, especially women with leadership qualities and good decision-making skills. However, at the end, the men should always have the last say”.

When it comes to decisions about women’s own healthcare, 54% of female respondents said they make decisions regarding their own health care jointly with their husband, 13% reported that such decisions are made mainly by their husband, and 29% indicated that they mainly make these decisions on their own (National Statistics Office PNG, 2019).



A woman cooking a traditional PNG dish
Photo: Nomad1988/ Shutterstock.com

Gibbs (2016) notes that **peer pressure for men to maintain stereotypical gender roles is “a significant cultural issue**. Men noted how if a man helps his wife, other men would offer smart comments to make him feel ashamed - ‘Em harim tok bilong meri tumas’ (He listens too much to his wife). ‘Em kago boi bilong yu ah?’ (‘Is he your [the wife’s] labourer/ servant?’).

The lack of gender balance in decision-making is also reflected at the national level in government.

Since PNG’s independence in 1975, only nine women have ever been elected to PNG’s 111-seat national parliament, including two in the most recent 2022 elections (ABC News, 2022). Social norms and stereotyped gender roles are substantial barriers to women’s political participation - there is a widely held view that political leadership is perceived as a masculine trait, including amongst women (National Democratic Institute, 2021). Fairio (2019) noted that the “big man mentality” and the perception of “politics as a man’s game” is a major handicap to women successfully contesting elections, and that other barriers include “lack of logistical support to carry out an extensive and effective campaign; lack of cooperation between women voters and women candidates and parties not endorsing women”. Strouboulis et al. (2022) note that elections are “highly localized and personalised; political candidates must bargain for support amongst those who control voting blocs through patronage networks. Since women are mostly excluded from leadership hierarchies in the first place, they often lack the resources and networks to negotiate support among local leaders”.

At a regional level, the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARoB) has taken significant steps to improve women’s representation in government. The 2004 ARoB constitution reserved 3 seats for women in its 39-seat parliament. There is discussion about whether this quota would be seen as a ceiling rather than a floor, and whether it makes it harder for women to contest the ‘open seats’ (Sepoe, n.d.; Kemish, 2022); nevertheless, two women have successfully contested the ‘open seats’ (Kemish, 2022). In 2016 a Community Government Act was introduced which established 47 local government wards and mandated that each ward must elect one male and one female representative, with the leadership role for each ward rotating between male and female representatives (George, 2018). One interview participant spoke about the opportunity that lies in supporting the female ward leaders to undertake the work of consulting communities and delivering on requests from the community at a ward level, e.g. for better water or power services.

4.3.2 Violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls in PNG is “prevalent and severe” (PNG-Australia Partnership, 2022) and PNG ranks amongst the top three countries in the world for rates of intimate partner violence (Sardinha et al., 2022). The PNG Demographic and Health Survey 2016-18 reports that 63% of women in PNG have experienced spousal physical, sexual, or emotional violence, with 54% having experienced it in the past 12 months. Spousal violence is most commonly physical violence (experienced by 54% of women), followed by emotional (51%) and sexual (29%) violence. Rates of violence vary between regions within PNG, and between urban and rural populations. Data from the National Demographic Health Survey, as cited in Gibbs et al. (2021b) shows that women’s experience of spousal violence increases with improved education and household wealth. Fifty-five percent of women with an elementary education reported experiencing spousal violence, compared with 76% of women with a higher education (National Statistics Office PNG, 2019).

Violence against women and girls is entrenched in societal attitudes and norms, so much so that many women express support for norms that accept violence towards women: 70% of women and 72% of men agreed that wife beating is justified under one or more of the following five circumstances: the wife burning the food, arguing with the husband, going out without telling the husband, neglecting the children, or refusing to have sex with the husband (National Statistical Office, 2019).

Women and girls with a disability are a particularly vulnerable group. According to the UN Population Fund, they are two to three times more likely to be victims of physical and sexual abuse than those without disabilities (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2016). Supporting the economic empowerment of people living with disabilities is a particular focus of the Building Community Engagement in PNG (BCEP) Program (see section 5.1) which ‘promotes constructive engagement between civil society and the PNG Government’ (DFAT, n.d.a.) as part of the Papua New Guinea-Australia Comprehensive Strategic and Economic Partnership (see section 4.10).

Protection from authorities for women who experience violence is extremely limited. As outlined in the PNG-Australia Western Province Strategy 2022 to 2030, ‘Protection Orders issued by District Courts are not enforced by under-resourced police, and families are often unwilling to support survivors of GBV due to fear of repercussions from the perpetrator. As a result, cases of violence against women generally go unreported’ (PNG-Australia Partnership, 2022). A study by Putt and Kanan (2021) found that there is low but growing public awareness of Family Protection Orders (FPOs), but the process is not well understood. They also found that the support of family and church can improve the effectiveness of FPOs and reduce the risks to survivors of domestic and family violence. Their research found that church leaders were trusted members of society – of the seven options provided in a survey of young people, “the most popular recommendation for whom a victim should talk to was church leaders, followed by another family member/family leader”. However, Putt and Kanan also found that “there appears to have been little overt community education about the FPA [Family Protection Act] and FPOs by or with the main church organisations, though at the local level church groups or networks may be heavily involved in supporting survivors, the most obvious being NCR [the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation]” (Putt and Kanan, 2021).

It is imperative that a Do No Harm approach is taken to any women’s empowerment initiatives. There is a significant body of research demonstrating a link between violence against women and girls and some initiatives to improve women’s economic empowerment where those initiatives have focused only on increasing women’s economic participation. Research by Eves et al. (2020) demonstrated links between women’s income-generation activities and an increased incidence of violence. An example commonly reported by women participating in their research was that if returning home late after selling produce at the market, their husbands become suspicious, or verbally or physically aggressive that they were not home early enough to make dinner for the family.

A driver of violence against women and girls is the practice of paying a bride price. The practice involves a monetary or material payment from a groom’s family to the bride’s family and is a common familial and cultural tradition in PNG. It varies in different provinces but the primary purpose is to provide compensation to the bride’s family (Verroya, 2022). According to Eves et al. (2018), it is “today widely understood to be a simple property transaction, in which the wife

becomes the property of the husband, her purchaser.” Eves et al. (2018a) note how the practice justifies controlling behaviour, providing concrete examples of language used by men such as “yu tap aninit long kontrol bilong mi” (you are under my control); or “laip bilong yu I stap long han bilong mi (your life is in my hands). There are also expressions that refer to men’s control over their wives’ bodies—full prais, full bodi (full price, full body); “Olgeta bodi bilong em, mi ful payment” to mean that a husband has paid full bride price so he is entitled to all of his wife’s body. Other variations refer to control from feet to the hair on their head, or from head to toe (Eves et al., 2018a). It is important to note that control also means full entitlement not only to sexual access to their wife regardless of consent but also to her labour and her full obedience (Eves et al., 2018a).

Bride price is also used to justify violent behaviour. The same authors point to common expressions such as “mi baim em pinis” (I have paid for her) or “Mi baim braed prais, bikipela braed prais. Mi got rait long paitim em, em I tok” (I paid bride price, a large amount of bride price so I have the right to beat her) (Eves et al., 2018a).

There are significant links between gender-based violence and political or social unrest and conflict in PNG. The almost-decade long conflict in Bougainville began in 1988, sparked by concerns over mining-related revenue and employment opportunities and then morphing into “a secessionist struggle between the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and the PNG government, and an internal conflict between opposing Bougainvillaeans groups” (Eves et al., 2018b). Between 12,000 and 20,000 people are estimated to have died in the conflict (Tierney et al., 2016) and the population suffered profound trauma, large-scale dislocation and loss of civil society infrastructure and governance. Violence towards women increased dramatically during the conflict and women were subjected to ‘humiliation, physical and psychological violence, rape and other forms of sexual assault’ (Eves et al., 2018b). Since the conflict, violence against women and girls remains much more prevalent than it was before the conflict. One of the interview participants commented that there was a direct correlation between the Bougainville conflict and gender-based violence, and that during the conflict rape was used as a weapon of war.

The link between violence against women and conflict is particularly pertinent given the current increase in conflict in the highlands and the expected closure of the mine at Ok Tedi in 2030. The PNG-Australia Western Province Strategy 2022 to 2030 notes that this closure ‘will bring enormous change; if it is not handled proactively, it could result in a deterioration in socioeconomic conditions across the province’ (PNG-Australia Partnership, 2022).

Another contributor to gender-based violence is the growing spread of belief in sorcery and witchcraft, and related sorcery accusation related violence (SARV). Belief in sorcery and witchcraft is widespread in some areas of PNG and SARV is a serious and growing issue in PNG, spreading to regions of the country where it did not traditionally occur. In many cases, those accused of sorcery have been tortured or killed in horrifying circumstances. Other types of harm include stigmatisation, threats, living in fear of violence, banishment from the community, property damage, homelessness, forced imprisonment and psychological trauma (Forsyth et al., 2019). According to a research conducted by the Australian National University, the gendered impacts of sorcery accusation related violence vary from region to region but in areas where most victims are women (such as in Enga province where 90% of victims are women), there were more incidents involving killing, burning, sexual violation, and in areas where most victims were men, there more incidents involving property damage (Forsythe, et al., n.d.). The same research notes that it is

generally harder for women survivors of SARV to recover because of broader gender inequalities in PNG. Criminal justice prosecutions are also found to be more successful in SARV cases involving men (Forsythe, et al., n.d.).

Another form of gender-based violence relates to online violence. The United Nations notes that ‘online violence against women and girls occurs as part of a continuum that is connected to offline violence and can take many forms. This includes sexual harassment, stalking, zoom bombing, intimate image abuse and misogynistic hate speech’ (UN Women 2023). In their report on violence against women in politics in PNG, Fiji and Samoa, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) reported that women in politics are subject to online violence including hate speech, defamation and character assassinations, and that this online psychological violence deters women from contesting political representation. The NDI report noted that “many politically active women are victims of character assassination and libelous accusations, which tend to be intensely personal and often sexual in nature”. It also noted that the perpetrators of violence against women in politics included both men and women, reflecting the prevailing culture “where families and communities tolerate and perpetuate gender-based violence” (NDI, 2021).

The government of Papua New Guinea has a range of legislation policies and initiatives that address gender-based violence. These include the national Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender Based Violence 2016-2025, the Family Protection Act 2013 and the Department of Health’s National Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) Clinical Guidelines.

In 2020, the PNG Government established a Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender Based Violence (GBV), which launched an inquiry into gender-based violence the following year (United for Equality, n.d.). The inquiry produced a report in 2020 emphasising the impact of GBV on families, communities and the PNG economy, and outlining 71 recommendations. The report also notes that only a year after the inquiry, significant changes have been achieved. The report recognises the role of churches and faith based organisations, and recommends continued government funding to support their contribution to GBV prevention and education, and initiatives that promote behaviour change on GBV and sorcery accusation related violence. It also points to the need for collaboration between government and non-government actors in identifying good practice examples of women’s economic empowerment, and to explore options to support women’s economic development, especially in support of GBV survivors (Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender Based Violence, 2022).

An updated report by the Committee released in October 2023 pointed to beyond urgent needs to address GBV. These included funding and training for frontline service providers such as health services and police to respond to cases more efficiently; as well as the National GBV Secretariat, which is the national body tasked to implement the National Strategy. The report also emphasised the need to strengthen crisis response and justice services for GBV and SARV; as well as implementing prevention and behaviour change strategies specifically reaching young people (PNG Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, 2023).

Despite the significant challenges, there are a range of initiatives which are slowly advancing gender equality and reducing gender-based violence. Examples of faith-based initiatives are provided in Section 5.

4.4 Education and literacy

PNG's literacy rate is one of the lowest in the Pacific and has proven slow to improve. In 2000 the literacy rate was estimated to be 56.3%, and in 2015 that has risen to 63.4% (Devette-Chee, 2021). Literacy is particularly low amongst women compared to men. According to the World Bank's Gender Data Portal for PNG, adult literacy in PNG is reported to be 57.9% for women and 65.4% for men (World Bank, n.d.). There is also an urban/rural divide, with literacy rates much higher in Port Moresby than in rural parts of the country.

In a policy spotlight for PNG's National Research Institute, Devette-Chee (2021) identifies a range of reasons for PNG's low literacy, including: the lack of affordable and accessible education facilities and learning resources, which may be partly due to remoteness; the failure of the former bilingual education approach ('the "Bridging to English Approach" in the Outcomes-Based Education/Curriculum'); illiteracy among parents; inadequate awareness of the benefits of literacy to life-long learning; social barriers and gender which preference education for boys over girls; and poverty, which means parents may not be able to afford school fees.

These barriers mean that almost one-third of females and one-quarter of males aged 6 and older have never attended school (National Statistics Office PNG, 2019), and of students who are able to attend school, a significant proportion still lack the literacy skills to meet required standards of the Standard-Based Curriculum (Devette-Chee, 2021).

Low literacy and numeracy are major barriers for both women's and men's economic and financial inclusion – this is discussed in sections 4.6 and 4.7.

The role of faith-based actors in education and literacy in PNG is discussed in section 5.5.1.



A village in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, PNG

Photo: iStock.com/Wirestock

4.5 Income-generation by women

4.5.1 Women and the informal sector

As the majority of PNG's population is based in rural areas, the main focus of this section is on income-generation for women in rural areas and the informal sector.

The informal sector in PNG is very significant – more than 80% of Papua New Guineans earn a livelihood through the informal sector, and the total output of the informal sector is equivalent to about 35% of PNG's official GDP (Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2023).

Women in these smallholder farming families bear disproportionately heavy workloads. They are typically responsible for growing the food that feeds the family, as well the domestic and caregiving tasks involved in running the household and looking after children. Women may also work on the production of the family's cash crops such as coffee and cocoa, though men are more likely to be in charge, and control the income earned from these cash crops (Eves & Titus, 2020).

Women in PNG are less likely to be involved in income-generating activities than men because of the barriers associated with discriminatory social norms, high levels of violence, lower levels of education and literacy. According to the World Bank (2023a), 45% of women earn cash for their labour, compared to 51% of men. When women are earning, they are more likely than men to be employed in the informal sector (46% of women compared to 15% of men) meaning they are in more vulnerable forms of employment (Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2021; World Bank, 2023a; World Bank, n.d.).

The Building Community Engagement in PNG (BCEP) Program and the National Research Institute plan to undertake a 2-year research study on PNG's labour market, in part to understand where women and youth are most economically active and thus where to target government investment to support the economic inclusion of women and youth (BCEP team, pers. comm., September 2023)

Women dominate the informal sector and make up the majority of market vendors and buyers (Kopel, 2021). In PNG, markets are important places where the majority of Papua New Guineans buy and sell food and other goods, as well as important social gathering places. In urban open-air markets which are the main source of fresh food for PNG's growing urban population, women comprise at least 80% of vendors (World Bank (2023a), although in some areas, the proportion of male vendors is increasing. Male participation is thought to increase the larger and the more lucrative the enterprise is, or if long-distance travel is required to reach the marketplace (Sharpe et al., 2022).

A growing number of people including women are making a living as 'market intermediaries' – people who transport produce from rural to urban areas, and resellers who buy and on-sell. The proportion of market vendors who are 'resellers' varies. Surveys have estimated the proportion of resellers in Port Moresby marketplaces to range from 51 to 55%, compared to 7% at Goroka marketplace (Sharpe et al., 2022).

The issue of safety for women in markets has been noted in the literature and by our interview participants. A survey by UN Women in 2011 found that 55% of women in Port Moresby reported experiencing some kind of violence in the markets in the past year (UN Women, as cited in

Chandler,2014). One interview participant noted that participating in markets is especially unsafe for women who travel long distances and stay at the market until their produce is sold, which could take up to a week or more.

Conditions between markets vary, but some markets lack adequate water supply, sanitation facilities, electricity supply and support staff. Harassment and theft can be issues in some markets, for example, Kopel (2021) noted that “Incidents of bag snatching, harassment, open consumption of marijuana and home-brewed alcohol are common occurrences in the late afternoons after departure of staff” at the Mt Hagen market. The National Research Institute PNG has provided recommendations for local government policy and regulatory frameworks to improve market safety and conditions (Kopel, 2021).

Safety is a concern for one of our interview participants. Aside from her work on women's empowerment, she also run a side business reselling products. Safety is a key issue that dictates her business practices. Precautions taken include always meeting customers in public places and going with her business partner in pairs. She said:

“We rely on our instincts and we pray.”

One interview participant noted that in one of the districts in Port Moresby, authorities built a very good market two years ago, but that:

“.. even now there is no-one using it. The women didn't feel safe because of the location.”

The interviewee wondered if there was an assessment of how women felt about the location or about the transport. According to a UN study, up to 90% of women in PNG have experienced sexual harassment or assault on public transport. As one measure to provide women with a safe public transport service, a women and children-only bus service called the *Meri Safe Bus* was established in 2015 with the support of the Ginigoada Foundation, the Australian Government, the National Capital District Commission and UN Women.

Interview participants also raised the high costs and challenges of transporting produce. One interview participant commented that:

“Getting goods to market can take days and is costly. People sleep at the market because they can't come and go back in the same day. They need to sell a few days in a row.”

4.5.2 Women's access to different activities in the value chain

In this report, we have used the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) definition of value chain:

A 'value chain' in agriculture identifies the set of actors and activities that bring a basic agricultural product from production in the field to final consumption, where at each stage value is added to the product. A value chain can be a vertical linking or a network between various independent business organizations and can involve processing, packaging, storage,

transport and distribution. The terms “value chain” and “supply chain” are often used interchangeably. (FAO, 2010)

For women involved in the value chain in PNG, most are likely involved in ‘traditional agricultural value chains’ (“generally governed through spot market transactions involving a large number of small retailers and producers”) and far fewer in ‘modern value chains’ (“characterised by vertical coordination, consolidation of the supply base, agro-industrial processing and use of standards throughout the chain”) (FAO, 2010).

As an example of a traditional agricultural value chain, the sweet potato value chain in PNG involves:

- At the production level: sweet potato farmers and clean-seed suppliers
- At the local market level: local traders, local retailers and institutional buyers
- At the long-distance market level: road transporters, wholesalers, shipping companies and urban retailers. (Kosec et al., 2022).

In PNG, although women make up the larger proportion of the agricultural workforce, they are less likely to be employed in higher-value agricultural activities or ‘nodes’ (such as sales, trained work and other services). This is attributed to barriers such as discriminatory cultural norms; lack of access to information, technology and services; and restrictions on their mobility. Yet when women are employed in more ‘lucrative’ nodes, there are clear benefits, including higher household wealth and a higher Household Dietary Diversity Score (a measure of a household’s economic access to food) (Kosec et al., 2022).

Further discussion of value chains, and opportunities for faith-based actors suggested by our interview participants, is continued in section 5.5.3.



Cocoa tree in East New Britain cocoa plantation. Cocoa is the third most significant cash crop in PNG. Photo: Parrotfish Journey/Shutterstock.com

4.5.3 Women in the formal sector

Women are underrepresented in the formal sector, with only 36% of public service positions taken by women. In the mining industry, a high-income sector in PNG, women make up only 12% of direct mining employees. This is partly due to the PNG Employment Act and Mining Safety Act which restrict the jobs women can do in the mining sector (World Bank, 2023a, page 31). Haley (2015) reported that women comprise only 24% of administrative positions in the public service are held by women, and even less at management and executive level.

The World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law 2023* report measures the legal differences on access to economic opportunities between men and women in 190 economies. On the basis of legislation applicable in Port Moresby only, Papua New Guinea scored 60 out of 100. The areas highlighted for reform included adopting legislation to: guarantee paid parental leave; prohibit the dismissal of pregnant workers; stop the prohibition on women being employed in certain jobs in the mining industry deemed as 'dangerous' or 'industrial'; mandates equal remuneration for work of equal value; prohibit sexual harassment in employment; and enable women to apply for a passport in the same way as a man (World Bank, 2023b).

However, there is a better gender balance in education and health services in PNG. The proportion of teachers who are women is about 42% (Haley, 2015) to 45.5% (Edwards, 2015, using figures in Table 2). In the health sector, women make up 54% of all health workers, including doctors, nurses, community health workers, health extension officers and allied health professionals (Haley, 2015).

The influence of faith-based actors on gender equality in employment in health and education services is discussed in section 5.5.1.

4.5.4 Taking a Do No Harm approach to enhancing women's access to income generation

Numerous studies have emphasized the fact that **focusing on providing women with access to income-generation opportunities without addressing their wider economic empowerment circumstances can lead to negative outcomes**. The link between women's income-generation activities and an increased incidence of violence has been noted in section 4.3.2.

Another unintended consequence of single-focus income generation programs has been to increase the 'double burden' of women's work. In their research for the *Do No Harm* project in PNG, Eves et al. (2018) reported that:

The economic advancement that the women are achieving rarely translates into actual empowerment, because they are rarely able to negotiate a decrease in domestic workloads'. For this reason, many of the women the authors spoke to reported feeling tired and weak from a lack of sufficient rest. An increase in income also resulted in additional burdens. For example, when women generate their own income, husbands 'often opt out of contributing, or reduce their contributions, to the household expenses so that the women must meet these shortfalls.

Earning money also often comes with increased expectations and demands from relatives (Eves et al., 2018).

One interview participant questioned how much of women's economic empowerment programming in the country has an inclusion lens, commenting:

“Even while women may have increased resources in the community, household or small business levels, they do not have control over resources they are increasingly having. Too often, programs do not couple inclusion and empowerment activities. We all know that we should do no harm but we don't talk about access and control over resources, and power and relationships in decision-making.”

4.6 Access to financial services

Women in PNG are 29% less likely than men to access formal financial services. This gender divide in formal financial inclusion is estimated to be the highest in the South Pacific (PFIP, 2020). In urban areas, 44% of women and 51% of men use a bank account; in rural areas, this is as low as 15% of women and 24% of men (National Statistical Office PNG, 2019). The reasons for the gender gap in financial inclusion are founded in discriminatory social norms and are outlined below.

Women are more likely to have lower levels of literacy, numeracy and financial literacy which restricts their participation in financial services. This is particularly the case in relation to English, which is “the main language of communication in the financial services” (PNG BAN, 2022). More than half of men can communicate in English but only 30% of women can (PFIP, 2020). It also means that women are more likely to depend on receiving information about financial services from friends and family than through other means (PNG BAN, 2022; PFIP, 2020), however a 2020 report by the Pacific Financial Inclusion Programme (PFIP) notes that peers and communities in Papua New Guinea are less likely to discuss or share their experience of managing finances than in other countries in the region (PFIP, 2020). Eves and Titus (2017) cite a report by Women's World Banking which found that “women have a low awareness of the choices available for banking and, even when a range of options is placed before them, they are not in a position to make informed choices because of their low financial competency”.

Women tend to have lower earnings than men, which limits the need for savings products and also their ability to invest in insurance and superannuation products (PFIP, 2020). Women are less likely to have paid, secure jobs, or to be in control of the sale of higher-value cash crops such as coffee (PFIP, 2020; Eves and Titus, 2017).



Informal roadside market in Port Moresby. Photo: Sarah Fleming

Another barrier is the standard practice of requiring two forms of identification to open a bank account, in a country where up to 80% of the population do not have access to any clear form of identification (Highet et al., 2019). (However, we note the contrasting example of Women's Micro Bank below).

The lack of a savings culture and distrust of banks are also barriers to the use of financial services. Many people are unfamiliar with the concept of banking or a 'savings culture'. One of our interview participants who is involved with a program that provides financial literacy training noted that even with such training, the practice of banking can seem removed and challenging for someone with low levels of formal education:

“The more education you’ve got, the closer you are to banking.”

The interviewee provided an example from the program: of the training participants who opened a bank account as a result of the training, a review undertaken a year later showed that only a small proportion of accounts had been actively used.

A second interview participant spoke about how, to those unfamiliar with banking, depositing your money in a bank account was a conceptual step that needs to be taken - it is seen as handing your money to someone you did not know. Asking people to bank via their phone was an even greater step.

A third interview participant talked about the lack of education and awareness about how banking works:

“Because of the lack of education, [people] think they’re putting money in the bank so it should grow. But if they see that after 6 months, their 100 kina has gone down to 80 kina, they think the bank stole it. They say no-one told them the bank would charge a fee. That’s when they switch to keeping it at home.”

For both women and men, a barrier to accessing financial services is the lack of 'bricks and mortar' banking infrastructure in rural areas. An analysis in 2018 found that PNG has fewer banking access points (bank branches and ATMs) per capita than Fiji, Samoa or the Solomon Islands (PFIP, 2020). One interview participant gave an example of the challenge of accessing banks in rural areas: if someone wants to go to the bank to withdraw 50 kina, the bus fares alone to get into town where the bank is located is 200 kina. The UNCDF also notes that women are disproportionately impacted by the lack of nearby access points, as they face more barriers to travel including due to social norms that expect women to stay close to home and having less time due to domestic responsibilities (UNCDF, 2020).

One solution to this lack of proximity to physical banking infrastructure is mobile phone banking, but this in itself is a challenge in a country with low rates of mobile phone ownership and access, especially in rural and remote areas. Women's lower access to mobile phones is discussed in section 4.8.

Another barrier to women accessing financial services is that not enough banks offer tailored products for women or have gender-sensitive procedures. According to PFIP (2020, p. 27), two

banks in PNG that do offer women-specific products are Women's Micro Bank Limited and MiBank, but not all banks in PNG do. In addition, according to the PNG Business Advocacy Network (PNG BAN):

an extremely high proportion of women from reported feeling uncomfortable while using financial services. Research has suggested that this may stem from a feeling that staff are impatient. FSPs [Financial Service Providers] are losing out by not taking the time to educate their female customers; women reported abandoning products after sign-up due to a lack of understanding of how to use them. (PNG BAN, 2022).

The PFIP report notes that “Although FSPs have made attempts to share information with women, the level and quality of staff engagement is insufficient to drive adoption” (PFIP, 2020).

However, some initiatives are helping women overcome the barriers to banking. One example involves the Women's Micro Bank Ltd (WMBL), also branded as Mama Bank. Mama Bank is the first women's micro bank in PNG and the Pacific, and is the only bank in PNG with an explicit focus on women. It was set up in 2010 with the objective of ‘providing Financial and Business Development Skills (BDS) to women in poverty in Papua New Guinea and empowering them with enhanced income prospects for the families and communities, and thereby improve the quality of their lives’ (WMBL, n.d.). A case study by Hightet (2022) describes how WMBL has partnered with the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) through PFIP to establish a network of Mama Bank Access Points (MAPS) to increase accessibility for women. The MAPS are in six locations across PNG (Kwikila, Kerema, Madang, Maprik, Goroka and Port Moresby) and are “kiosk-type structures established at safe locations in marketplaces, manned by two WMBL staffs. Each MAP is equipped with tablet-based biometric technology that allows customers to perform basic transactions, such as savings, deposits, withdrawals and checking their balance” (UNCDF, 2019). MAPS bring banking closer to where women are running their businesses. Mama Bank has also set up a biometric system which can replace the need for formal identification documents, and also enables women



A woman cuts open a coconut at a market stall selling coconuts and betel nuts.
Photo: Annalucia/
Shutterstock.com

who are illiterate to use their thumbprint instead of a signature to open a bank account and make transactions (Highet, 2022). Mama Bank services have now been extended to include families, so men are also now availing of these innovative opportunities (E. Kopel, pers. comm., September 2023).

Another example from the Women's Microbank is the MERI project (Market, Economic, Recovery, and Inclusion). This initiative uses a model of community-based savings and credit groups called 'Self-Reliance Group' (SHRG). The SHRGs encourage members to pool their resources, save together, and access small loans - even members who don't have collateral, formal documentation or bank accounts. The model is said to promote a culture of saving and financial discipline (Ngwabe, 2023).

We conclude this section by quoting the PNG Business Advocacy Network who ask:

Despite all these advances the demand does not meet the supply and we have to ask, why? There is an obvious gap in communicating of these services and banking products available to a largely illiterate population of women in the country.
(PNG BAN, 2022)

4.7 Access to credit and loans to start businesses

Along with higher barriers to accessing basic financial services, **women in PNG also face higher barriers to accessing credit and loans to start businesses.**

Highet et al. (2022) estimated that "less than three percent of women in PNG have access to credit, with the numbers significantly lower in the Highlands region, where only about one per cent of women have access to credit".

In addition to the barriers to accessing financial services outlined in the section above, there are a few extra barriers in relation to accessing credit to start a MSME or SME.

Low financial literacy means that women are less likely to have documented their 'financial footprint' of income and expenditure as required when applying for business loans (PNG BAN, 2022; Mishra et al., 2017). This also means that women may have more difficulty in understanding government regulations or the financial reporting requirements of banks (Mishra et al., 2017).

Women are also less likely to own collateral or financial capital which is often needed to secure a loan. 97% of land in PNG is under customary land tenure, and most of this is under patrilineal ownership which means that women are excluded from owning and controlling land (Mishra et al., 2017).

Prevailing social norms mean that it is **generally harder for women to get involved in business in the first place.** It also means that **women may often require support or approval from their husbands to start and conduct a business** (Mishra et al., 2017).

As a result of these barriers, no more than 7% of women in PNG borrow from formal financial institutions. Instead, most women borrow from "money lenders who charge 50-250% interest fortnightly, with high repercussions for default" (PFIP, 2020).

In general, SMEs in PNG face significant barriers in accessing loans. Morona and Odhuno (2020) cite research by Tebbutt Research in 2014 which reported that 81% of the 1,117 SMEs they surveyed across the country were unable to access loans from the commercial banks and

microfinance institutions. The main barriers were the high cost of borrowing, lack of trust in banks, complicated application procedures, high collateral requirements, and short-term loan repayment periods.

In recent years the growth of more accessible microfinance has emerged. Women's Micro Bank is one example as noted in section 4.6. To enable Women's Micro Bank to extend affordable loans to more women borrowers, free of deposit requirements, UNCDF has created a credit guarantee to lower WMBL's risk (Highet, 2022).

Policy and civil society initiatives to encourage women's entrepreneurship

PNG's 2016 National Financial Inclusion Strategy has an aim that women should constitute 50% of new bank accounts opened, but "the policy offers limited guidance on how this target is to be achieved" (PNG BAN, 2022). Policies to stimulate the growth of SMEs include the PNG Small and Medium Enterprise Policy (SME) 2016, accompanied by PNG's SME Master Plan 2016-2030 (PNG Ministry of Trade and Commerce, 2016, p.8). The SME Corporation, the government agency mandated to promote the development of SMEs in PNG, has established credit guarantee schemes with banks and other financial institutions.

However, an interview participant noted that the policies only benefit a tiny segment of the population of women in the country (mainly women in urban centres with formal education) and that funding usually only reaches already established SMEs that are often owned by men.

To better understand the demographics of who is accessing SME credit, the Building Community Engagement in PNG (BCEP) Program plans to undertake a national research study on the PNG Government's SME Policy in partnership with PNG's National Research Institute. This research will investigate who is accessing SME credit, including women and other marginalised groups (BCEP team, pers. comm, September 2023).

At a civil society level, the Women's Business Resource Centre (WBRC) was established in 2016 to support women entrepreneurs to start and strengthen businesses. It is operated by the Center for International Private Enterprise with support from the PNG-Australian Partnership. The WBRC (runs business skills training, mentoring and networking events).

The PNG Business Advocacy Network (PNG BAN) is a coalition of 60 business and civil society leaders working together to advocate for regulatory reforms that promote women's participation in the economy. In 2022, PNG BAN launched the Women's Business Agenda to offer policy recommendations and reforms for priority issues to increase women's economic participation and "improve the business climate for women" (PNG BAN, 2022).

The Business Coalition for Women (BCfW) is a member-based organisation, supported by the PNG-Australia partnership as part of the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program. Their members comprise registered businesses operating in PNG, mainly medium to large enterprises. Their strategic pillars focus on: eliminating violence against women; promoting women to leadership roles; recruitment and retention of women; and opportunities for women in supply chains (BCfW, n.d.).

4.8 Access to mobile phones

Mobile phone penetration rates in PNG are low compared to other Pacific countries, especially in rural areas. In 2019, an estimated 63% of women and 70% of men in urban areas own a mobile phone, compared to 30% of women and 47% of men in rural areas (National Statistical Office PNG, 2019). However, these statistics need further unpacking. One interview participant noted that in rural communities, if you ask someone if they have a mobile phone and they say yes, what they mean is that someone in their family or village has a phone that they can sometimes use; poor mobile coverage also means that one might have to leave the village and go to a high point to get reception. This point was also made in a 2014 GSM report of women's phone usage in PNG which noted that "Borrowing mobile phones is well-established and socially acceptable, however focus group discussions revealed that owners of mobile phones want to minimise expenditure, not lose credit, and protect privacy and phone contents. As a result, an etiquette emerged that the borrower must make call(s) in full sight of mobile owner", meaning a lack of privacy for the person borrowing the phone (GSMA, 2014).

Women are less likely to own and use a mobile phone than men. The interview participant above also noted that social norms might not allow women to leave their village without permission, and that more generally, these norms can discourage women from owning or using phones because there is a perception that mobile phones are used to conduct marital affairs. This assumption, particularly in rural areas, might be made about women seen with a phone. This point is also highlighted in a 2014 GSM report: 'Women fear receiving calls from "unknown callers" because this might aggravate their husbands. She might be beaten or the phone smashed as the husband will fear promiscuity. Suspicion of affairs is high. For this reason some women refuse to own a mobile, as they are frightened of what will happen with their husband if they do. Not having a mobile is a risk averse strategy. Some women allow their husbands to gate keep their mobile, and access it when needed in front of him. This is another risk averse strategy to prevent problems in the household.' (GSMA, 2014).

The gender gap in mobile phone usage is likely to reflect existing patterns of gender inequality. Curry et al. (2016) found that women in matrilineal East New Britain province, where women experience a higher status in society, had higher rate of mobile phone adoption and use relative to men, whereas in patrilineal WHP which has higher levels of gender inequity, fewer women than men are using mobile phones.

Other barriers to mobile phone access includes affordability (especially as mobile phone call charges in PNG are relatively high), limited access to electricity, and lack of digital literacy skills (Highet et al., 2019).

4.9 Climate change and gender

Climate change impacts on PNG

PNG is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The 2022 World Risk Index ranks PNG as the 16th most at-risk country to climate change and environmental hazards (DFAT, n.d.c.) According to the World Bank Group's climate risk profile for PNG (2021), global heating will result in a more unstable, heat-stressed climate with more frequent, intense extreme rainfall events. Exposure to hazards such as flash flooding, landslides, coastal flooding, sea level rise and extreme heat are already significant and will only increase. The number of people affected by river flooding alone is expected to double by 2030. Sea level rise in PNG has been measured at twice the global average (Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO, 2011) and is displacing some of PNG's coastal communities. A hotter climate in PNG will harm human and ecological health (World Bank Group, 2021). Climate change will impact infrastructure, for example more extreme rainfall events will increase the likelihood of landslides and make already-difficult roads and terrain even harder to traverse, adding time and expense to the transport of goods to market.

Climate change will continue to reduce crop yields, including sweet potato, cassava, maize, rice, sugarcane and taro. According to the World Bank Group, PNG's population is particularly dependent on sweet potato production - it accounts for 63% of calories in rural diets. It is therefore particularly concerning that sweet potato yields are forecast to decline by as much as 10% by 2050 as a result of climate change (World Bank Group, 2021) in a country where malnutrition is still common (add reference).

Another significant crop which is being affected by climate change is coffee. Coffee is the second most important agricultural export in PNG after palm oil. Around 2.5 million people from about half of all rural households in PNG are estimated to be involved in its production. Warmer temperatures mean that coffee crops which once flowered twice a year are now flowering more often, bringing more frequent yields but of lesser quality which detracts from export opportunities. Two major pests of coffee, the coffee berry borer and coffee leaf rust, will become more problematic as temperatures rise – for example, research on the coffee berry borer from Latin America and Africa found that “for every 1°C rise in average temperature there would be an 8.5 % increase in the pest” (CSIRO and SPREP, 2022).

The nexus between gender and climate

Gender and climate intersect in multiple ways. Women are disproportionately impacted by climate change and environmental disasters - for example, their gendered workloads are likely to increase if natural resources become scarcer; they are more likely to lack access to land, income, credit and information which could increase climate resilience; and they are more likely to experience gender-based violence or inequalities in distribution of aid after climate-related disasters (Pacific Women, 2021; PNG Climate Change Development Authority, 2020; Pudmenzky et al., 2022; UNDRR, 2019; UN WomenWatch 2009).

Yet women are active and powerful agents of change if enabled to participate in decision-making around climate resilience. Women have valuable skills, local and traditional knowledge, and unique perspectives which can improve climate adaptation and mitigation efforts, and enhance community resilience to climate and environmental damage. Too often, however, women are marginalised from consultation and decision-making.



Gender equality and climate resilience are also linked in that improving gender equality contributes to improved community resilience to climate change. As an illustration, a study conducted in two villages in India found that through the process of becoming ‘climate-smart’ farming households, the increased participation and decision-making in economic and agricultural activities by women and men was a catalyst for empowerment and improved gender equality, as well as better resilience to climate change (Haraharan et al., 2020; Huyer et al., 2021).

For these reasons, a gender-transformative approach to climate resilience initiatives is essential. Gender transformative climate adaptation seeks to transform the discriminatory power dynamics, structures and norms that reinforce gender inequalities and obstruct positive adaptation in climate change contexts (Resurrección et al., 2019). A range of frameworks and indicators have been developed to support climate resilience initiatives to become gender transformative (Huyer et al., 2021; Resurrección et al., 2019).

In PNG, an example of a gender transformative climate resilience initiative is a pilot project to support innovative soil improvement training for increasing semi-subsistence sweet potato production in Jawaka. The training helps semi-subsistence farming households to adopt more effective and equitable farm management practices, and also increases their adaptive capacity and resilience to climate change. This ACIAR-funded project integrates the gender-transformative Family Farm Teams (FFT) approach with scientific agricultural knowledge (including on soil improvement techniques and new disease-resistant sweet potato varieties) and local place-based, place-informed training. As outlined on page 52, the FFT approach promotes shared learning and decision-making between female and male household members, and results in a more equitable division of labour. In this project, it ensured that the introduction of new soil improvement and sweet

potato production innovations did not have the unintended effect of increasing the workload of women and children (Kopel and Pamphilon, 2023).

At a minimum, a gender-inclusive lens should be mandatory in every project design. One reason is that there is a gender difference in the challenges that people and communities experience. For example, climate change will impact infrastructure such as roads, which creates additional barriers for farmers transporting goods to market. One interview participant noted that in PNG, there is some emerging evidence of agriculturalists promoting the adoption of more transportable crops, e.g. vanilla instead of coffee, as vanilla is higher value and lesser weight. It is crucial to take a gender lens to both challenges and solutions - while switching from coffee to vanilla may be a productive adaptation for a man, the same approach would most likely create challenges for a woman, who may face movement and access limitations due to restrictive gendered social norms. Understanding gender and social dynamics and unpacking what these challenges look like for women is the first step in addressing those challenges in a way that empowers women and resonates with their lives.

The gendered nature of agricultural challenges, and thus the gender difference in the type of information needed, was also observed by researchers involved in the Jiwaka sweet potato and soil improvement project outlined above. As noted by Kopel and Pamphilon (2023), female farmers (who do a lot of the farm labour) were more likely to focus on “purchasing new tools to ease their labour and finding paid labour to manage new and larger fields”; whereas male farmers also noted the need for new tools but focused on “being able to work more effectively and efficiently”. Female farmers also expressed more interest in training to manage pests and diseases as production increased, on budgeting and saving, and on the two high-income activities of raising pigs and poultry.

The importance of gender-responsive information delivery and extensions services is supported by another ACIAR-funded project which examines the opportunities and needs for providing tailored weather forecasting information to PNG farmers. Results so far show that women and men prioritise different types of information, e.g. women tended to show greater interest in information relevant to planting and harvesting times, while men were more likely to be interested in crop choice and market information. Women are also more likely to share information with close-knit circles of family and friends, while men are more likely to provide links between external information sources (e.g. media) and their community, friends and family (Friedman et al., 2022a, Friedman et al., 2022b).

At a policy level, the PNG Government released its *Papua New Guinea Enhanced Nationally Determined Contribution* (Enhanced NDC) in 2020 and the related *Papua New Guinea Revised Enhanced NDC 2020 Implementation Plan (2021 – 2030)* (Implementation Plan) in 2021. The Enhanced NDC notes the gendered nature of climate change impacts and of resource use and ownership, and highlights the importance of women to food security, agricultural value chains and rural livelihoods. It commits to ensuring ‘gender responsive and human rights-based approaches in all related planning, programming, and implementation’. Both the Enhanced NDC and Implementation Plan recognise the importance of gender inclusion (Climate Change Development Authority of PNG, 2020, 2021).

Gender-inclusive climate finance

There is a growing recognition and focus on the importance of integrating gender inclusive finance and inclusive green finance (IGF) (Alliance for Financial Inclusion, 2022; OECD, 2022). According to the Alliance for Financial Inclusion (2022), gender inclusive finance “aims to increase women’s access to, and usage of, quality and affordable financial services, while reducing the global financial inclusion gender gap”; whereas IGF is “aimed at mitigating and building resilience to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation through financial inclusion”.

Evidence suggests that investors are becoming increasingly aware of integrating the two elements: according to the Global Innovation Lab for Climate Finance, global climate-focused Official Development Assistance (ODA) that integrates gender objectives into development projects grew from 36% to 57% between 2014 to 2019. Meanwhile there was a tripling in blended finance transactions targeting both gender and climate goals from 2010 to 2020 (Global Innovation Lab for Climate Finance, 2022).

However, there is still a long way to go before climate finance is sufficiently integrating gender equality considerations. Just 0.04% of climate-focused ODA had gender equality as a *principal* objective, and female farmers receive only 10% of total aid for agriculture (Global Innovation Lab for Climate Finance, 2022). Systemic challenges to integration include a lack of prioritisation and focus of gender-sensitive design, a paucity of reporting on gender-aggregated IGF data and a lack of collaboration between entities working in the two intersecting areas (Alliance for Financial Inclusion, 2022).

A number of coalitions, initiatives and strategies are attempting to address this gap in ‘gender-smart’ climate finance. This includes the Alliance for Financial Inclusion and the OECD, which offer frameworks, guidance and forums for policy-makers, organisations and investors (Alliance for Financial Inclusion, 2022; OECD, 2022).

The Bank of PNG is a member of the Alliance for Financial Inclusion. It launched PNG’s first *Inclusive Green Finance Policy* in June 2023. The *Inclusive Green Finance Policy* includes a recognition of the link between gender equality and environmental outcomes (Bank of PNG, 2023) and its implementation will be supported by a new Green Finance Center at the Centre for Excellence in Financial Inclusion (CEFI) Office (CEFI, 2023b).

The role of faith-based organisations in promoting gender-inclusive climate resilience is explored in Section 5.5.5.

4.10 Papua New Guinea – Australia relationships for development

Australia and PNG have a unique history and relationship. PNG is Australia's closest neighbour. Just 4 kilometres separates PNG from the closest Australian Torres Strait island while the distance from Cape York to PNG is around 150 km. The Torres Strait was formerly a land bridge which connected the Australian continent to Papua New Guinea (DFAT, n.d.d; Torres Strait Island Regional Council, n.d.).

The territories that make up modern day Papua New Guinea were colonised by Britain and Germany in 1884. Germany colonised the northern part of what is now PNG ('German New Guinea') and the British colonised the southern part and nearby islands ('Papua'). Administration of Papua was transferred to Australia in 1906. During World War I, Australia occupied German New Guinea and in 1922, it was made a Mandated Territory of Australia by the League of Nations. During the Second World War, Japanese forces occupied large parts of PNG but were eventually defeated by Australian forces with the support of almost 50,000 Papua New Guineans who assisted by carrying supplies, building infrastructure and evacuating the sick and the wounded. After the Second World War, Australia combined both colonies into one called the Territory of Papua New Guinea. From the 1960s onwards, steps were progressively taken towards greater decision-making and then independence by Papua New Guineans, including the establishment of the first House of Assembly in 1964 and the election of Michael Somare the first Chief Minister of a democratically elected government in 1972. PNG became fully independent in 1975 (High Commission of PNG in Canberra, 2020; CIA, 2023; Stokes, 2013 as cited by Australian High Commission in PNG, 2013). In the last four decades the relationship between the two countries has continued to evolve and develop. In the present day, Australia and PNG are each other's largest bilateral development partner.

The Comprehensive Strategic and Economic Partnership (CSEP) is an overarching framework that defines bilateral cooperation between the two nations on key areas such as security, trade and investment, governance, development cooperation, health, education, gender equality and climate change (DFAT, n.d.). The CSEP builds upon the 1987 Joint Declaration of Principles Guiding Relations between Australia and Papua New Guinea and the 2013 Joint Declaration for a New Papua New Guinea – Australia Partnership. PNG is the largest bilateral country recipient of funding from Australia's international development program (Development Policy Centre, n.d.).

The CSEP has six pillars, including a *Strong Democracies for a Stable Future* pillar with the following commitments relevant to gender equality and women's economic empowerment:

- We commit to supporting the full participation of all people in our societies, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, disability, religion or belief or any other attribute, consistent with our international human rights obligations. We commit to empowering women and girls, increasing the number of women in visible leadership roles, and ensuring gender equality in all aspects of the economy, politics and government.
- We will strengthen partnerships to promote gender equality and empower women and girls in Papua New Guinea through all Australia-funded development programs, as well as the effective implementation of Government of Papua New Guinea programs and policies such as the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender Based Violence 2016-2025.

Gender initiatives under the former Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program in PNG (2012-2022) have helped strengthen partnerships with government to support national, provincial,

district and local level gender equality initiatives; as well as advocacy for legislative and policy reforms to protect women and children (Pacific Women, 2022). It has also been instrumental in providing gender inclusive COVID 19 response, providing financial resources, training and protective equipment to allow the safe operation of partners and service providers. In the ten years it was implemented, the program has reached 1.62 million people, supported 56 projects and 59 partners in PNG (Pacific Women, 2022). Specifically on women's economic empowerment, the initiative supported the implementation of PNG's National Financial Inclusion Strategy, including initiatives that enable women to make financial decisions, as well as earn, control and accumulate economic assets (Pacific Women, 2022).

Additionally, the Australian Government has been supporting the Church Partnership Program since 2004. Recognising the significance and influence of Christian Churches and their role in delivering health and education services in the country, the CPP is a partnership with PNG's seven mainline churches to promote "holistic, inclusive and sustainable development" (DFAT, 2022a). More details on the CPP are provided in section 5.1.

To promote innovative finance (see section 5.5.4), in 2023 the Australian Government recommitted and renewed the Emerging Markets Impact Investment Fund. This fund will support impact investing and gender lens investing in PNG and other countries in the Pacific, South Asia and Southeast Asia. It aims to increase the volume and impact of private capital flowing to these regions to support inclusive and resilient economic development and gender equality.



A village in the highlands region of PNG
Photo: Caritas Australia

5. Analysis of the contribution of faith-based actors to women's economic empowerment

5.1 Church Partnership Program

The PNG Church Partnership Program (CPP) is a long-established partnership between the governments of Australia and PNG, the 'CPP partners' (comprising the seven mainline churches in PNG supported by their Australian sister churches) and the PNG Council of Churches (PNGCC). CPP began in 2014 and is now in its fourth phase.

Phase 3 was marked by a significant shift in focus, away from service delivery to strengthening the capacity of churches to engage with the Government of PNG regarding improving the provision of these services, as well as a closer focus on strengthening inter-church collaboration on key themes of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, disaster risk reduction and Health.

CPP's 4th phase is delivered under the Australia-PNG governance initiative, the Building Community Engagement in Papua New Guinea (BCEP) Program. The BCEP Program "brings together a diverse group of partners from PNG's most influential state and non-state organisations, including civil society organisations, think-tanks, and the media. The long-term goal is to influence citizen-government interaction, which is currently weak, to become more constructive and inclusive" (CPP Phase 4 Design Document, 2022). The program will provide support for institutional strengthening and gender mainstreaming; inclusive economic empowerment, inclusive institutions for policy engagement, policy research, and strengthening organisations of people with disabilities. The program is also designed to build a coalition of frontline GBV service providers for policy advocacy (BCEP team, pers. comm, September 2023).

As stated in the CPP Phase 4 Component Design Document, 'the long-term CPP-4 goal is: "to improve delivery of public services and goods to vulnerable and marginalised communities." 'Vulnerable and marginalised communities' are defined as including women, people accused of sorcery, people living with disabilities, and people in rural and remote communities".

One of CPP's four strategic pillars is to promote gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI). Each of the seven PNG church partners is encouraged to develop their own GEDSI strategy, appropriate for them.

The BCEP Program is currently developing a disability and social inclusion (DASI) strategy from 2023 – 2030 in consultation with churches, economic empowerment service providers and SARV service providers. Within the draft DASI strategy, one of the proposed strategic action areas is to support church-led inclusion of persons with disabilities, and survivors of gender-based violence and SARV, into economic empowerment activities, as well as inclusion of those groups into gender-based violence coordinating committees, referrals and other services (BCEP team, pers. comm, September 2023).

Box 1: High-level summary of GEDSI achievements by the seven mainline churches, as reported in an evaluation of the 3rd phase of CPP:

- The launch of the Gender Equality Theology (GET), endorsed by all partners
- Four churches (SDA, Baptist Union PNG, UCPNG and the Catholic Church) have used GET within their theological colleges or church leader training
- Increased work and focus on gender-based violence (GBV) with the development of new safe houses (Catholic Church, SDA and UPNG); emerging referral pathways; GBV response in health (UCPNG); GBV and protection in Disaster Risk Response (Catholic)
- Gender equality and male advocate training at the community level (Anglican and Catholic)
- GEDSI audit (SDA)
- Gender mainstreaming in adult literacy (Anglican Church)
- Focal points in gender (UCPNG) and disability inclusion (Lutheran)
- Uniting Church focus on increasing women's leadership
- Formalisation of the gender working group including all CPP partners
- Improvements in sex-disaggregated data collection (all partners) (CPP Phase 4 Design Document, 2022)

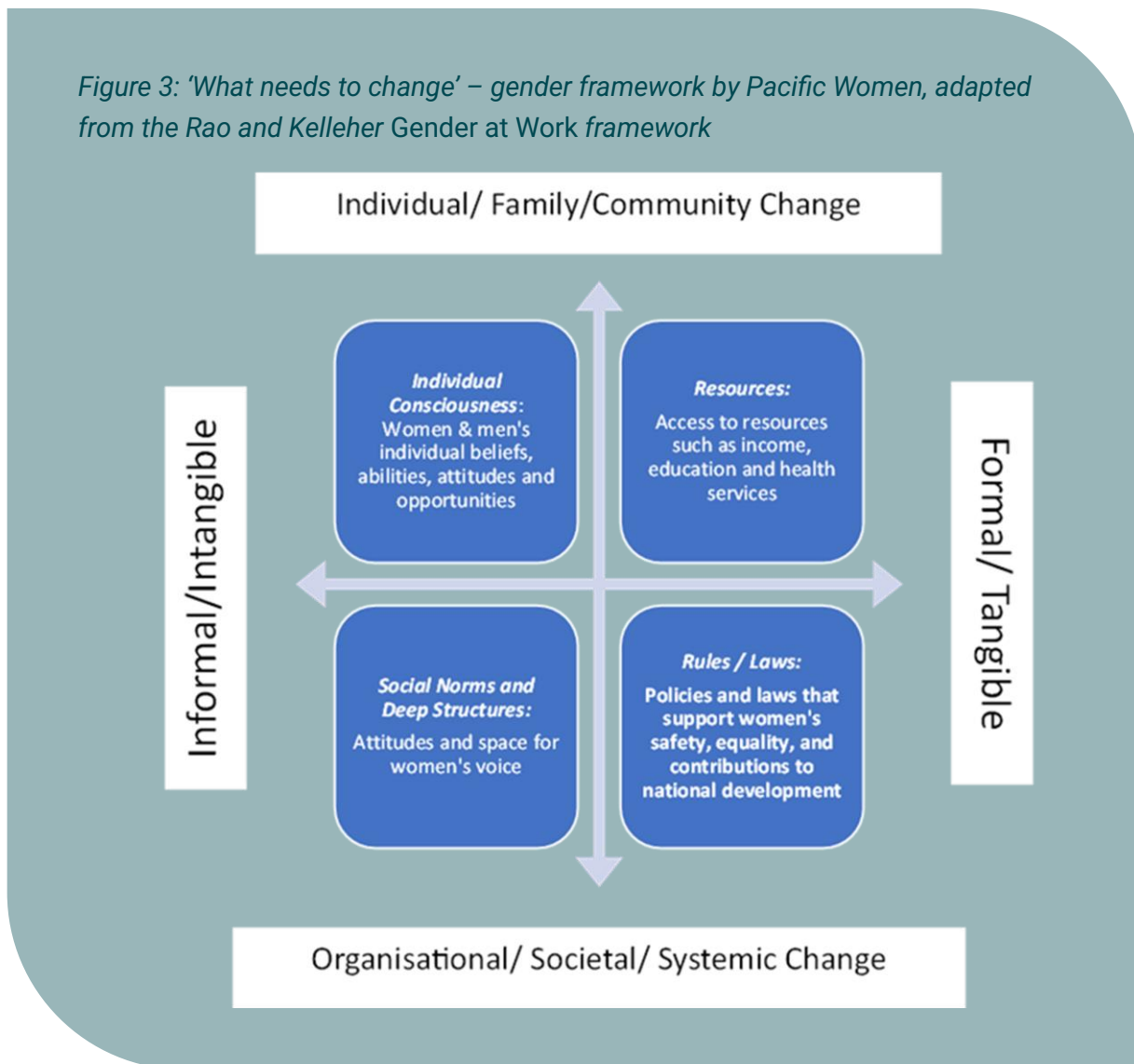
5.2 A framework to analyse women's economic empowerment in this section

In 2021, Pacific Women published a report based on a participatory review of gender transformative approaches used in PNG, developed by the *Pacific Women Support Unit* and fourteen of its implementing partners between 2019 and 2021 (Pacific Women, 2021b). The authors identified the following eight elements as key to achieving gender transformation in PNG:

- Gender transformation is explicit in the project's design
- Long-term commitment
- Working with women as change agents
- Engaging men meaningfully in gender transformation
- Working with credible partners and local change agents
- Working across multiple levels of society
- Building on existing protective customs and practices
- Including tailored gender capacity building

The Pacific Women report used a gender framework approach adapted from the Rao and Kelleher *Gender at Work* framework, as shown in Figure 3:

Figure 3: 'What needs to change' – gender framework by Pacific Women, adapted from the Rao and Kelleher Gender at Work framework



This framework has been used in international development programming to examine gender inequality and where and how change must happen. It identifies key domains of change across formal and informal spaces and covering change in different levels—from individual consciousness to more systemic structural change (Rao et al., 2016). The framework demonstrates how changes across all domains are necessary for sustainable transformative change (Pacific Women, 2021).

For Rao et al. (2016) change at the level of individual consciousness (upper left quadrant) is informal and involves a two-step process of self-reflection towards understanding power relations, and taking action to change unequal power dynamics. This entails consciousness about individual capacities and knowledge that could support change (Rao, et al., 2016). This might also refer to changes in women and men's individual beliefs, abilities, attitudes and opportunities. Change in resources (upper right quadrant) are more formal changes that may refer to increased access to a variety of resources, for example income, access to health services and education; as well as increased sense of security, freedom from violence. Change also needs to happen at the systemic level, for example in formal politics in terms of legislation, and policies that enable gender equity and inclusion (lower right quadrant). Informal or intangible change can also occur, for example, when social norms and cultural or traditional practices that perpetuate gender inequality are

challenged (lower left quadrant). These may result in positive norms, attitudes and spaces that amplify women's voices (Rao, et al., 2016; Pacific Women, 2021).

Rao and Kelleher's framework provide a good starting point to demonstrate where and how change must happen towards the realisation of women's rights and gender equality. This is affirmed by MacArthur et al. (2022) who emphasise that transformative change entails a holistic process that not only seeks to change women's lives, but indeed the society they live (MacArthur, et al., 2022). In their examination of gender-transformative approaches in international development, MacArthur et al. (2022) list five unifying principles that are useful for conceptual discussions: motivations towards profound gender transformation; focused on systems that perpetuate inequalities; grounded on strategic gender interests; recognises and values diverse identities; and embracing participatory methodological practices.

In the remainder of this section, we look at the contributions of faith-based actors to women's economic empowerment by using this framework. Although many initiatives demonstrate a large degree of overlap between Rao's four quadrants, for practical purposes we have divided the remainder of the section into initiatives with either 'informal/intangible' or 'formal/tangible' outputs.

5.3 Informal / intangible: initiatives that change individual consciousness and/or social norms

5.3.1 Awareness raising and training on gender equality and women's empowerment

Our literature review and key informant interviews showed that many faith-based actors in PNG are delivering, collaborating on, or supporting programs that seek to change individual consciousness and/or social norms on gender equality and economic empowerment. Some of this work is undertaken by the seven mainline churches and is partly reflected in the evaluation of the Church Partnership Program Phase 3 (see Section 5.1). Aside from CPP partners, other faith-based actors such as religious congregations also run such programs.

For example, within the Catholic Church, the National Family Life Commission is the overarching body which supports Family Life coordinators in each of the 19 Catholic dioceses in PNG. In turn, the Family Life coordinators support volunteer Family Life team leaders in each parish in their diocese. Family Life staff and volunteers run workshops and seminars to raise awareness on a variety of issues including gender equity, gender-based violence, child protection, health and parenting skills. According to one Family Life coordinator:

**“Awareness should lead to empowerment in all spheres of society
We help women and girls to stand up on their own rights and not to be
trampled on.”**

Family Life coordinators also go to schools and health clinics to run awareness sessions; some also provide counselling to individuals or couples. The Family Life coordinators are also able to use their networks within the Catholic church to provide referrals when appropriate to other services within the church, including health, child protection, safehouses.

Family-oriented approaches

Many of the faith-based programs we encountered through the literature or key informant interviews (as well as some of the non-faith-based programs) engaged families as a whole, not just women in isolation. Interventions in PNG that have been developed around the concept of strengthening the family as the basic social unit in communities, around working towards shared family-oriented goals, and around community cohesion, have proven successful in achieving transformative change for gender equality and women's economic empowerment. This has been well documented in research (Pamphilon et al., 2019; Pacific Women, 2021b). For example, a 2021 study by Pacific Women noted that 'efforts to transform gender relations were more effective when they worked across multiple levels – individual, family and relationships, community and institutional – and when they adopted mutually reinforcing strategies' (Pacific Women, 2021b).

The importance of working with both women and men, and with a family-centred approach, was a point made by several of our interview participants. One interview participant said:

“Gender equity is about the process of men and women working together to have reciprocal and respectful relationships. If you give families the strategies that will enable them to think and work and live together, they'll move towards gender equity.”

Another interview participant said:

“We target the family or couple because they are the basic cell of society. We target them so they can have a good family, community, church and society as a whole. Without the family there would be no community or church.”

A third interview participant said:

“So much of women's economic empowerment WEE is focused on the individual, and that doesn't necessarily translate to a society where the social fabric is so collective. People have more loyalty to their wantok system than they have to their state. Morality is so powerful, it keeps community together for better or worse. So you can't come in and focus on the individual, maybe it does more harm than good.”

In the context of PNG's highly Christian population, **interventions on gender equality and women's economic empowerment are also often communicated through a theological lens, such as the Gender Equality Theology (GET)**. This represents a vernacularisation of the issues that is appropriate to PNG's context, and given its efficacy, is used by both faith-based and secular organisations alike. As mentioned in section 3.4, theology creates relatable entry points to reflect on social norms that are detrimental to the wellbeing of women, and to prompt positive shifts in attitudes.

As an illustration of the integration of the family-oriented approach, the use of Gender Equality Theology and the engagement of faith-based actors, the following case studies focus on how two initiatives – the Family Farm Teams program and the Empowering Youth and Families program – are engaging faith-based actors. They draw from published literature as well as information gathered from six key informant interviews.

Spotlight: Family Farm Teams program

The Family Farm Teams (FFT) program promotes gender-inclusive learning activities to build business acumen, skills and knowledge of semi-subsistence farming families in PNG. The rationale behind the model is that to improve women's lives and economic security, the program needed to support both women and men to work together for mutual benefit and for the benefit of family. Otherwise, simply improving women's skills and income could lead to greater hours of labour for women and to male jealousy and violence.

The FFT approach involves training volunteer community educators (VCEs) who are made up of 'family pairs' (a male and female from each household, which is often husband and wife but can be flexible depending on the individual family composition). This pairing reinforces gender-inclusive principles and ensures that men were engaged. The training involves a range of modules that cover income-generation skills such as financial literacy and farm business planning, as well as modules that encourage participants to reflect on their family relationships dynamics and division of household labour.

Factors that have contributed to the program's impact include:

- Using a 'one step removed' methodology to surface local gender and cultural issues and to ensure local knowledge and analysis arise from the lived experience of local community members, not from outside influence. This makes the training highly engaging, relevant and effective for each community. This also means that the FFT approach is adaptable.
- The peer-to-peer learning process. VCEs become role models to other families in their community, who see improved harmony, farm productivity and income in the VCE households and become interested in taking the training themselves. The peer-to-peer process is appropriate and effective in PNG, where traditional culture is ingrained and people often resist change coming from outsiders, especially on gender-specific issues. It is also said to foster a sense of collaboration instead of competitiveness.
- Delivery of training by mixed female and male teams makes the training more effective.
- Having a shared language and shared family-oriented goals.
- Using the language and concept of equitable families instead of 'rights'. The former invites women and men to negotiate roles in families, while latter can create a binary or defensive reaction.

(Pamphilon et al., 2019)

Church networks have been involved in the FFT program from its inception. One example of informal engagement is that VCEs use their personal networks to invite their family members, friends and peers to join the FFT program. The two most commonly used networks were immediate kinship networks and church networks, e.g. fellowship groups and women's groups.

Church leaders at the community level are also invited to participate in the training themselves. One interview participant noted that in rural communities, "except for the Catholic Church, the other church leaders have to depend on subsistence farming themselves". The interview participant said "We always invite them [the local pastor or minister]. The local pastor will see the benefit for his family. Sometimes they say that they themselves didn't understand their own family dynamics, but now they do and are teaching others". Another interview participant mentioned that in their experience, pastors supported the program including letting the training occur in church buildings if there were no other venues.

A third example is the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation inviting the FFT program to run the training at their centre a few years ago.

We encountered individual success stories related to FFT training from multiple sources. One interview participant shared the story of a woman who became a community leader after completing FFT training. "Before the training and before she became chairlady of community government, she used to do everything in the household. But after the training, they have reversed their roles now. Her husband really supports her in her role as chairlady of community government. He helps with the cooking, looking after the children, washing up, tidies up. This happens every night".

The FFT program has been so successful that pilots of the Australian- and New Zealand-supported Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access Program (PHAMA Plus) is adapting the FFT program with country stakeholders in Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu, Tonga and the Solomon Islands. The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) is also funding a major project in the Solomon Islands to further develop FFT for this nearby Melanesian neighbour.

The University of Canberra FFT program has been funded by ACIAR and Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development. Within PNG the National Agricultural Research Institute and Pacific Adventist University have been key partners in all FFT projects.

Spotlight: Empowering Youth and Families Program

The Empowering Youth and Families (EYF) Program was developed to strengthen the engagement of PNG youth and women farmers in their family and family farm, particularly in relation to developing equitable workloads and engagement in decision-making. The project is “specifically designed to explore challenges and successes in building gender-equitable approaches within PNG religious institutions (churches), and to further understand the future agricultural aspirations of PNG youth” (University of Canberra, n.d.).

The EYF program uses a new learning model called the Wholistic Participatory Action Research (WPAR) approach, developed jointly between PNG project participants and the Australian and PNG research teams to maximise impact and to ensure the program is linguistically, culturally, and environmentally relevant to all PNG farming families, regardless of religious belief. EYF Project Coordinator, Dr Josephine Caffery, noted that the WPAR approach “recognises that project participants’ lives are fundamentally linked to influential factors in a wholistic manner, including their culture, language, land, environment, individual, family, social, agricultural, political and religious practices, norms and habits”.¹

The EYF program collaborates with all seven mainline churches and four smaller church groups across nine provinces. It supports them to adopt the core EYF principles into their existing church-run programs on gender, agriculture, sustainable living or families, and to adapt it to align with each church’s religious philosophy, beliefs, practices, norms and expectations. The ELCPNG has adopted and adapted the EYF program into their Seminary training program in Mount Hagen. The SDA Church has integrated the approach into their Pacific Adventist University’s Ministry and Theology Degree and has committed to integrating the EYF program into their other Pacific Island based programs (J. Caffery, pers. comm., October 2023).

Like many church-based initiatives, the EYF program uses the Gender Equality Theology (GET) to frame discussions on gender equality and women’s rights. The EYF program has adopted and adapted the ten pillars of the GET.

At least 1,500 church leaders across all church groups have now been trained, and these leaders have trained approximately 1,100 congregation leaders through their church programs, with slightly more women than men participating. Feedback received from the churches so far is that the EYF program is a powerful strategy that is changing church’s mindsets and actions on gender equality. Church representatives report that more women are being recognised as church leaders within their congregation, having their say within their church groups, and getting involved in more of the church activities (J. Caffery, pers. comm., September 2023).

EYF In-country Project Manager, Professor Lalen Simeon, from the Pacific Adventist University is quoted in an ACIAR blog: “The result of this training has encouraged more families to be involved in farming, poultry and fish. Some have also started their own trade stores. These farmers are now looking for a market to sell their produce” (ACIAR, 2022). East New Britain Project Coordinator, Kiteni Kurika, is cited as saying that “most of the church representatives have expressed that they were very happy to be a part of the project. Many believe the project is life changing and they want it to be part of the church programs” (ACIAR, 2022).

The EYF program has also been adapted from its initial focus on rural semi-subsistence farming families to be relevant for semi-subsistence fishing families in coastal areas. While the core principles remain, the daily practices involved are different (e.g. the changing seasons of fish or the logistics of preserving fish and getting fish to market).

The University of Canberra EYF program is funded by ACIAR and partners with the Pacific Adventist University and the East New Britain Women and Youth in Agriculture Cooperative Societies Association.

Other initiatives have also found that a **peer-to-peer learning model** contributes to the success of the program. One interview participant said:

“We used the Family Life Program [of the Catholic Church] which had a strong co-couple program. Every parish had a couple trained as Family Life role model, we used that to bring the husband and wife to our session. ... Men started becoming facilitators and advocates. That made a big impact in the program. When others saw the men changing and the families improving ... [other] men started talking about it and wanted to be part of the program.... When we used the co-couple group, it became the entry point. If there is a strong entry point, you achieve gender transformation.”



At the Gerehu Markets in Port Moresby.
Photo: Ness Kerson/madNESS Photography for AusAID

Individual identity, self-worth and dignity

Some interview participants who facilitate training programs commented on the impact of their training on the self-confidence of some of the women trainees. One interview participant commented that it is not uncommon for women (particularly in remote locations), when asked to introduce themselves, to stand up and say ‘I am nothing’. The interview participant said:

“I tell them they are not nothing, they are someone!”

In the literature, Anderson (2015) also noted that women who participated in trainings through the CPP showed increased confidence and feelings of self-worth.

One interview participant noted that focusing on women’s dignity and self-worth was a good approach, saying:

“We [help] them to have freedom. They need to enjoy that freedom in such a way that they realise and enjoy their dignity.”

Dignity is a concept that can also be aligned with theology. One interview participant said 'We explain to them the notion that we are made in the image and likeness of God. That notion is well known to all the churches. ... In the Catholic belief there is a Pisin translation of dignity, dignity means the everyone has the same number in the eyes of God'.

A number of faith-based actors, including some of the mainline churches, the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation and the Centre of Hope, also run programs specifically for men. These include programs that champion positive models of masculinity and create space for men to reflect on their identity and their role in society (Australian High Commission in PNG, 2019a; Gibbs, 2016).

Spotlight: Championing positive masculinity

One example of an initiative that championed positive masculinity was the 'Men's Matters' workshops and network. Starting in 2006, the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga (Western Province) brought together 39 Catholic leaders from 12 parishes across the diocese for "men's matters" workshops. This approach facilitated discussions about masculinities to identify how men understand their roles and to develop a strategic plan to help men in the diocese to live out these roles in a "life-giving way" (Gibbs, 2016, p.130). These conversations began with reflections about participants' identities and roles as 'provider', 'protector' and 'leader' within a rapidly changing context (including the impacts of copper mining and logging). The workshops later evolved into a network called the Men's Movement, which emphasized that "men and boys are not only part of the problem but they are also an important part of the solution" (Gibbs, 2022a p. 154).

Following the Mens' Matters Workshops in the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga, Fr. Philip Gibbs with the support of Caritas Australia arranged for a series of awareness workshops in Madang, Enga, Jiwaka and Bougainville. These were attended by men from throughout Papua New Guinea and facilitated by an experienced facilitator from Fiji. The approach and techniques used in the workshops can be observed in a YouTube video of the Jiwaka workshop held in 2014 at the Catholic Church in Banz. In the video, the male participants are seen exploring concepts of positive and negative masculinity, gender, power, male violence and patriarchy. On the fourth day of the workshop, female activists were invited to engage the men in a dialogue, where "some initial tensions turn into a very fruitful conversation" (Gibbs, 2022b).

As a follow-up to these awareness workshops, the team would visit the families of the workshop participants and interview their wives to learn if they saw change. Invariably the answer was in the affirmative. The team also convened a dialogue with women leaders from the communities and the men from the workshop, with the support of a facilitator, to provide another opportunity for dialogue between women and men (P. Gibbs, pers. comm, September 2023).

5.3.2 Strengthening women's visibility, collective voice, representation and leadership

Women in PNG are not typically encouraged or preferred to be leaders (Lovai, 2016). They are chronically under-represented in leadership in community, business and government spheres (Pacific Private Sector Development Initiative, 2021; Meki, 2022), despite women leaders playing a prominent role in peacebuilding efforts in Bougainville (both after the decade-long civil conflict and also more recently in relation to Bougainville's referendum on independence) as well as during tribal conflicts in the PNG highlands (UN Women, 2018; McLeod, 2015).

At a community level, churches are known for providing women with leadership opportunities and pathways. In a 2017 report by Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (PWSPD) on women's leadership in the Pacific, the authors comment that 'one of the most active sites for women's leadership at community level is within churches. In some cases, women are already being actively engaged as leaders of church groups, as pastors and within executive bodies. Even where women are not in formal leadership positions, it is understood that many play active roles in leading the organisation of key church functions and ceremonial events. The PWSPD report authors drew partly from Pacific-wide research by McLeod (2015), who reported that "women's church groups provided women with new opportunities for social cooperation, status advancement and the exercise of influence, as well with transferable skills such as budgeting, agenda-setting, minute-taking and constituent engagement". According to McLeod, "Women's church groups have increasingly performed both consciousness-raising and activist roles, discussing and drawing community and state attention to a number of issues affecting them such as domestic violence, reproductive health and literacy".

This sentiment was raised by one of our interview participants, who said:

"If you don't speak English, you don't get on the hospital board, the school board, the committees You end up helping those who get into those positions. Whereas if you're in the church, you can go further."

Individual churches also have formal programs to promote women's leadership. For example, UnitingWorld supports a 'Women In Ministry' project that supports Pacific women, including from PNG, to "study theology and seek ordination, equipping them for leadership in the Church and community" (UnitingWorld, 2022).

Two of PNG's six universities – the Divine Word University and the Pacific Adventist University - are run by churches. The Divine Word University is a national Catholic university and has campuses in Madang, Port Moresby, Wewak, Rabaul and Tabubil. In 2019, 55% of all students enrolled are female, and 70% of its administrative staff are women (Australian High Commission in PNG, 2019b). The proportion of female students rises significantly for some courses such as teaching and nursing. Female students also make up the majority of business and accounting courses. Safe and gender-inclusive facilities for female students and staff contribute to providing education and employment opportunities for women. In general, the university places a large focus on engendering a sense of empowerment amongst the female students – one example we heard was the university encouraging female students to obtain their drivers' license which enabled them to take up volunteering driving positions which men would normally take. The university also encourages students to take a strong stance against violence (P Gibbs, pers. comm., September 2023).

Some churches also promote women's participation and leadership through direct employment of women into positions within the church and associated faith-based organisations, including a number of the interview participants we spoke to. They also employed women who had graduated from their community programs, such as livelihoods programs, to in turn train new female participants entering the program.

Yet while many churches in PNG are actively promoting women's leadership and participation (e.g. by supporting women's groups, formal leadership programs and providing direct employment), many senior leadership and spiritual ministry positions within most mainline churches are held exclusively by men (Anderson, 2015; Quality and Technical Assurance Group, 2019). In addition, some researchers have noted that Christianity is not monolithic and that there are both helpful and unhelpful perspectives on gender equality within the diverse Christian churches in PNG, and even within the same church (Eves, 2012; Eves and Koredong, 2015). For example, in a study of young women and leadership in Bougainville, Eves and Koredong (2015) noted that some churches have promoted the growth of women's groups within their organisational structure (which offers women the opportunity to have a say in community-based activities and also provide some forms of support), however 'some churches support traditional notions that exacerbate gender inequality, such as considering men to be the heads of households'. Examples of patriarchal religious beliefs, teachings and practices have also been observed (Anderson, 2015; Eves, 2012; Hermkens et al., 2022; Putt and Kanan, 2021). In short, the literature highlights the contradictory forces within the church sphere that both uphold and dismantle harmful gender norms.

Despite this dissonance, there is strong consensus across the literature and from our key informant interviews that churches (including their use of theological interpretations of gender equality, see section 3.4) are instrumental in supporting progress on gender equality and women's economic empowerment.



Rugged terrain of the highlands region of PNG
Photo: Roslyn Kuniata

5.4 Formal / tangible: initiatives that increase access to resources and/or improve policies and laws that support women's empowerment

5.4.1 Providing training and awareness initiatives to increase financial literacy and inclusion

Through literature searches and key informant interviews, we encountered **numerous examples of faith-based actors providing training on literacy and numeracy, financial literacy and livelihoods**, such as cooking, tailoring and sewing, backyard gardening, farming. Some of these programs are amalgamated with training on gender equality. Some of these programs are delivered in partnership with other stakeholders, such as UN Women or the Womens Micro Bank. A few examples are included below:

- All of the mainline churches provide literacy training including the Catholic Church (through the Family Life Commission), the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Baptist Union of PNG, the Seventh Day Adventist Church and Anglicare PNG. Through the Church Partnership Program, the BCEP Program supports CPP partners to strengthen their adult literacy programs to include more content on financial literacy and running SMEs.
- The Catholic Church, through the Family Life Commission and its diocesan Family Life Coordinators, provides regular training to communities to build skills that would enable women's participation in economic activities. These include skills training on cooking, tailoring, sewing, and backyard gardening. In some cases, some of the women who complete the training may be employed to help teach new students.
- The Nazareth Rehabilitation Centre provides skills training as part of a holistic approach to support victim-survivors of gender-based and sexual violence, including financial on financial and adult literacy. They have also been able to provide small grants to start a poultry project as part of addressing issues of malnutrition in the community.

Some of our interview participants noted the challenges involved with reaching communities with these training programs - in particular, the challenge of reaching women with low or no literacy skills in remote areas compared to women with high levels of formal education in Port Moresby:

One interview participant said:

“For most women, they need to access a market to sell their goods and items. Those who have a bigger voice for advocacy, they can find a market. They tend to be part of projects on WEE. In some circumstances, women establish their own group or association. Then there are other women who don't have that connection and that access, they are disadvantaged and left out. It's two different groups of women when it comes to women's economic empowerment – those that have the voice and advantage to access it, and those that don't have those voice and connection.”

Another interview participant said:

“In Port Moresby, you work with business centres, but this is about women who already have skills, who are able to access business centres, who can manage grants. But if you are looking for empowerment of women in provinces and communities, that level of economic empowerment service doesn’t match the needs of women at the community level.”

A third participant said:

“Many women miss out on those trainings and team building activities. Most women who are going to those [women’s economic empowerment] training are mostly already educated women, they already have an SME set up themselves.”

However, the latter interview participant also commented that church programs, more than other actors, do reach women in rural areas who lack a formal education or literacy.

Resourcing was also raised as a major challenge. One interview participant noted:

“We need more money to continue doing this. Word has gotten around and we have been asked when we can do the training again because they appreciated it.”

Another interview participant said that while church workers had the skills, they did not have enough resources to deliver the activities, including human resources, including priests and religious nuns. A third interview participant spoke of a trainers’ manual that had been developed but had not yet been widely rolled out due to lack of funding.

5.4.2 Supporting community income-generation activities

Some churches have also provided resources to support income-generating opportunities for communities. One interview participant relayed an example of a church in Central Province where community members were growing surplus crops but lacked a market for them to sell their produce. The church built a market house outside of their church - a large shed-type structure without walls to give shade and shelter – for the community to use. The church also bought a 36-seater bus to transport the farmers and their produce to the market, as well as using the bus for additional purposes such as trainings and gatherings. Another example was a church in Western Province which purchased a mechanical plough that the community could share. Both examples were from communities where members had undergone the Empowering Youth and Families training.

Another example is from another community in Western Province. The community is remote and can only be accessed by a 4-hour boat ride, so travel in and out of the village is difficult and expensive and when people travel up and down that part of the coast, there is nowhere for them to

stay. Some community members had taken part in EYF training and wanted to continue building skills and capacity within the community. To address these issues, the church and community built an accommodation house with four rooms for travelling guests. Female youth from the village manage the accommodation centre, from the bookings, finances, operational decisions, cleaning and management of the resources that their guests need. One of the main proponents, a father and leader in the community, said it's about training the youth in how to work as a family team and what is involved in running a business.

Several interview participants spoke about the challenge of competition and market saturation amongst nascent micro-SME owners who complete a program of livelihood training and attempt to start a business in an area with a limited market. One interview participant said:

“... when they are given this training, there is competition amongst the individuals. There is no money to sustain the economic empowerment activities. The individuals who have been given training drop out again.”

Other interview participants said:

“Everybody does the same thing!”

“You go to a market and everyone is selling the same thing. There's not much diversity.”

This issue of limited economic opportunities, saturated markets and the need to find new opportunities and niches has been noted in the literature, including by ACIAR (2021, p. 62).

The issue of market saturation is closely tied with the issue of access to markets. In a country where so many communities are in remote locations, the challenge of transport is significant. Several interview participants mentioned this as an issue for both coastal and inland communities.

5.4.3 Helping to improve access to banking facilities

Some faith-based actors have found other ways to improve access to banking facilities for people in remote locations. One interview participant described their experience of working through a faith-based institution in collaboration with the FFT to establish four 'MiCash' agents. 'MiCash' is a bank account accessed on a mobile phone attached to the Digicel network, operated by Nationwide Microbank, otherwise known as MiBank. A MiCash agent is typically a service provider (e.g. a women's resource centre or a local business) that offers community members access to the MiCash service on a tablet connected to a mobile network. This helps rural women to access banking services and cuts down the travel they have to do into towns. The interview participant explained that in the church program she was involved with:

“... the bank people train agents, so they can provide a service to the communities. The women from the church run the banks. They nominate women or men to be trained. These agents are volunteers from the community groups.”

5.4.4 Use of assets, infrastructure and networks

Faith based networks and electricity access

PNG has one of the lowest rates of electricity access in the Pacific (Asian Development Bank, 2022) and globally (Sharma et al., 2021). Only 16.6% of PNG's population has access to electricity, ranging from 57% in urban areas to 11.4% in rural areas (National Statistics Office PNG, 2019). The unreliability and high cost of electricity are further challenges (Sofe and Sanida, 2022). The PNG Government has committed to achieving 70% electricity access by 2030 and 100% by 2050, as outlined in its National Energy Policy 2017 – 2017. It has established the National Energy Authority to oversee the development of renewable energy resources through the coordination of the National Electrification Roll-Out Plan (National Energy Authority PNG, n.d.). The PNG government is supported in improving electrification through the PNG Electrification Partnership, an initiative supported by Australia, the United States, New Zealand and Japan (Sofe and Sanida, 2022).

While urban power grids are largely powered by hydro, diesel and gas-fired power plants, Sofe and Sanida (2022) note that “the majority of the rural population is using off-grid solar lighting and battery powered lamps”, which “adds to the investment prospect of solar energy within the renewables and off-grid sector”.

Examples from PNG and the wider Pacific show that solar micro-grids are being used to provide affordable, reliable and clean electricity to community facilities or even whole communities. As well as improved electricity access, this has the benefit of drastically reducing energy costs previously spent on diesel-powered electricity (UNDP, 2022b) and in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In an example from PNG, the UNDP is working with PNG partners in the Sepik region to install micro grid solar systems (an independent energy system that can operate independent of the national grid) in rural communities. This is through the EU-funded Support to Rural Entrepreneurship and Trade in Papua New Guinea (STREIT PNG) Programme, a joint UN program which focuses on the value chains of cocoa, vanilla, and fisheries in the Sepik region (UNCDF, 2023). In the micro-grid solar system project, participating stakeholders include the Division of Education, Division of Health, Sepik Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Mission and Catholic Health Service. Six education and health facilities will receive the solar systems: Taul Community Health Post, Nagum Adventist Secondary and the Catholic Health Service-run Dagua Community Health Centre in East Sepik Province; and Don Bosco Technical School, Vanimo Secondary and Baro Community Health Post in Sandaun Province (Kellerton, 2022), three of which are run by faith-based actors. All of these facilities had experienced an ongoing lack of adequate power supply, hindering their ability to run and provide services efficiently (UNDP, 2022c). With a reliable electricity supply, they are better able to support health and education outcomes in their communities.

An example of a community-run energy system comes from Vanuatu. In the communities of Wintua and Lorlow on Vanuatu's second-largest island of Malekula, a community solar micro-grid now provides affordable and reliable energy to 2,814 people and seven institutions: the primary and secondary schools, the health centre, the police station, the community hall, the market area, and the airport. The micro-grid is owned and managed by the community, which keeps electricity costs low as there are no external operation costs or profit margins. As part of the maintenance plan for the micro-grid system, the two communities have established an energy cooperative in partnership with the Vanuatu Department of Cooperatives, and the local energy service company provided free

maintenance and training to community members in the first year of operation. This project was implemented by the Vanuatu Ministry of Climate Change in collaboration with UNDP and with funding from the Government of Austria (UNDP, 2022b).

One interview participant, in referencing to opportunities to roll out solar energy systems in PNG, noted that churches have governance systems in place which makes it easier to work with them.

This scoping study was not able to provide an analysis of the role of faith-based organisations on this issue however, given the extensive physical and social infrastructure of churches and other faith-based networks in PNG, including in rural and remote areas that suffer from lack of access to reliable electricity, we recommend it as a topic for further investigation.



Other uses of extensive infrastructure and networks

Churches also informally support various faith-based and secular-led initiatives on gender equality and economic empowerment by allowing training sessions and meetings to be held in their buildings. As one of our interview participants said:

“When you look at value added in terms of cost sharing, the churches have a lot of facilities that can be used at minimal cost for training and capacity building.”

In promoting and delivering the training, churches also make use of their extensive networks of volunteers throughout their dioceses. One interview participant commented:

“They have the structure for training of trainers, [it’s] far more cost saving than if you tried to use the government system, that would be quite expensive.”

5.4.5 Support for survivors of gender-based violence and sorcery accusation related violence

Faith-based organisations run a number of safehouses in PNG to support women and children who have experienced gender-based violence and/or sorcery accusation related violence (SARV), including the Catholic Church, United Church, The Salvation Army and various religious congregations. Five of these safehouses are part of the Catholic Safehouse Association, including the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation in Bougainville and the Centre of Hope in Madang province. The Catholic Safehouse Association is a network of safehouses that provide shelter for survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse and their children in Wewal, Kokopo, Madang, Bougainville and Vanimo (Akuani, 2020). It was established to build a stronger network among its members to better provide much needed support to victim-survivors of gender-based violence. It will work closely with different service providers, including the Department of Community Development and Religion, police, hospitals, family and sexual violence units and other civil society actors (The National, 2020), to establish more effective referrals to legal services and judiciary.

In supporting survivors of SARV and gender-based violence, the Nazareth Centre and Centre of Hope help survivors overcome trauma through counselling, refer them to services as needed including health and judicial services, and where appropriate facilitate dialogue with relatives of the survivor. They also run initiatives on gender equality and rights training, male advocacy/champion programs, livelihood training for clients, public awareness campaigns and advocacy to government.

Two interview participants raised the issue of funding for these safehouses as significant issue. One interview participant said:

“There are lots of civil society organisations working on [SARV] but they don’t have the human resources or the funding. Funding is scarce in this space.”

This tallies with the findings of a review of domestic and family violence services in PNG, which said “A patchwork of non-government and faith-based organisations run FSV [family and sexual violence] services in various forms and with varying levels of skills across the country and are very much dependent on precarious funding sources” (Putt and Kanan, 2021).

Churches and other faith-based actors in PNG have and continue to be key contributors to addressing gender-based violence in PNG through their prevention and response programs for survivors of GBV, as well as their public awareness campaigns and community advocacy initiatives. Some scholars however have noted that variation exists within some churches in their response to violence. Putt and Kanan (2021) note that “At one research site, the research team observed tension between religious institutions whose priority is to keep marriages intact and survivor rights advocates (sometimes within the same institution) whose priority is the safety of women. Traditional gender roles and social norms also contributed to this tension.” (Putt and Kanan, 2021). Similarly, Hermkens et al. (2022) cite several research reports where certain church leaders did not encourage women to access services such as safehouses or to lay charges through the Family Protection Act, and surmised that “the protection of the marriage unit may be the core concern” Hermkens et al. (2022).

5.4.6 Advocacy and engagement to influence policies and legislation

Some faith-based actors in PNG have a long history of engaging in community advocacy, particularly in raising awareness on gender-based and sexual violence, and on child protection. For example, the Centre of Hope and Nazareth Rehabilitation Centre participate in global campaigns such as the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women (held from 25 November to 10 December each year) and international days such as International Women's Day, International Day of Peace and International Day of the Girl Child. The Centre of Hope also runs a Male Advocacy Program that engages men and boys to become advocates against violence against women and champions of change. The Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation have similar advocacy initiatives at the community level. They also have a pool of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), who have been trained on women's human rights and gender equality, to become advocates in their own villages by sharing their success stories and lived experiences. The Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation also advocates for gender equality in political governance, particularly as Bougainville is going through a process of elections.

Faith-based actors have also been key players in advocating for social and legislative change in the area of SARV. Fletcher et al. (2016), in their research paper *Power, Politics and Coalitions in the Pacific: Lessons from Collective Action on Gender and Power*, analysed the coalition of actors in PNG who came together address SARV and how they worked together. Faith-based networks and actors, including the Human Rights Defenders network supported by the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation, Fr. Phillip Gibbs; academics from the Melanesian Institute, and the Catholic Church. The coalition raised public awareness of SARV, worked for legislative change and responded to incidents of sorcery-related violence at the village level.

In 2019 the PNG Council of Churches, a key actor in the implementation of PNG's National Action Plan on Sorcery and Witchcraft Accusation Related Violence, released a National Strategy for Churches to address SARV. Some church interventions include: an online forum on SARV to raise awareness and support discussion and engagement on the issue; the commemoration of the first International Day Against Sorcery Accusation Related Violence on 10 October 2020 which was marked by peaceful demonstrations; and a panel discussions on sorcery and witchcraft broadcast over the Catholic Radio Service of the Archdiocese of Mt Hagen in the Western Highland Province (CBCPNGISI, 2020).

In the latest phase of the Church Partnership Program (CPP), the seven mainline churches in PNG are being supported to strengthen their engagement with government on public policy. The CPP Phase 4 Design Document notes that "Policy engagement remains a new area for most partners' and that 'the long-term goal of the CPP is to influence citizen-government interaction, which is currently weak, to become more constructive and inclusive". The document states that "To achieve this, BCEP will create a portfolio of interventions that promote constructive citizen-government engagement for jointly solving practical development problems, such as basic service delivery issues". The document also notes two key issues affecting service delivery:

1. Unreliability of government funding for church health services over the last 10 years, compromising service delivery
2. Government control over the employment of teachers, including those allocated to church schools, compromising church's ability to manage poor teachers and maintain quality services. (CPP, 2022).

The CPP Phase 4 Design Document also explores the opportunities, challenges and mechanisms for CPP church partners in advocacy at the local community level and at a national level to government. It recommends that:

- CPP partners will be “better placed to engage on policy issues within the mandates of their development units” (which lead the churches’ work with CPP), including “community development/social services, disaster relief/humanitarian response, gender equality (combatting violence against women and children) and the inclusion of disadvantaged people, particularly those with disabilities”.
- At the local level, churches have a role as “trusted intermediaries between communities and subnational governments’ and to ‘engage with communities to directly solve problems in relation to their own delivery of services”.
- At the national policy level, churches have three avenues for action: through their peak body, the PNG Council of Churches; generating evidence as the basis for policy change; and engaging in multi-stakeholder coalitions for change, such as on SARV (CPP, 2022).

Questions for faith-based actors and their allies arising from section 5.4:

- How can faith-based actors strengthen their contribution to improving women’s access to financial inclusion, for example through reducing the social, cultural, resource and infrastructure-related barriers that discourage women from improving their literacy and financial literacy; accessing bank accounts, mobile phones and credit; or sustaining a business or livelihood.
- Can faith-based actors use their extensive physical and social infrastructure to support communities to access reliable, clean, affordable electricity?



Showcasing the variety of food crops during
2023 World Food Day celebration in Buka,
Autonomous Region of Bougainville.
Photo: Roslyn Kuniata

5.5 Additional opportunities for faith-based actors to scale up the reach and impact of women's economic empowerment initiatives

5.5.1 Leverage faith-based health and education networks

The seven mainline churches in PNG have extensive networks in healthcare and education, as outlined below.

Faith-based actors and education

The mainline churches provide about 40% of education services across the country in collaboration with the PNG Department of Education and Provincial Education Boards. All seven CPP partners and another 3 churches are represented by the National Churches Education Council (CPP Phase 4 Design Document, 2022). As an illustration of the footprint of some of the mainline churches:

- The Catholic Church runs 3,311 schools which employ 16,453 teachers and teach 374,792 students (2016 figures). These schools are coordinated through the National Catholic Education Commission which reports to the Catholic Bishops Conference of PNG and Solomon Islands (National Catholic Education Commission, n.d.).
- The ELCPNG operates 234 schools (Lutheran Education, 2018).
- The United Church of PNG runs 6 high schools, 400 primary and community schools, three vocational schools and 'many more elementary schools'. It also runs 8 colleges for teachers, lay leaders and pastors (United Church in PNG, n.d.)
- The Anglican Church of PNG runs 3 high schools, about 100 community schools and 2 vocational centres (Anglican Communion Office, n.d.)
- Two of PNG's six universities are also run by faith-based actors – Divine Word University and Pacific Adventist University.

Given their footprint in the education sector, faith-based actors in partnership with the PNG Department of Education have a key role in improving literacy and education in PNG.

Early childhood education was not historically part of the formal education system in PNG. However, a new National Education Plan (NEP) 2020-2029 incorporated ECE into a restructured formal education system, specifically two years of kindergarten for children aged 4-5. The NEP outlines that early childhood education will be provided through a 'Public Private and Church Partnership' approach, centrally involving churches (Department of Education PNG, 2020). According to the NEP, "there are early childhood centres in the urban areas that are operated as businesses and charge fees accordingly. There are also centres in the rural areas that are operated by the churches, NGOs and other community groups" (Department of Education PNG, 2020). Early childhood care and education services are regulated under the PNG Education Act 1983 (for preschools) and the Lukautim Pikinini (Child) Act 2015 (for childcare centres) (UNESCO, 2021). The role of faith-based actors in providing childcare, and in 'childcare entrepreneurship', is discussed in section 5.5.2.

Faith-based actors and health

The seven mainline churches provide about 50% of healthcare services in PNG, and half of these are provided by the Catholic Church. There are two key church engagement bodies in the health sector - the Catholic Church Health Service, and the Christian Health Service which comprises 27 churches including the other six CPP partners.

The Catholic Church runs 5 hospitals, 5 health training schools and about 240 other health facilities (Catholic Church Health Service, n.d.). The ELCPNG runs 4 hospitals, 28 health centres, 88 aid posts and 14 two-men aid posts (ELCPNG, n.d.). The United Church runs 29 Health Centres, 31 Aid posts, one Community Health Worker training school and one Nursing School (United Church, n.d.) The Anglican Health Service runs 3 health centres (rural hospitals), 12 health sub-centres and 12 aid posts (Anglican Communion Office, n.d.).

There are many challenges to providing healthcare in PNG, including shortages of medicines and medical supplies. One interview participant also noted some challenges around capital infrastructure. In particular, they noted the difficulty of placing doctors and midwives in remote and rural areas due to a lack of housing or appropriate facilities for these health workers. The interviewee was aware of at least 500 vacant positions for health workers to go into rural and remote communities, but there is no housing available for them. In addition, many facilities in remote and rural areas have deteriorated over time and need renovating and/or rebuilding, but there is a lack of funding to do this. This raises the question of whether there is an opportunity whether faith-based actors can play a role in attracting innovative finance for healthcare. Innovative financing is discussed in section 5.5.4.

Health provision and women's economic empowerment are linked in a number of ways. Firstly, women in poor health are less able to enjoy economic empowerment. Secondly, health services can be a vehicle for gender-transformative training and awareness-raising. Thirdly, health providers can promote gender equity in employment within their services.

Promoting gender-transformative training and awareness-raising through health services. As a parallel example, the ability of the seven mainline churches to mobilise their networks to promote positive behaviour-change messaging was aptly demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when CPP partners worked together with the Church Agencies Network - Disaster Operations (CAN DO) consortium under the Australian Humanitarian Partnership to share information and resources, tackle mis-information, and provide water, sanitation and hygiene facilities (Australian Humanitarian Partnership, 2023).

Promoting gender equity in employment within these services. The high proportion of education and health services run by faith-based actors in PNG would seem to suggest that there are opportunities for them to promote women's participation and leadership through employment policies in these services. However, some literature notes that the employment of teachers in schools is not necessarily a decision for churches even in church-run schools. The CPP Phase 4 Design Document (2022) states that "Unlike the health sector, where church health workers are directly employed by the church service provider, in education, the government employs all teachers including those working in church schools". Similarly, a study by the National Research Institute PNG in 2012 found that "In some cases, the churches recommended teachers they had identified for their schools, yet the PEB [Provincial Education Board] appointed teachers of its own choice to

these positions. As expressed by one of the teachers, “the churches recommended teachers of their choice to teaching positions in their schools but sometimes the PEB makes their own appointments to the same positions” (Paraide et al., 2012). This scoping study was not able to provide insights specifically into the topic of how faith-based actors can influence gender equality in employment in the education and health sectors in PNG, however this may be a fruitful area for further investigation.

Overall, we recommend further research to explore how could faith-based actors further leverage their education and health networks and how can other stakeholders, including government and development partners, support them to do so.

Questions for faith-based actors and their allies to consider:

- How can faith-based actors further leverage their extensive health and education networks to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment? Research could examine the influence of faith-based actors in improving literacy and education levels; implementing gender-transformative learning and training throughout their health and education services; and Influencing gender equality in employment within these services.

5.5.2. Paid childcare and women's economic empowerment

Women in PNG typically bear the responsibility for unpaid care work, including caring for children, which significantly limits their time and capacity to engage in paid work and income generation opportunities. **Women also face higher barriers to accessing paid employment**, as outlined in section 4.5. **At the same time, many children in PNG do not have access to early childhood education** (UNICEF, n.d.). Research from regional and global contexts indicate that in low-income countries, 80% of preschool-age children are not enrolled in pre-school education and care, and that children living with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged (Devercelli and Beaton-Day, 2020). Barriers to accessing early childhood care and education (ECCE) include cost (including for transport, meals and enrolment fees), remoteness/lack of transport and perceived quality of the ECCE service (International Labour Organization and Asian Development Bank, 2023).

One approach which simultaneously addresses these intersecting challenges is inclusive 'childcare entrepreneurship' - the provision or facilitation of paid childcare work. As noted in a 2022 report by UN Women Asia and the Pacific:

the provision of accessible, affordable and quality childcare provides what has been termed a “triple dividend.” It can: improve female labour force participation rates; enhance children's education and capabilities; and create decent jobs in the paid care sector in which women dominate. (UN Women Asia and the Pacific, 2022)

Multiple research studies point to the benefits of this 'triple dividend' (Borrowman et al., 2022; Devercelli and Beaton-Day, 2020; UN Women Asia and the Pacific, 2022).

The Government of PNG has recognized that churches are key partners in the provision of ECCE in PNG, as outlined in Section 5.5.1. We recommend further investigation into the opportunities for churches and other faith-based actors to expand their contribution to the 'triple dividend'. This could include a focus on training and employing more women as qualified ECCE workers; supporting the

provision of inclusive, safe, high quality learning environments for pre-school children, delivered either by faith-based actors or community cooperatives; and addressing other barriers to children's access to ECCE, such as transport and cost.

Question for faith-based actors and their allies to consider:

- How can faith-based actors facilitate cooperation/collaboration of communities, churches and government in childcare entrepreneurship to increase accessibility of affordable and quality ECCE, reduce the burden of unpaid care work, and provide employment opportunities for women?

5.5.3 Provide development pathways and support better access to markets

The importance of providing ongoing support and development pathways to people who have completed financial literacy or livelihoods training was a common issue raised by six of our interview participants:

As one interview participant pointed out:

“For digital financial literacy, it's not a ‘one and done’. Particularly when you're talking about adult learning, because it's not digital nativism”.

Another interview participant said:

“The training needs to be accompanied by an actual program of activities to encourage women to increase their earning capacity or to bank. Training without follow up activities doesn't benefit women much, so the training has to be done in conjunction with practical activities.”

The interviewee suggested that faith-based actors could help by working with women on activities that will generate income. The interview participant nominated the *Lus Frut Mamas* scheme as a good example of a program that provided ongoing support to women seeking financial inclusion.

A third interview participant suggested that churches could sponsor or run “family finance centres” for both women and men, to help them start micro enterprises after they had completed financial literacy and business skills training. It could be framed in terms of shared goals and values:

“A church sponsored initiative ‘to help your children’.”

A fourth interview participant suggested that churches, who have a well-established history of running adult literacy programs and have collaborated with the PNG Government on the passage of a national literacy act, could work with the government to strengthen pathways for graduates of adult literacy programs to commence economic pathways.

A fifth interview participant noted that:

“One thing that I see as missing from other areas I work is mentoring and supervising”. The participant mentioned that just providing training

without ongoing support does not work. “Someone has to do the mentoring and supervision to make sure there’s impact.”

A sixth interview participant emphasised the importance of helping community members to access markets. The participant observed that in some livelihoods training projects:

“there has been a lot of training, but the accessibility of market is not there. The value chain includes different places – from the woman selling her goods, it goes to the next place, the production line. In most trainings, women are taught to produce, but who is the next actor in the chain? So there are projects that are not complete projects. There’s a whole process that needs to be followed, identifying who the key stakeholders are.”

The interviewee used an example of a previous project they had been involved with, saying it was:

“.. a very good project, we provided a lot of skills. Some of the youth established their own small companies and did a lot of things. In some activities, although we provided them with the skills, we didn’t provide them with the next step, the access to market. We could have introduced them to an exporter for example. We didn't have a clear pathway for after the training. That was one learning. That’s where the local value chain comes into place. Any livelihood program needs to have clear next step.”

This interview participant also suggested that faith-based organisations could analyse at which points in the value chain they could engage and help women to engage. One specific suggestion was that faith-based actors explore the feasibility of helping women’s groups attain organic certification status for their agricultural products such as coconut oil to give their products an advantage for the export market. In PNG, the National Agriculture Quarantine Inspection Authority are responsible for certifying organic products, but as the interview participant noted:

“It costs money and most of these women’s groups wouldn’t have that money to send the sample to Port Moresby and get it certified. Then you have to meet certain requirements for production. Most groups don’t have those facilities in place, so they sell to the local market [without organic status].”

Furthermore, in this interviewee’s experience of supporting local women’s groups to sell products such as coconut oil, the women’s groups benefited from guidance on how to be more ‘market ready’, especially managing their production to boost the quality and consistency of their supply of products:

“I can’t set them up with a supermarket without those two things.”

This points to a possibly unfilled need/opportunity in the value chain – helping women’s groups to better market their products.

A seventh interview participant spoke about the challenge experienced by small-scale farmers and fishers in accessing post-production cold storage facilities. The interview spoke about local coastal fishing production, where lack of electricity restricts the ability to produce ice to keep fish cold. This in turn prevents local fishers from selling to local hotels as they cannot meet their standards.

One of the interview participants above noted the need for greater linkages with other key stakeholders: for church-based organisations to establish more connections with other NGOs doing this work, and link with the economic and commerce sectors of government.

There are a few examples of churches supporting community members to expanding their production and start MSMEs by building a local marketplace, providing transport or establishing a community-run guesthouse (see section 5.4.2). It may be useful to systematically gather more examples in order to examine the conditions for success for such church-supported community initiatives and to understand how to scale up such approaches. What role do governments, donors or other stakeholders have in helping churches resource and support such initiatives?

While an increasing number of women are benefiting from skills and knowledge training as well as access to economic opportunities as a result of initiatives led by faith-based organisations, the scale at which this happens is not clear, or at least the authors of this report are not aware of such a sector-wide mapping or evaluation. Through the literature and key informant interviews, we have encountered numerous stories of transformative change at an individual, family and sometimes community level.

However, one interview participant commented that in terms of churches' work on economic activities:

“... it's not easily sustained. It's a little more ad hoc and at a micro level, where the economic activity tends to produce food security rather than economic inclusion and a growth of family resources and assets.”

One suggestion was that churches could seek to create links with bigger government programs, and also with the economic sections of government. Further investigation to better understand the scale, reach and impact of faith-based actors in this space may be required.

Questions for faith-based actors and their allies to consider:

- What are the opportunities for faith-based actors to provide development pathways and ongoing support to people who complete their training programs on literacy, financial literacy and livelihoods?
- How can women be empowered to access and benefit from participation in some of the more lucrative, value-added activities within agricultural value chains, and how can faith-based actors support them?
- Where are the synergies and opportunities for strategic collaboration between faith-based actors, other civil society actors and government on initiatives for women's economic empowerment? This research could include a detailed mapping exercise to identify existing reach, impact, linkages and opportunities.

5.5.4 Attract more resourcing through innovative finance to scale up impact

Research by the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program has shown that **significant shifts in gendered practices and power are possible even with relatively small amounts of funding** (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). However, the need for greater investment to address gender equality and women's economic empowerment is significant and will require a **significant scaling up of resources**. Our interview participants identified several key areas where there is a gap in support for women's economic empowerment, including the provision of development pathways after training, and helping community members to access markets and diversify their products to avoid market saturation. Plugging these gaps will only be possible with sustained, increased funding. While larger funding flows from multilateral and bilateral development partners is needed, it has been recognised that traditional grant-based financing will not be enough to meet these development needs and a very significant boost in private sector investment is also required (DFAT, 2023b, p.5). In countries such as PNG with nascent private sectors, innovative finance can play a key role in attracting private sector investment.

Innovative finance refers to financial solutions and mechanisms that create effective ways of channelling private money from global financial markets and public resources towards solving pressing global problems. *Impact investing* refers to innovative financing/investments made with the intention to generate positive, measurable social, and environmental impact alongside a financial return. *Catalytic financing* is innovative finance that is more patient, risk-tolerant, and willing to have lower returns than conventional capital in exchange for developing an ecosystem and encouraging further investment that would not otherwise occur (Dalberg, 2023).

Investors looking at innovative finance options in the Pacific have encountered some significant barriers. According to DFAT's new Development Finance Review, "The Pacific's development finance needs are shaped by economic, fiscal, and political fragility, high levels of indebtedness, and vulnerability to natural disasters. Pacific Island countries' small sizes, remoteness, narrow resource



base, limited climate-resilient infrastructure, and exposure to climate risks are major constraints to private sector development” (DFAT, 2023b).

A 2023 scoping study by Dalberg on the investment landscape for innovative finance in several countries, commissioned by Caritas Australia, analysed investment conditions in PNG. They found that PNG’s nascent private sector, the “lack of a well-developed commercial investment ecosystem” and the heavy dependence of the private sector on grant financing and government support, are barriers for impact investors seeking to make a difference. In other words, there is a lack of “investable opportunities” as well as a lack of market information.

Another factor is relatively high transaction costs compared to other regions. In PNG’s case this is due to the lack of strong “banking, financial services and insurance ecosystem” (Dalberg, 2023) and that fact that individual social enterprises in the Pacific tend to be relatively small and consequently have relatively small investment requirements, which means that the transaction costs of single deals are prohibitively high to most investors (Hilton et al., 2021). There are also perceptions that investment in the Pacific has relatively high risk (Jarvis, 2019).

More generally, the barriers to private sector investment and business operations in PNG include limited liquidity and foreign exchange, corruption, issues related to governance and the regulatory environment, government capacity constraints as well as tribal conflicts and unreliable energy and water supplies which may cause operational disruptions (International Trade Administration, 2022; US Department of State, n.d.).

While the Dalberg study did not specifically examine opportunities for gender-lens investing in PNG (instead focusing on the agriculture and forestry sectors) some of their findings may have transference across sectors and are relevant for gender-inclusive investment in agriculture and forestry. The Dalberg authors noted that “There is unmet need for catalytic financing in these sectors to improve the resilience and sustainability of producers. These investments would increase credit for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in agriculture and forestry; and contribute to the development of agriculture technology and forest technology products that can support these businesses to scale, access finance, and connect to the market”. They also concluded that there is a demand for “partners with a proven, comprehensive set of capabilities—including financing and contracting with capable firms to implement projects” (Dalberg, 2023).

The challenge of attracting investors to an emerging market characterised by numerous small and scattered enterprises needing small investment amounts, as well as high transaction costs, highlights the value of intermediaries. In an evaluation of the Pacific RISE program³, Hilton et al. (2021) explained that:

Intermediaries play a key role in the functioning of impact investing markets, helping to de-risk deals and facilitate capital flow through services such as knowledge sharing, brokering, networking, enterprise incubation and acceleration, financial innovation, technical assistance, and impact enhancement and measurement.

³ “Pacific RISE was established by DFAT in 2016 to promote the development of an impact investing market across the Pacific, with a focus on social enterprise and women’s economic empowerment through gender lens investing (GLI). The program sought to work through a range of intermediaries to connect investors to social enterprises across the region, initially as a grant facility that funded enterprise scoping and investment readiness work, based on a pipeline development model piloted under the earlier DFAT Pacific Investment Readiness program”. (Quoted from the Pacific Rise Evaluation Report by Hilton et al., 2021)

Hilton and colleagues recommended that DFAT should preference building the capacity of local intermediaries in the Pacific, rather than “defaulting to well-established international intermediaries with limited local presence”.

One of the learnings from the Pacific RISE program was that fund structures such as investment vehicles are ‘more appropriate for most investors as they reduce their risk exposure, allow for greater leverage relative to donor input, and can recycle funds for long-lasting future benefits’ - as long as their design is market demand driven. Investment vehicles were also recommended as having greater value for money than a focus on individual enterprises, as there was the potential to leverage significant amounts of investment into the vehicles, with debt vehicles in particular having the potential to recycle funds indefinitely over time (Hilton et al., 2021).

The mainline churches in PNG have extensive networks (including health and education centres) and relationships across PNG. They are trusted and influential actors in communities in PNG. They also have connections with their sister churches and affiliated networks overseas. These qualities suggest that there is fertile ground to explore the opportunities for churches to engage with or as an intermediary body, to bridge the gap between communities that need finance and investors who want larger ticket sizes, and lower risks and transaction costs, than could be achieved without an intermediary.

Dalberg (2023) suggest that there is potential for churches to explore leveraging their considerable “non-financial capabilities” to perform the roles of:

- Enabler - providing supporting infrastructure, such as clinics and storage facilities;
- Advisor - providing technical assistance leveraging expertise from existing initiatives;
- Facilitator - providing access to potential customers or stakeholders through churches and their Australian and international networks; and/or
- Customer - purchasing products and services (e.g., health and education services, or electricity) from investee companies that will improve development outcomes for the communities they serve. (Dalberg, 2023)

To explore these possibilities, Caritas Australia is conducting a separate feasibility study to explore innovative finance opportunities with a gender and/or climate lens in PNG, with a particular focus on the role that faith-based networks can play.

Questions for faith-based actors and their allies to consider:

- What are the opportunities for faith-based actors in PNG and Australia in attracting innovative finance with a gender / climate lens, to direct more funding to gender/climate projects that empower women?

5.5.5 Promote women's economic empowerment through gender transformative climate resilience initiatives

Gender equality, women's economic empowerment and climate justice are strongly linked. We outlined these intersections in section 4.9 and emphasised that a gender-transformative approach should be part of every climate resilience initiative.

Faith-based actors are supporting communities in PNG to strengthen their resilience to climate change in a number of ways. Using Rao and Kelleher's *Gender at Work* framework (see page 48), we provide examples of both informal/intangible and formal/tangible change.

Informal/ intangible change

Faith-based actors have a key role in helping people understand climate change and motivate them to take inclusive action for climate resilience. Research indicates that most people in PNG and the wider Pacific have interpreted disasters through Christian theological views (UnitingWorld, 2019; McKenna & Yakam, 2021) as well as indigenous customary views (Jackson & Piggott-McKellar, 2021). The biblical concepts of "Divine Retribution" (UnitingWorld, 2019) or "the End Times" (McKenna & Yakam, 2021) are widely held, and can lead to fatalistic views of climate change which discourage preventative action (McKenna & Yakam, 2021). It also means that some people view disasters as a punishment from God, which can lead to blame of self or others for certain behaviours including those that may be inconsistent with traditional social norms (Mitchell, 2018). At the same time, Sahai et al. (2021) recognise the power of spirituality as a source of strength and empowerment in times of disaster. The power of theology to be either a "transforming or disempowering mediator for change" (Carroll, 2022) has been recognised by researchers (Carroll, 2022; Luetz & Nunn, 2020) but is reportedly a missing element from many climate and disaster resilience initiatives, to the detriment of the success and impact of those initiatives (Luetz and Nunn, 2020; Mitchell, 2018). Researchers have recommended a consilience between scientific and spiritual approaches to addressing climate resilience in the Pacific (Gard, 2021; Luetz and Nunn, 2020).

In recognition of the importance of theology in supporting resilient Pacific communities, a Theology of Disaster Resilience in a Changing Climate (TDRCC) was developed in 2018 by the Theology of Disaster Resilience Working Group with the support of CAN DO. The TDRCC uses theological approaches to "strengthen, empower and enable individuals and communities to build and maintain communities of sustainability and resilience in the face of disasters". It is based on the core statement "Preparedness is an element of discipleship for a Resilient Pacific Earth Community". The TDRCC is communicated via a framework paper and accompanying bible studies (UnitingWorld, 2019). It is hoped that the TDRCC resources will "bring about the changes in attitudes and behaviours around disasters and climate change that will in turn bring about transforming and transformative change in local communities and beyond" (Carroll, 2022). A number of faith-based actors are working with CAN DO to implement training of trainers and community education (Bolatagici, 2022).

Inclusion is one of the 5 key principles of the TDRCC, which states that:

all human beings are equal and precious in God's created order regardless of whether they are men, women, girl or boy, and regardless of their gender, race, class, disability, age, sexuality or religion. Our policies and practice of Disaster Preparedness must include the perspectives and safety of all people within our community. The safety of women, children,

youth, the elderly, those with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities, must be paramount in our policies and practice of Disaster Preparedness. (UnitingWorld, 2019)

While TDRCC emphasises equality of all in the eyes of God, and the treatment of all human beings with dignity, there is opportunity for faith-based actors to explore how it can be used alongside the Gender Equality Theology to address issues brought about the intersections between gender and climate change and to support women's contributions to disaster and climate resilience, and enhance their capacity for leadership and decision-making in all aspects related to disaster resilience and climate change.

Formal/tangible change

Faith-based actors have a strong presence in disaster response initiatives throughout the Pacific (Gero et al., 2013). In PNG, one example relates to how the seven mainline churches of the Church Partnership Program (CPP) and their development agencies were a key part of Australia's response to the 2015-17 El Niño drought and frost disaster (Broughton, 2017). In an evaluation of Australia's response to this disaster, Broughton notes that the World Food Program (WFP) was 'very positive' about the role the churches played in its emergency food distributions in 2016, saying "WFP's relationship with churches and their social networks was used to establish its 'social license' to operate, and allowed WFP and partners to move freely across impacted areas and provide beneficiaries with information on the general distributions before they took place".



Storm brewing off Kiriwina Island, PNG. Global heating will result in a more unstable climate.

Photo: Annalucia/Shutterstock.com

Spotlight: CAN DO Disaster READY program

A more recent example relates to the **CAN DO Disaster READY program in PNG**, delivered through CPP partners and funded through the Australia Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) program. Disaster READY strengthens community-based approaches in community-based disaster risks management (CBDRM), stress-resilient farming, safe and resilient water systems and prepositioning of relief supplies. It promotes humanitarian capacity building including through the provision of training in TDRCC, trauma counselling, relief logistics training, Sphere Standards, gender equity, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI), monitoring and evaluation, and safeguarding. The Disaster READY partners in PNG are Anglicare PNG, ADRA PNG, Baptist Union PNG, Caritas PNG, ELCPNG, and United Church PNG. Caritas Australia acts as the coordinating hub, providing overall management, coordination and monitoring of the project (AHP Support Unit, n.d.).

GEDSI is framed as a cross-cutting issue in the Disaster READY program. The Disaster READY 2.0 Project Plan states that CANDO partners will be “actively inclusive in their preparedness and response planning through mainstreaming and integration of GEDSI in the CBDRM process”, the disaster hub planning processes and other activities. CAN DO partners leverage existing women’s groups where possible to share information and ensure women’s participation in community consultations, needs and vulnerability assessments, hazard mappings and project planning (AHP Support Unit, n.d.).

The longer-term objective is to move from “merely mainstreaming GESI, to one that effectively integrates Protection by strengthened referral pathways and provision of direct psychosocial support” (AHP Support Unit, n.d.).

Faith leaders and organisations in PNG are also engaged in advocacy to raise awareness on a national, regional and international level about the need for action on climate change, including the need for polluting countries to reduce their emissions, contribute to addressing loss and damage, and climate finance (Carroll, 2022; Kana, 2019; Sadowski, 2018).

Given the pivotal role that faith-based actors play in fostering greater climate resilience in PNG, they also have a key role in ensuring that climate resilience initiatives are gender inclusive at minimum and ideally gender transformative, and that they can be used where possible to promote women’s economic empowerment.

Question for faith-based actors and their allies to consider:

- What are the emerging opportunities for faith-based actors to promote women’s economic empowerment through gender transformative climate resilience initiatives and through gender-inclusive climate finance? In what ways can faith-based actors find convergence between theologies on gender equality and disaster resilience to promote gender transformative and climate resilient approaches to women’s economic empowerment?

6. Recommendations

The aim of this scoping study was to develop recommendations for further work in further phase/s of research. Based on the findings of this scoping study, we suggest that the following topics be considered for further research and collaboration with interested stakeholders.

In each case, the initial focus is on the role and contribution of faith-based actors. The additional questions to add to each proposed topic are: how can the governments of PNG and Australia support them to achieve this, and how can faith-based actors in Australia support faith-based actors in PNG?

1. Where are the synergies and opportunities for a more systematic and strategic collaboration between churches, other civil society actors and government on initiatives for women's economic empowerment? This research could include a detailed mapping exercise to identify existing linkages and opportunities.
2. How can faith-based actors strengthen their contribution to improving women's access to financial inclusion, especially in rural and remote areas of PNG? This research could consider how faith-based actors can help reduce the social, cultural, resource and infrastructure-related barriers that discourage women from improving their literacy and financial literacy; using bank accounts, mobile phones and credit; or sustaining a business or livelihood.
3. How can faith-based actors further leverage their health and education networks to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment?
4. How can faith-based actors facilitate cooperation/collaboration of communities, churches and government in childcare entrepreneurship to increase accessibility of affordable and quality early childhood care and education, reduce the burden of unpaid care work, and provide employment opportunities for women?
5. How can faith-based actors provide ongoing support to people who complete their training programs on literacy, financial literacy and livelihoods? How can they work with other stakeholders to create economic pathways out of their training programs?
6. How can women be empowered to access and benefit from participation in some of the more lucrative, value-added activities within agricultural value chains, and how can faith-based actors support them?
7. How can faith-based actors use their extensive physical and social infrastructure to support communities to access reliable, clean, affordable electricity?
8. What are the opportunities for faith-based actors in PNG and Australia in attracting innovative finance with a gender/climate lens, to direct more funding for women's empowerment projects and to resource the opportunities identified above? This could examine how faith-based networks could use their unique attributes to reduce the barriers currently perceived by potential investors.
9. What are the emerging opportunities for faith-based actors to promote women's economic empowerment through gender transformative climate resilience initiatives and through gender-inclusive climate finance? In what ways can faith-based actors find convergence between theologies on gender equality and disaster resilience to promote gender transformative and climate resilient approaches to women's economic empowerment?

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to provide an overview of the contribution of faith-based actors to women's economic empowerment in PNG, and to identify potential opportunities to scale up and strengthen their engagement. It comprised of a literature review and key informant interviews.

We found that faith-based actors in PNG play an important role in supporting initiatives that change social norms to enhance gender equality and facilitate women's increased access to strategic resources, thus enabling their active and meaningful participation in economic activities and decision making. Scaling up efforts on this front and collaborating with government and other stakeholders could further contribute to a holistic and transformative approach that addresses deeply rooted systemic and cultural barriers to women's economic empowerment.

The findings also suggest that there may be opportunities for faith-based actors to scale up, extend, diversify and increase the impact of their support for women's economic empowerment by: providing development pathways and/or programs to help people transition from literacy and livelihoods training into sustainable livelihoods; assessing potential opportunities to engage (or help community members engage) in different parts of the value chain; improving coordination and collaboration with government and other parts of civil society; further leveraging their extensive health and education networks; exploring their potential to engage in innovative finance initiatives to channel more resources; and explore their potential to support gender-inclusive climate resilience initiatives.

These findings should be interpreted in light of the limitations of this study as noted in the report, hence further research and validation is advised. This report provides recommendations for areas for further research. Caritas Australia hopes that this report will spark further conversations and potential collaboration on research and advocacy towards enhancing the role of faith-based actors to promote women's economic empowerment in Papua New Guinea.

Appendix: About Caritas Australia's work in Papua New Guinea

Caritas Australia is the aid and humanitarian agency of the Catholic Church in Australia. We have been supporting development and humanitarian programs in Papua New Guinea (PNG) for almost 50 years. Caritas Australia has worked in partnership with church and community-based organisations in PNG on a range of sectoral areas including HIV/AIDS, peacebuilding, health and education and institutional capacity strengthening of the Catholic Church.

In 1997, following the crisis in Bougainville and at the request of Bishop, Caritas Australia established a small office in Buka, and in 2007 established an office in Port Moresby. From around 2009 - 2013 Caritas Australia had a presence in the highlands (Mt Hagen) as part of the Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) Management and Prevention Program (a five-and-a-half year AusAID funded program focused on strengthening the capacity of the Church Health Services to undertake preventative activities and improve treatment for STIs). From 2015 to 2018, Caritas Australia once again had a presence in the highlands (Mt Hagen) to support response and recovery efforts to the El Nino drought and later the February 2018 earthquake, including supporting a coordinated response by the Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations (CAN DO) consortium in Caritas Australia's capacity as the lead agency of CANDO in PNG.

In more recent years, much of Caritas Australia's focus was on supporting the Church Partnership Program. Management of the Catholic Church's participation in the Church Partnership Program was localized and formally transitioned to Caritas Papua New Guinea in January 2023.

Caritas Australia continues to support our partners in Papua New Guinea - the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, Catholic Church Health Services, Catholic Safehouse Association and the Family Life Commission - and remains the lead agency for CAN DO in Papua New Guinea. With our new strategic directions, our work is now focused on the areas of women empowerment, gender and climate change adaptation. Our staff are based in Port Moresby, in the compound of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

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