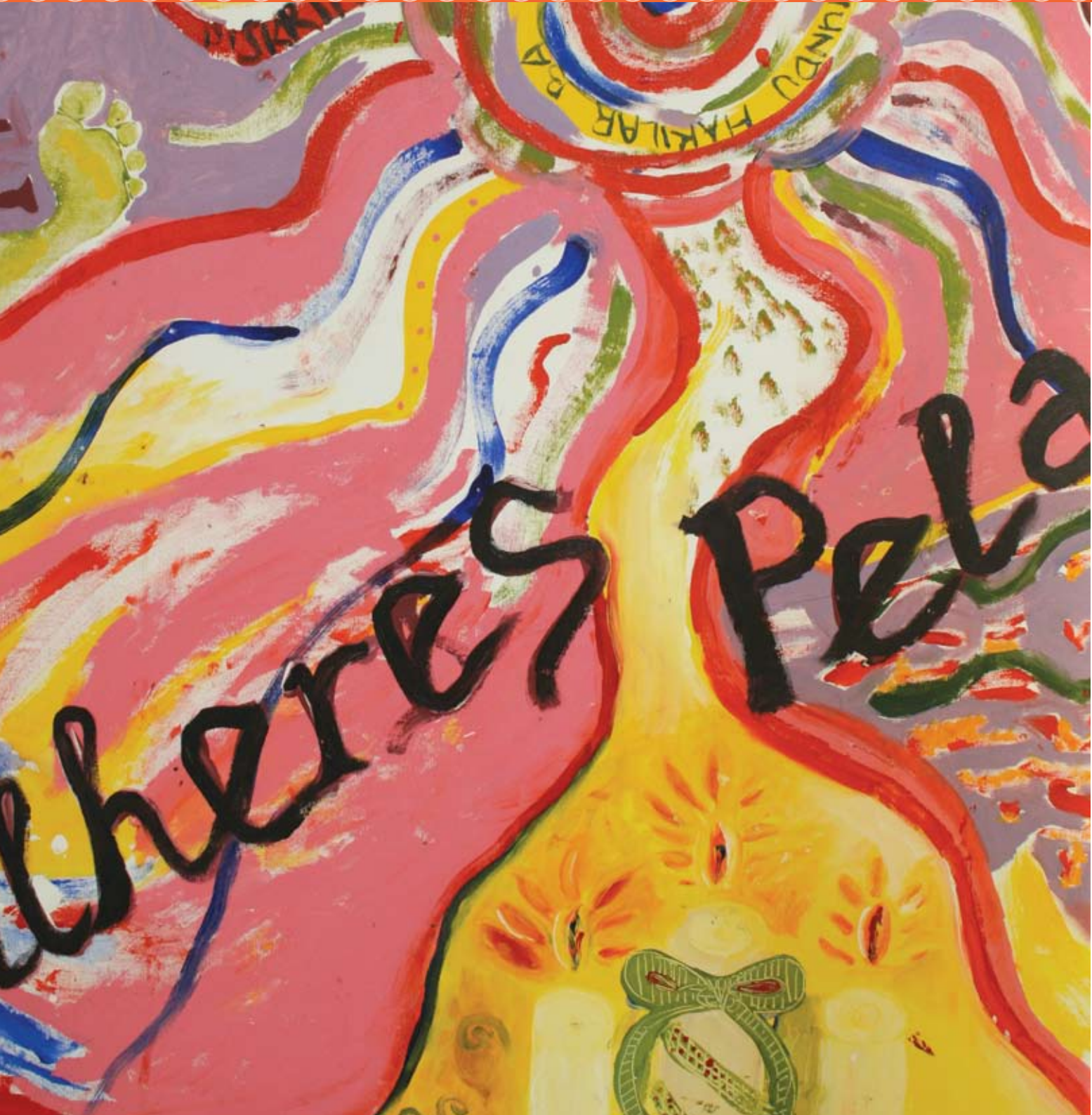


Fiji country report



Introduction

Fiji was one of five countries included in a study by AusAID's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) to assess the effectiveness of current approaches to addressing violence against women and identify promising practices. The report of the study—*Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches*—was published in 2008.

The ODE report was released by the Hon Stephen Smith MP, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Australian Minister for the Status of Women, on 25 November 2008 to coincide with White Ribbon Day, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

The Fiji country supplement to the report was launched in Suva on 3 December 2008 by Ms Judith Robinson, Australia's Minister Counsellor for Pacific Development.

The ODE study was undertaken using a participatory approach that focused on women's own experience of violence, and what does or does not help them in terms of protection and prevention. This included speaking with more than 120 people in Fiji, including interviews with 60 people and the participation of another 60 people in focus groups. The research was undertaken using international and local researchers. The local researchers in Fiji were Roshni Sami and Matelita Ragogo. The research was also supported by a local advisory group of prominent individuals.

The ODE report made a series of recommendations for Fiji and the region that are relevant to all organisations and individuals who are committed to preventing and responding to violence against women.

This paper sets out Australia's initial response to the recommendations for action to end violence against women in Fiji. The response is set in the wider context of emerging impacts of the global economic recession on vulnerable groups including women, children and people with disability. The political situation in Fiji also limits the value of considering some response options (for example, advocacy and legislative change). The response also seeks to minimise the proliferation of activities, to provide greater focus and to minimise demands on national organisations and the limited staff resources of AusAID's regional hub in Suva. Priority is given to activities that address violence against women by delivering key support services and promoting the economic empowerment of women.

AusAID recognises that ending violence against women requires action over the long term, and that the activities set out in this report are just the first stage in intensifying our efforts to address violence against women as part of the Australian international development assistance program.

Principles and priorities



The ODE report identified a range of principles and priorities structured around a *framework for action* for addressing violence against women. AusAID will use this framework and a set of key principles to guide its contribution to ending violence against women in Fiji.

Principles guiding Australia's contribution

The following principles will guide Australia's contribution to ending violence against women. AusAID will:

- > make a long-term commitment to ending violence against women
- > promote gender equality as a central principle of our work
- > work in partnership with key stakeholders and align with partner government priorities
- > adopt an integrated approach.

Further details are set out in the regional report.

A framework for action

The framework for action sets out three main *strategies* for responding to violence against women:

- > ensuring women have access to justice
- > ensuring women have access to support services
- > preventing violence against women.

The framework for action can be used by all those working to end violence against women.

The box below sets out AusAID’s vision, its aim and the outcomes it will strive to achieve within the framework recommended by the ODE report.

A framework for ending violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor		
Vision: Women in Melanesia and East Timor are able to live free from violence and the fear of violence.		
Aim: To work in partnership—with national governments, civil society, international partners, and men and women—to increase efforts to reduce and respond to violence against women.		
Outcome: Women have access to justice	Outcome: Women have access to support services	Outcome: Violence against women is prevented

The structure of this report reflects the framework for action recommended in the ODE report, with sections on each of the three key strategies—ensuring women’s access to justice, ensuring women’s access to support services, and preventing violence against women—and on efforts to support an integrated approach.

Women have access to justice

Goals for all stakeholders in Fiji

To increase women's access to justice.

This will include:

- > passing and implementing laws and policies that discourage violence and impose consequences on offenders
- > providing women with the means to protect themselves and their children from violence
- > providing women with the information necessary to access their rights
- > ensuring women are treated humanely and fairly by justice system personnel.

Situational analysis

The formal justice system in Fiji includes a number of promising mechanisms to respond to violence against women. The Fiji Police Force has a 'no drop' policy for domestic violence complaints. This policy is designed to ensure that complaints of domestic violence are investigated by police and proceed to court, and to remove possible pressure on women to drop complaints.

The Fiji Police Force's Sexual Offences Units operate to support victims of sexual assault; they have offices in Labasa, Lautoka and Suva. The welfare and employment services unit within the police force supports the welfare of police officers, including addressing the issue of domestic violence perpetrated by police.

The Fiji Government enacted the Family Law Act in 2003 with considerable input from non-government organisations (NGOs) and the Australia Fiji Law and Justice Program, which provided technical assistance and support enabling the implementation and enforcement of the Family Law Act in 2005. The Act is aligned to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and is based on a no-fault principle of divorce, and uses a compassionate counselling-based system. It also created a Family Division of the High Court, which prioritises children's needs and parental support.

A positive feature of the Act that is being used in domestic violence cases are the restraining/protection orders. Previously, under the Criminal Code, restraining orders were difficult to obtain and were impractical for women seeking protection from violent partners. The application process took several weeks and, even when a woman did receive a restraining order, the police could not detain the man for breaching the order. If an order was breached, it was only a magistrate who could make a decision on whether the perpetrator should be remanded or not.

Under the Family Law Act, restraining orders are easier to obtain and police now have the power to arrest and detain a man for breaching an order for up to 48 hours before he is brought before the magistrate. The magistrate then decides whether the man will be remanded further for breaching the order.

Before the 2006 coup, revised domestic violence legislation had been drafted, and consultations had taken place on reforming the Penal Code, including the possible strengthening of the sexual offence provisions. These reforms are currently on hold. However, the Employment Relations Bill, which includes some limited protections against sexual harassment, was promulgated in 2007 by the interim regime and put into force in April 2008.

NGOs play an active role in Fiji in supporting women's access to justice. The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and the Regional Rights Resource Team provide training to police officers, judges, magistrates and prosecutors on violence against women. The Fiji Women's Rights Movement works to increase women's knowledge of laws and their rights.

Women in rural areas have difficulty accessing the formal justice system, which is largely urban based. As a result, rural women frequently rely on, or are coerced into, traditional justice systems that are overwhelmingly patriarchal and based on notions of reconciliation that provide few options and limited protection for victims of violence.

Fiji Government priorities and actions to support women's access to justice

For women seeking information and assistance or reporting acts of violence, the Department of Women and the Department of Social Welfare make client referrals to relevant governmental agencies and NGOs. These departments track the progress of cases through further referrals and consultations with relevant agencies and institutions.

The Fiji Police Force continues to support survivors of sexual assault through its Sexual Offences Units by taking statements of survivors, transporting survivors to hospitals and health centres for medical checks and treatment, and making appropriate referrals to agencies for services such as counselling and emergency housing. The police also continue to abide by the 'no drop' policy, which allows investigations to continue once complaints of violence against women are lodged and cases are sent on to magistrates.

The Family Law Court is vested with jurisdiction under the 2003 Family Law Act in matters of family law and provides counselling, legal advice and redress for women and children survivors of violence.

Legal aid assistance is available for women who have experienced violence. This includes providing information on their legal rights and legal processes, including information on how to fill in relevant forms, especially for cases requiring court proceedings and representation.

The Legal Aid Commission provides training to women and men at the community level on the Family Law Act and other relevant issues. This assists in creating an understanding of the existing laws that address violence against women and the services provided by the Legal Aid Commission.

The Department of Women will continue to coordinate and facilitate awareness training with local communities targeting men and women, young men and young women, and law enforcement agencies. This training is designed to create awareness and understanding of gender-based violence and human rights issues and to provide information on procedures to follow when experiencing or encountering acts of violence.

Australian support for women's access to justice

In view of the abrogation of Fiji's Constitution on 10 April 2009, legislative reforms and advocacy would have limited value. Pending broader political and legal developments in Fiji, Australia's support will focus on legal literacy and human rights-based training for community members. This will largely be through funding provided to civil society organisations that are already working in this area, such as the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and the Regional Rights Resource Team. It also includes funding for training for government and non-government organisations through the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Pacific Facility Fund.

Women have access to support services

Goals for all stakeholders in Fiji

To increase women's access to support services.

This will include providing assistance to:

- > increase women's access to psychological, medical and legal support
- > increase women's access to safe havens
- > increase support to organisations that provide support services to women.

Situational analysis

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre is the main institution providing psychological, human rights-based crisis counselling and practical support for women and children who have experienced violence in Fiji. The centre provides practical support and counselling to women and works with other agencies such as the police, courts, doctors and welfare agencies to ensure that women can access these services. The centre has its headquarters in Suva. It has branches in Ba, Labasa and Nadi, with plans for two more branches in Rakiraki and Savusavu.

Counselling services are also provided by Pacific Counselling and Social Services, emergency accommodation providers and faith-based organisations.

Support services are much more accessible for women living in Suva and other urban centres, where nearly half the population live. Women in rural areas in Fiji have greater difficulty in accessing support services.

For women wanting to escape violent situations, finding alternative accommodation often presents a significant obstacle. Crisis or emergency shelters, largely concentrated in urban centres in Fiji, are owned or administered by NGOs or faith-based organisations. There is a growing need for more crisis accommodation and this accommodation needs to be inclusive of the needs of women and girls with disabilities.

In rural, village or settlement areas, often the only option is for the survivors to stay at the home of a religious or community leader. In some cases the survivors have to move out of the area altogether.

Fiji Government priorities and actions to support women's access to support services

The Department of Social Welfare is the lead government agency for the administration of welfare payments to women who have experienced violence and to their children. It provides referrals for counselling, emergency accommodation facilities and assistance in pursuing cases for maintenance payment awards.

The Ministry of Women, Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation administers a boys centre and the Mahaffy Girls Home. Both facilities provide residential care for children between the ages of 10 to 17 years who are in need of care and protection as defined under the Juvenile Act. This includes care for children who have been subjected to violence.

Australian support for women's access to support services

Support services

Enhancing women's access to support services in Fiji and improving the quality and delivery of services are key recommendations of the ODE report. This will be a major area of focus for Australia in the support that it provides to collective efforts to end violence against women in Fiji.

Continuing support for the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre is a cornerstone of Australia's strategy for providing support services to survivors, given its role as a leader in advocacy for women's rights and its strengths in delivering practical services (such as counselling, training and mentoring other groups throughout Fiji and the Pacific region).

Australia has provided financial support to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre since 1989. Under the most recent funding agreement, AusAID provided \$4.87 million over five years (2004-05 to 2008-09) as core funding to support the centre's work. AusAID is currently negotiating a multiyear funding arrangement, for commencement from July 2009, for continued support to the centre.

Australia also provides core and/or project support to other agencies in their efforts to address violence against women. This support will be guided by Australia's priority in funding activities that provide key support services to women and contribute to economic empowerment to mitigate the emerging impacts of the global economic recession and the existing economic challenges in Fiji following the 2006 coup and the resulting political uncertainty.

Agencies receiving AusAID funding include:

- > Pacific Counselling and Social Services—financial assistance is provided as core support towards establishing an infrastructure of professional counselling and social services throughout Fiji, including counselling and related support services for victims of gender-based violence. By providing counselling through the major hospitals in Fiji (Nadi, Lautoka, Suva and Labasa), the agency also has opportunities to address cases of suspected domestic violence referred to it by hospital staff
- > Regional Rights Resource Team—to support human rights training, technical support, and policy and advocacy services tailored specifically for the Pacific region including Fiji
- > Fiji Women's Rights Movement—to support advocacy, training and awareness-raising on women's human rights issues including violence against women, sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination against women

Continuing support for the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre is a cornerstone of Australia's strategy for providing support services to survivors, given its role as a leader in advocacy for women's rights and its strengths in delivering practical services.



In Fiji, counselling has proved effective. Fiji Women's Crisis Centre counsellor Shobna Devi, right, and project officer Wilma Eileen demonstrate a typical counselling scenario. Photo: AusAID

- > Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises 'N' Development (FRIEND)—to administer community programs for unemployed and rural women by creating income-generation programs in handicrafts and food production. FRIEND is particularly focused on poverty alleviation and creating gender equity in rural and underserved communities in Fiji
- > Salvation Army—financial assistance is provided for the Salvation Army–operated Suva, Lautoka and Labasa family care centres, which also provide shelter for domestic violence victims and their children.

AusAID provided a grant of \$400,000 to the UNIFEM Pacific Facility Fund in 2008-09 for activities in Fiji. These funds will be used to provide grants to civil society organisations and government agencies to enable them to finance key projects and actions for the elimination of violence against women in communities. AusAID will also consider providing additional funding to the UNIFEM Pacific Facility Fund in future years to support the ongoing provision of grants to civil society organisations in Fiji.

There has been no comprehensive study on crisis accommodation services provided to women and girls in Fiji. To guide Australia's future funding in this critical area, current standards of accommodation facilities need to be examined and those working in these facilities need to be trained to ensure they have a sound understanding of the issue of violence against women and operate using a rights-based approach. AusAID, through the services of local researchers and expertise, is currently conducting an assessment of standards of care in crisis accommodation for survivors of gender-based violence in Fiji. The research report will, in addition to reviewing current accommodation services, provide recommendations for effective strategies to improve the accessibility and quality of such services.

Health sector

Although survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault receive medico-legal services at hospitals, the Ministry of Health does not currently have a policy on violence against women. Because violence against women is a significant cause of injury and ill health among women, increasing access to health services for survivors of violence will be a priority for AusAID. Integrating attention to violence against women into health services requires establishing policies and protocols that encourage health providers to identify support and referrals for women and girls experiencing violence, as well as training and follow-up to ensure programs are implemented effectively.

AusAID, in consultation with the health sector, will fund activities that:

- > provide training on issues relating to violence against women within the Fiji School of Nursing and Fiji School of Medicine curricula. This support will also be provided to any new health professional education and training institutions that are set up
- > support the development of policies and protocols for the handling of sexual offences cases in the health system
- > develop data collection systems in order to ensure that, as much as possible, information on all victims and survivors accessing health services is recorded
- > enable antenatal clinics to support pregnant women who are living in violent situations.

Violence against women is prevented

Goals for all stakeholders in Fiji

To prevent violence against women.

This will include:

- > raising awareness through coordinated efforts at all levels
- > changing community attitudes about violence
- > increasing women's status in society.

Situational analysis

There are a range of innovative programs run predominantly by civil society in Fiji that aim to prevent violence against women, including through changing community attitudes towards violence. These programs actively seek to engage a broad range of stakeholders in preventing violence against women, and include activities that engage men, young people and churches.

Activities include public awareness campaigns, educational activities, use of the media, and use of theatre and workshops to raise awareness of the issue of violence against women and to change attitudes and behaviour.

Organisations that are active in working to prevent violence against women in Fiji include the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, femLINKpacific, Women's Action for Change, the Regional Rights Resource Team, the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International and the Weavers Program.

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre works to address all forms of violence against women, including rape, assault, sexual harassment, and abuse of children. It is involved in public advocacy and community education on gender-based violence. The centre started the Male Advocates Programme in 2002, to engage men as allies in challenging violence against women, and to encourage men to take responsibility for the issue of violence against women.

The centre also provides technical support for other organisations working in the Pacific region, such as the Vanuatu Women's Centre. It is also the secretariat for the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women, which meets every four years and carries out regional training workshops for network members, including both civil society organisations and government departments that deal with violence against women.¹

¹ The fifth meeting of the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women was held in Fiji in June 2009. The meeting was facilitated by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. Resolutions from the meeting are available at www.fijiwomen.com/images/regionalmeeting.pdf.

Support is provided through ongoing in-country support visits and the regional training and attachment program, as well as through regular liaison via email and telephone.

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement provides a free legal information and referral service for women in Suva. It delivers feminist training to groups and organisations, including developing school- and institution-based education and awareness-raising programs. The agency has also played a significant role in advocating for other key legislative reforms, including the Family Law Act, and in advocating and providing draft legislation for sexual harassment to be included in the Employment Relations Bill.

FemLINKpacific is a regional feminist media organisation that focuses on women's role in preventing, reconciling and avoiding conflict. It also works with women who are victims of violence and gives them an opportunity to talk about their experiences and their needs. These women are also referred to other relevant organisations for counselling.

Women's Action for Change provides community-based dramas and workshops on a diverse range of issues, including child sexual abuse, women's reproductive health, and violence against women.

The Regional Rights Resource Team provides training, advocacy and resourcing on human rights issues relating to violence against women to the police, the judiciary and community-based organisations in Fiji and the Pacific region.

The Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International operates an intervention program known as 'Stepping Stones'. Originally designed to address HIV prevention and gender relations, it targets communities and engages women, men and youth in a series of weekly workshops. The foundation also runs programs that engage men and boys as partners in eliminating violence against women.

The Weavers Program, part of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools, advocates for women's issues in theological education. Weavers has focused on domestic violence against women as part of its core program, designing a curriculum for working with theological schools and faith-based organisations on violence against women in the South Pacific. The course, based on four years of consultations with member schools of the association, includes a series of readings on violence against women as a human rights violation and social problem, and also calls for reflection on and action against violence against women within Christian communities and churches of the Pacific.

Other organisations working in Fiji to address gender equality also indirectly address the issue of violence against women, including the National Council of Women Fiji and the Soqosoqo Vakamarama.

Fiji Government priorities and actions to prevent violence against women

The Ministry of Women, in partnership with key stakeholders, has piloted the establishment of a violence-free community in Fiji. The project was launched on 25 November 2008 at the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence at Koroipita Village, Lautoka.

The goal of the pilot violence-free and zero-tolerance community is to empower women, men and children through human rights education using media campaigns and community training. An awareness program on relevant acts that violate the basic human rights of people, especially women, forms part of the campaign. It is envisaged that this will contribute to changing attitudes and behaviours of the community and stakeholders in

order to promote and protect human rights. Furthermore, it will enhance stakeholder knowledge of human rights and violence against women and promote recognition of the fact that violence against women is a crime.

Four other districts—Rakiraki, Tavua, Nadi and Sigatoka—have been identified to participate in the project. These communities were selected after extensive consultations with the Fiji Police Force regarding statistics on violence against women in the community and other relevant issues. The project will be undertaken only upon the approval of the identified communities. It is intended that the program will continue throughout 2009 and will be replicated in other districts in Fiji.

The Department of Women and the Department of Social Welfare are members of the Family Life Education Committee, which reviews and refines curriculum and resource materials for family life education in schools. One of the policy objectives of the committee is to raise awareness about gender-based violence and its consequences with a view to its complete elimination from society.

The school curriculum will be the entry point for raising awareness and eliminating violence against women and children among boys and girls in primary and secondary school. However, there is a need to lobby for the family life education program to become part of the compulsory social science curriculum in schools.

Australian support for preventing violence against women

Working with civil society

Support for civil society

A specific recommendation of the ODE report was the continuation of AusAID's support to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. As mentioned above, support for the centre will continue to be the cornerstone of AusAID's strategy for working with civil society to respond to and prevent violence against women in Fiji.

This approach does not rule out Australia's support for other organisations that provide awareness-raising and training programs on violence against women; indeed, AusAID does provide support to several such organisations as discussed above. However, ongoing funding for these organisations will be guided by Australia's priorities in funding activities that provide key services to women and contribute to economic empowerment to mitigate the emerging impacts of the global economic recession and the political situation in Fiji.

As noted earlier, AusAID is contributing to the UNIFEM Pacific Facility Fund. This funding will enable grants to support the work of civil society organisations in Fiji, including for community education and awareness-raising on the issue of violence against women, and activities directed at preventing violence against women.

Working with men and boys

AusAID partnered with the United Nations Development Programme Pacific Centre in supporting a Pacific and East Timorese delegation to attend the 'Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys to Achieve Gender Equality', held in March 2009. The delegation included representatives from Fiji.



Tura Lewai, a youth representative from Fiji, presents a Pacific perspective to the 'Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys to Achieve Gender Equality'. Photo: UNDP Pacific Centre

AusAID will provide funding in 2009-10 to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre for the development of a handbook on working with men as advocates for the elimination of violence against women in the Pacific. The handbook will provide guidelines on best practices for working with men to advocate for gender equality and the elimination of violence, including outlining a training program for men who will become gender equality advocates. This will build on existing work by the centre, which started the Male Advocates Programme in 2002.

AusAID supports Pacific Counselling and Social Services, which provides a counselling service to men (both prisoners and offenders who have not been incarcerated) in areas that include personal responsibility, anger management and respect for human rights, especially of women.

Working with faith-based organisations

AusAID is a Principal Partner to the International Women's Development Agency initiative 'Asia Pacific Breakthrough: The Women, Faith and Development Summit to End Global Poverty', to be held in December 2009. The summit will bring together faith-based, women's and development organisations from across Asia and the Pacific to discuss opportunities to work together to advance gender equality, including to end violence against women.

Prevention activities through the education sector

Although women's rights organisations in Fiji have extensive experience in public awareness and advocacy campaigns, it is felt that a more effective and systematic way to conduct prevention work could be through primary and secondary schools. Australia—subject to a feasibility assessment and discussion with Ministry of Education officials, and consistent with our education priorities—may support activities that develop curricula and educational materials on violence against women and girls for use in schools. These activities would be implemented in partnership with Fiji's Ministry of Education and the Department of Women.

Supporting women as peacemakers

AusAID is partnering with femLINKpacific to support the Regional Women's Community Media Network on Women, Peace and Security (\$235,000 in 2008-09). The network raises awareness and supports the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325² on women, peace and security through regional media initiatives including publications, a website and radio campaigns. This work also supports the institutional strengthening and improves the media skills of a regional network of partner organisations in Fiji, Bougainville, Solomon Islands and Tonga.

AusAID also supports the International Women's Development Agency 'Peace Talks' initiative (\$85,000 in 2008-09), which aims to raise awareness on implementing Resolution 1325 by training civil society organisations from Solomon Islands, Tonga, Bougainville and Fiji. The International Women's Development Agency supports training for a core group of regional women's organisations to engage with regional policymakers during the annual Forum Regional Security Committee meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum. In addition, it manages a regional secretariat that shares women's perspectives and experiences of conflict and peace-building; facilitates collaboration among stakeholders in implementing

2 UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000. It is the key international framework that addresses the links between the protection of women from violence and the promotion of women's participation and leadership in peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts.

Resolution 1325; and supports women's participation in regional forums on peace and security.

AusAID is commissioning research on the impact and challenges of implementing Resolution 1325 in partner countries. This research will focus on the four interrelated areas of Resolution 1325: increasing participation of women in decision-making and peace processes; ensuring gender perspectives and training in peacekeeping and security; protecting women and girls from violence; and gender mainstreaming in all peace and security concerns. The research will focus on two in-depth case studies of Fiji and East Timor to highlight best practices, provide transferable lessons and make practical recommendations on how AusAID can measure, evaluate and advance the participation of women in peace and security issues.

Promoting the rights of women with disability

AusAID, through the Pacific Public Sector Linkages Program, is supporting the Australian Human Rights Commission to partner with the Pacific Disability Forum to progress disability issues in the Pacific by delivering training in nine countries in the Pacific. The training courses are scheduled to be held between August 2009 and July 2010. In Fiji the training will bring together members of the Fiji Disabled Peoples Association and government representatives to build their capacity and knowledge of disability rights in order to progress disability issues, including the rights of women with disability.

Gender equality and empowering women

The ODE report noted that efforts to reduce violence against women are intrinsically linked to women's political, social and economic empowerment. The report recommended that Australia ensure all its interventions focus on promoting greater equality between men and women.

Gender equality is a guiding principle of Australia's international development assistance program. The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that the needs, priorities and interests of women, as well as men, are considered in all development activities and at every stage of the development process.

Women's leadership and decision making

AusAID provides core support for the National Council of Women Fiji and Soqosoqo Vakamarama.

The National Council of Women Fiji promotes the interests of women, in particular those of women with disability, the girl child and marginalised women. It advocates on behalf of women and children to ensure development efforts produce sustainable improvements to the quality of life for all Fiji citizens. It operates a child care centre and is one of the 14 partners in the Fiji National Incentive for Civic Education project.

Soqosoqo Vakamarama works with indigenous Fijian women to enhance their status, strengthen their tradition, culture and heritage and improve the standard of living in villages and rural communities. It also works with civic education programs targeting Fijian women.

AusAID is providing \$6.2 million over five years for the Gender Equality in Political Governance Program, in partnership with UNIFEM. The program focuses on supporting women standing for elections in the Pacific and including gender in governance programs in the Pacific. It will also undertake research and develop generic information, resources and learning materials to promote women's leadership.

Women's economic empowerment

Australia provides assistance for the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises 'N' Development (FRIEND) (FJD 840,000 over three years from 2008-09) to work with rural communities, assisting them toward economic and social advancement. FRIEND has a number of income-generating projects that draw on local resources and traditional skills, for example in handicrafts and food production.

An integrated approach

Goals for all stakeholders in Fiji

To deliver a coordinated and comprehensive response to violence against women, including among government and non-government actors, at the national and local levels.

This will include:

- > developing and implementing plans of action for preventing violence against women at national, provincial, municipal and community levels
- > supporting interagency taskforces on violence against women (for example, within the context of the reporting on progress required by Fiji as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women)
- > conducting national coordinated campaigns and awareness-raising activities
- > collaborating on training and capacity building of local stakeholders across all sectors.

Situational analysis

Historically, there has been strong collaboration between civil society organisations and government agencies on addressing violence against women in Fiji.

The Fiji Government established an Inter-Agency Taskforce on Violence against Women in 1998 in order to follow up on Fiji's commitments with respect to the Beijing Platform for Action and the Fiji National Women's Plan of Action (1998–2008). This taskforce, chaired by the Chief Executive Officer (or Permanent Secretary) of the Ministry of Justice facilitated the participation of both government and non-government actors in the identification of priority actions to be implemented and the organisations responsible for implementing them; and development of mechanisms for implementing, monitoring and evaluating priority actions.

The taskforce, together with other taskforces, was discontinued in 2005 as the Fiji Government had identified mechanisms other than taskforces for addressing violence against women and other issues. Prior to its discontinuation, the taskforce had achieved several milestones, including the draft domestic violence legislation which was completed in 2005. The taskforce was reconvened by the Department of Women in 2008.

In 2008, Fiji was selected as one of the 10 pilot countries for a UN Joint Programming Initiative on Violence against Women.³ This marks the first time the Fiji Government, NGOs, various UN agencies and donors will work together in a coordinated way as part of a Joint Program on addressing violence against women.

The first major step in the initiative was to organise a national multi-stakeholder workshop, held in July 2008, to address violence against women and to develop a draft framework for the program. The *Assessment of the State of Violence Against Women in Fiji* formed the core document of the meeting. This assessment was prepared by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre at the request of the United Nations Population Fund. Based on this assessment, four forms of violence against women were identified as the most prevalent in Fiji: domestic violence; sexual violence, including rape; sexual harassment; and commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking.

The Fiji Multi-stakeholder Joint Committee on Violence against Women was subsequently formed to facilitate the development, funding, implementation and monitoring of a multi-stakeholder program approach to the problem of violence against women.

In Labasa and Ba, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre branches have set up Interagency Committees to assist them, as well as other stakeholders, in the smooth handling of cases of violence against women and children. The interagency committees include key stakeholders such as the Fiji Police Force, the Department of Social Welfare, hospital staff, the Director of Public Prosecutions office, the Legal Aid Commission and NGOs such as the Salvation Army.

The committees meet on a monthly basis and are a forum for open discussion about the different areas of work on violence against women and the various problems that each agency is facing. They also allow for easier liaison when dealing with individual cases.

In Labasa, members of the Interagency Committee have joined together for campaign activities on violence against women.

Fiji Government priorities and actions to ensure an integrated approach

The Fiji Government ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995.

Priority actions that have been identified by the Ministry of Women, Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation for 2009 include:

- > reviewing and strengthening membership of the Inter-Agency Taskforce on Violence against Women and continuing taskforce meetings
- > conducting violence against women awareness training in partnership with taskforce members
- > conducting CEDAW awareness and human rights training for the community and service providers
- > developing a service protocol on violence against women for service providers.

³ This was a direct follow-up to the UN Secretary General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women, *Ending violence against women: From words to actions. Study of the Secretary-General*, and the UN General Assembly resolution *Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women* (A/RES/61/143, of 19 December 2006).

The service protocol for assessing and appropriately handling victims—including procedures for case management and referrals to other government agencies—will be developed by the Department of Women in conjunction with relevant stakeholders including the Ministry of Health, the Department of Social Welfare, the Fiji Police Force, the Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Arts and Culture and Youth and Sports, and NGOs. It will provide better coordination of activities among government agencies and NGOs on issues relating to violence against women and support for women who have experienced violence.

Australian support for an integrated approach

Australia will continue to play a key role in supporting harmonisation of efforts of all agencies involved in addressing violence against women in Fiji. As a member of the Fiji Multi-stakeholder Joint Committee on Violence against Women, Australia in collaboration with other donors and stakeholders will facilitate the development, funding, implementation and monitoring of a multi-stakeholder program approach to eliminating violence against women.

AusAID is committed to continuing support for the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, which makes an important contribution to multisectoral coordination in Fiji and across the Pacific. The centre is the secretariat for the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women. It plays a critical role in galvanising public opinion and action on violence against women, not only in Fiji but throughout the region through its training and mentoring programs. As discussed above, the centre has also set up interagency committees in Fiji to facilitate a multisectoral approach to ending violence against women.

AusAID is a contributor to the UNIFEM Pacific Facility Fund in Support of Organisations and Actions to End Violence Against Women. The fund was established to support government and civil society organisations working to end violence against women in the Pacific. Staff from AusAID's regional hub in Suva will be part of a Donor Steering Committee to oversee its operation. The committee will meet on a regular basis to receive feedback on the operation of the fund and to provide guidance on the fund's administration. By drawing on the expertise and knowledge of donors, UN agencies and regional NGOs, the fund will contribute to increased coordination as well as sharing of knowledge and good practice across the region.



The fifth meeting of the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women was held in Fiji in June 2009.