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Gender equality and economic empowerment in the Solomon Islands and Fiji: a place-based approach

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Abstract

The economic empowerment of women is emerging as a core focus of both economic development and gender equality programs internationally. At the same time there is increasing importance placed on measuring outcomes and quantifying progress towards gender and development goals. These trends raise significant questions around how well gender differences are understood, especially in economies dominated by the informal sector and characterised by a highly gendered division of labour, as is the case in many Pacific countries. How well do existing international and national indicators of gender equality reflect the experiences and aspirations of Pacific women and men? What do concepts such as gender equality and economic empowerment mean in this geographical context? How might local attitudes and practices be identified and measured? In this paper we draw on Boaventura De Sousa Santos' call to recognise and value knowledges of the majority world that have been rendered either largely invisible or non-credible by mainstream development and human rights policy agendas. Reflecting on an action research project conducted with partner organisations in Fiji and the Solomon islands, we explore a more nuanced place-based approach to understanding and measuring gender equality and economic empowerment. This approach takes account of diverse economic practices, such as non-market transactions, and forms of non-cash exchange and unpaid labour, and recognises the imbalance in women's and men's household and care work.

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The globalisation of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West's view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of 'civilised' knowledge.

(Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999/2012, 127)

...there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice, that is to say, that there has to be equity between different ways of knowing and different kinds of knowledge.

(Boaventura De Sousa Santos, 2014, 237)

Introduction

In 2012, leaders representing the small island nations of the Pacific Ocean signed a Gender Equality Declaration that articulated explicit commitments to “progress gender equality” across a range of areas including “economic empowerment” (Pacific Islands Secretariat 2012). This unprecedented signing saw male Pacific leaders acknowledge the need for their governments to join an international community united in its goals to end gender inequality and discrimination (Wilson 2014). It took place in the midst of fraught negotiations, ongoing since 2001, to seal a free trade agreement with neighbouring nations: the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations with Australia and New Zealand (PACER Plus). While economic empowerment and gender equality are understood to contribute to economic development, it is less clear how trade liberalisation will lead towards economic empowerment for Pacific women and men (Connell 2007). Those interested in economic justice, such as the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network Ltd., are calling for more up front research into the impact that trade liberalisation will have on Pacific nations where development aid is a priority and internationally tradable goods are scarce.¹ Those concerned for gender justice, such as the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), are keen to see the impacts of economic change disaggregated in terms of their effect on the lives of women and men (IWDA 2009). It was in the context of these concerns that the research project we draw on in this paper was conceived. In partnership with IWDA and a range of Pacific based NGOs, the project aimed to generate community based indicators of gender

¹ Within Island economies there are fears that this trade agreement will mean accelerated rural-urban migration and falls in export income, government revenue and formal sector jobs and no guarantees about increased opportunities for seasonal labour migration to Australia and New Zealand (AFTINET 2015)

equality and economic empowerment that could be used to track the course of change as livelihoods are inevitably shaped by social, economic and environmental forces in coming decades.²

Our collaborative research took place in the Solomon Islands and Fiji where IWDA had active connections with NGOs involved in local development issues that were keen to further their gender training.³ These two nations share similarities in terms of their Melanesian culture and history.⁴ Both Fiji and the Solomon Islands were colonized by the British in the late 19th century, gaining independence in the 1970s. Colonial authorities introduced export agriculture to a subsistence economy, recruiting labour from outer islands (in the Solomons) and India (in Fiji) to work in the coconut and sugar plantations. This laid the foundations for ethnic tensions that have at times erupted into violence and political instability (Gegeo and Gegeo 2002; Brookfield 1988; Overton 1999). Despite the central role of agricultural exports in the national economies of both nations, subsistence and semi-subsistence livelihoods are still dominant. In the Solomons, 85% of the population live in rural areas and rely primarily on subsistence agriculture. In Fiji, urbanisation is more advanced with 46% of the population living in urban areas (Storey, 2006) and household reliance on subsistence incomes is lower (see Brown and Leeves 2007). Changing agricultural production systems, rapid urbanization and the rise of a cash economy have transformed gender relations at the same time as transforming Melanesian economies. In pre-colonial times women and men were both understood to play complementary roles in production systems, and both sexes gained power and status in recognition of their vital contributions. As Scheyvens argues in the Solomon Islands, for example, colonialism and ‘development’ reconfigured local livelihoods with the result that women’s work and traditional sources of power have become devalued (1998). Meanwhile men gained status, power, and recognition in the cash economy, while *kastom* changed in ways that gave men more power to make community-level decisions. Alongside these shifts women’s overall work burden has been seen to increase and many organisations have become increasingly concerned about levels of violence against women (Hermkens 2013).

² It must be noted that our focus was limited to gender equality as it pertains to economic empowerment and change. We did not set out to generate indicators on all aspects of wellbeing, though as is evident, it is hard to separate economic from social and political wellbeing.

³ The original proposal included research sites in Vanuatu as well, but by the time the funding was awarded the NGO did not have the personnel capacity to participate.

⁴ Along with PNG, West Papua, Vanuatu and New Caledonia.

It is clear that changing economies have enormous impacts on households that extend beyond simple statistics on household incomes. The future impact of economic development on gender relations is likely to be equally significant, but until now there has been little attention given to local community perspectives on the gendered impacts of economic transformation in the region. The lack of existing research or appropriate indicators may be in part because of the complexities of quantifying gender equality. As a recent background paper for UN Women acknowledges gender equality in the Pacific must ‘focus on questions of women’s embodied experience and daily livelihoods’ across ‘public and domestic spheres, formal and informal economies’ (Jolly et al 2015, 3). But these dimensions of gender equality are difficult to ‘quantify, enumerate and rank’ (3).

This research sought out local perspectives by initiating conversations with community members during a series of iterative research workshops. The first round took place in 2010 and 2011 in two urban settlements around Honiara, (Burns Creek and Koa Hill) and two rural villages (Kuzi and Sausama villages, Kolombangara Island, Western Province) in the Solomon Islands, as well as two urban settlements around Suva (Jittu Estate, Raiwaqa and Wainibuku) in Fiji. In 2012, we held a follow-up workshop with our NGO partners to continue the conversation about the community based indicators that had emerged following shared reflection and analysis of the initial workshop material.

In this paper we draw on discussions from the first round of workshops to reflect on the ways that mainstream development and human rights agendas have influenced the composition of gender equality and economic empowerment indicators. We ask if these indicators reflect the experiences and aspirations of Pacific women and men on the ground. What might gender equality and economic empowerment mean in a context where the majority of Island populations rely on subsistence and semi-subsistence agriculture and precarious forms of non-agricultural employment, as well as a highly gendered division of labour? In an attempt to counter the oft assumed legitimacy of one kind of knowledge (that Smith refers to above), we open up ‘place’ to a form of theoretical exploration in which it exists as potentiality, as that ‘which is not fully yoked into a system of meaning, not entirely subsumed to and defined

within a (global) order' (Gibson-Graham 2004, 33).⁵ In doing so we attend to different ways of knowing that have long been delegitimized and excluded from dominant systems of meaning (Santos 2014), including those that inform mainstream development and human rights policy agendas.

Gender Indicators: Challenging or Instating the Status Quo?

Indicators have played an important role in bringing a gendered perspective to international development. Women in Development (WID) approaches in the 1970s focused on exposing the gender bias in development outcomes and ensuring that women were 'added in' (Waring 1988) through use of indicators such as women's national political participation, labour force participation, levels of gender based violence and girls' education. A more nuanced understanding of gender roles characterised the Gender and Development (GAD) movement of the 1980s which brought the feminization of poverty firmly to the attention of economic developers. As Sylvia Chant notes, a critical catalyst was the 'Fourth UN Conference on Women in 1995 at which it was asserted that 70 per cent of the world's poor were female' (2008, 166). It was then that 'eradicating the "persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women"' was adopted as one of the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA)' (2008, 166). A host of gendered economic empowerment indices were formulated to allow for comparisons as nations progressed towards the BPFAs and the Millennium Development Goals. Two decades on from the 1995 Conference, efforts to mainstream gender in government policy and establish national gender sensitive indicators to measure progress towards equality and empowerment continue. However, significant challenges remain, particularly in the implementation of gender mainstreaming (Moser and Moser 2005; United Nations 2014).

With the burgeoning of this new field of gender indicator measurement some concerns have emerged. For example, the 1995 UNDP Human Development Report warned that 'gender-sensitive indicators are not ends in themselves but a political tool to be used to challenge the status quo' (CIDA 1997, 6). In subsequent years the simplifications involved in many easily

⁵ Gibson-Graham laid out this conception within the Women and the Politics of Place Project led by Wendy Harcourt and Arturo Escobar (see Harcourt and Escobar, 2005). "Place is not a local specificity (or not that alone), and the subject is not an identity but the space of identification.....places always fail to be fully capitalist, and herein lies their potential to become something other. Individuals and collectivities always fall short of full capitalist identity, and this lack is their availability to a different economic subjectivity" (2004, 33).

quantifiable indicators have been questioned. Debra Leibowitz and Susanne Zwingel (2014), for example, point out that ‘a rise in women’s labor force participation cannot automatically be interpreted as empowerment’ (2014, 365). This indicator does not ‘tell anything about the quality of work (for men or women, nor for different groups of women)’, ‘whether wage-labor leads to a double work load for women’, ‘whether improvements in the gap between women’s and men’s labor participation are due to increases in women’s employment or decreases in men’s’ or whether there are ‘gendered wage gaps’ (2014, 365).

There is a risk that as they conceal the nuances of how change is experienced national indicators of gender equality homogenize local difference and channel development pathways into status quo forms of economic empowerment. Feminist legal scholar, Sally Engel Merry, has warned of the dual ‘emancipatory and homogenizing effects’ (2006, 49) spread by national indicators that perpetuate a modernist view of individual rights (2011, S88). Consider the World Bank’s statement that ‘Economic empowerment is about making markets work for women (at the policy level) and empowering women to compete in markets (at the agency level)’ (2006, 4). Consider also the Pacific Island Gender Equality Declaration’s focus on women’s opportunities in the cash economy, including entrepreneurship and paid employment (especially in the public sector, and in senior positions). The Declaration aims to *target support to women entrepreneurs in the formal and informal sectors*. Recognising the important role of produce markets in creating incomes for women, it also calls for improvement of *the facilities and governance of local produce markets* in ways that *increase profitability and efficiency and encourage women’s safe, fair and equal participation in local economies* (Pacific Islands Secretariat 2012, 14). It is significant that Pacific leaders recognise the importance of the informal economy and initiate women’s increased access to informal market opportunities because for many women (and men) there are few opportunities to derive cash income from formal economic activities. It seems, though, that women’s equal economic opportunity is to be obtained via only one particular economic subjectivity—that of the rational, competitive, market-oriented, maximizing individual. In the Pacific context, where kinship systems and a culture of relationality positions the individual very differently to ‘Western’ norms, a development ideology based on a system of individual rights does not fit well (Hermkens 2013). What mainstream development and human rights policy agendas continue to ignore is the potential for collective economic subjectivities to achieve equality outcomes.

A second blind spot is the recognition of women's (and men's) participation in non-market transactions (reciprocity, gifting) and forms of unpaid labour (caring, volunteering, sharing). These diverse involvements also contribute to wellbeing and even empowerment for women and men and might be supported by different development pathways (see also Leach, Mehta, and Prabhakaran 2014). But these activities *can* stand in the way of change and deepen inequality. Feminist scholars and activists have long argued for the need to address the burden of unpaid household and care work on women and girls for progressing gender equality. Magdalena Carmona and Kate Donald (2014, 443) argue, for example, that the persistent neglect of unpaid labour 'can be attributed to many factors, including the apparent intractability of the status quo' and, at least in part, the 'common misperception that issues like balancing work and child care are mostly middle-class concerns – and therefore not relevant for human rights advocacy and poverty-reduction strategies'.

Other possible non-status quo pathways to economic empowerment and gender equality are effectively delegitimised by mainstream development and human rights agendas. This effect is associated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos with the active production of non-existence or non-credibility (2004, 2014). Along with feminists such as Smith (2012) and Harding (1991), Santos argues that modernist technico-scientific knowledge operates like a monoculture that suppresses rival knowledges. He points to the need to develop 'epistemologies of the south' in order to produce "global *cognitive* justice" (2004, 238). Of particular interest in this paper is Santos' use of the term 'ecologies' to highlight place-based multiplicity and the non-destructive relations of interdependence that are overlooked by Western knowledge monocultures (2004, 240). Santos discusses 'ecologies of productivity' and 'ecologies of recognition' as a language which can begin to encapsulate and to value interdependent systems of difference and diversity that intersect the majority and minority worlds, cutting across the tendency to prioritise 'epistemologies of the north'. Ecologies of productivity include diverse economic practices "which have been hidden or discredited by the capitalist orthodoxy of productivity" (240). Ecologies of recognition involve, as Santos notes,

a new articulation between the principles of equality and difference, thus allowing for the possibility of equal differences—[for instance] an ecology of difference comprised of mutual recognition (240 insert added).

The epistemology we employ in this research involves a place-based approach that refuses to yoke meaning into dominant monocultural knowledge systems but proceeds by observing, recovering and reinstating the rich diversity of economic practices and forms of recognition

that sustain life (Gibson-Graham 2004, 2014). In the remainder of this paper we would like to show how we have used such an approach to generate a localised perspective of gender equality and economic empowerment, one that may call forth new, non-status quo, forms of community-led development in the Pacific context.

Challenging homogeneity and absences: community based understandings of productivity and recognition in the Pacific

There are many ways to apprehend the diverse economic practices that contribute to survival and wellbeing across the Pacific, constituting place-based ‘ecologies of productivity’. In our research we used a simple template to represent the economy—the floating coconut—with which we invited community members to enumerate their diverse economic engagements.. During our workshops we asked our participants to record each economic activity they had engaged in over the past week on single post-it notes (colour coded by gender). We then asked them to place each post-it note on a large coconut floating in the ocean drawn on A1 paper. Post-it notes with activities in registered workplaces or businesses were placed, above the coconut’s waterline, representing the ‘capitalist’ or formal economy. Those that involved cash transactions in informal markets were clustered below the waterline, as were those that were unremunerated or remunerated in kind, representing the informal, non-capitalist economies including household and community activities.⁶ Finally, the results were rewritten and compiled on another coconut with women’s activities on the left and men’s activities on the right (see Figure 1). This technique for enumerating a diverse economy was developed by J.K. Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) as a first step towards countering the capitalocentrism of dominant economic representations, and to identify the many different logics of interdependence that inform actions and transactional relationships, other than those above the waterline.⁷

⁶ Gibson has used this technique in many action research projects, though usually the template is a floating iceberg with a small section of visible ice and a large section of hidden ice under the water line. In the Pacific context it seemed appropriate to replace the iceberg image with a coconut.

⁷ While the resulting representation still relies on the binaries of formal/informal market transactions, paid/unpaid work and registered/unregistered business, Gibson-Graham’s diverse economy framing (2006) resists classifying activities in terms of production and reproduction, or in terms of private/public/NGO/domestic economies. This strategy leaves open the possibility for a diversity of class processes and ethical economic relationships to be recognized within each category of activity, e.g. in the domain of childcare there can be capitalist, cooperative, reciprocal, volunteer, neighbourhood shared and domestic forms (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003).

The floating coconut representation of ecologies of productivity shares much with the pioneering work of the Vanuatu National Statistics Office which has aimed to increase awareness at national and international levels of the value of the *kastom* (Pacific pidgin for custom or traditional) economy in providing for Pacific people's survival and well-being (Regenvanu n.d; Vanuatu National Statistics office 2012). The Melanesian Spearhead Group indicators for wellbeing were developed in the Melanesian context and provide an avenue to continue to raise awareness of, and garner support for, a much broader and more appropriate definition of economic and social wellbeing. One indicator, for example, is access to "traditional wealth items" i.e. pigs, chickens, yams, mats, and kava, that have traditional exchange value and are held in common throughout the islands (44).

Vanuatu's national initiative leads the way in constituting a non-modernist engagement with economic development, one that does not privilege one kind of technical knowledge, one type of economy or economic subject or development pathway, but that promotes a 'sufficient way of living' (Hermkens 2013, no page). As we can see in the findings shown in Figure 1, Pacific livelihoods encompass a great volume of activities, many of which do not intersect the formal capitalist economy. Many rely on a range of transactions and interdependencies, informed by the ethics of customary exchange, or household and family sharing, or new forms of reciprocity and social protection appropriate to the squatter life-world. This is an ecology of productivity that invites further discussion and research into what a sufficient or desired way of living might be. The Vanuatu well-being indicators provide some existing resources to draw on in tracking change in livelihood practices at the community level, but what these engagements with *kastom* economies are missing is a consideration of gender—both the gendered nature of economic activities and the potential for non-modernist modes of economic development to support movement towards gender equality.

While there is movement towards valuing and measuring diverse Melanesian economies, thus far there has been less work on making place-based forms of gender recognition visible and amenable to indicator development. Instead the tendency has been to rely on outside conceptualisations of women's liberation, based on the erroneous assumption that existing (traditional) social relations are characterised by male domination and the oppression of women (Jolly 1997). While there may be cross cultural similarities in women's and men's roles and the challenges faced by both, there are also differences in how different cultures

view gender roles and what equality might mean to women and men in different places, and Jolly thus calls for ‘liberation’ in Pacific Island countries to be made locally meaningful based on women’s experience of *their* place, culture and religion (2005, 154).

There are plentiful examples of how local visions of gender equality align with elements of a global feminist vision. Our research findings show, for example, that women want to be recognised for their unpaid household and care work and for men to share more of the work load. But this unpaid household and care work should not be seen as necessarily ‘reproducing’ labour for a capitalist economy, as women want this work to be valued for its intrinsic worth within a diverse economy. The feminist struggle to get a more equitable sharing of care and household work recognised as a human right poses a challenge to mainstream human rights policy makers and asks them to listen and respond to how community members articulate their own aspirations for change (Carmona and Donald 2014). It is these local aspirations and capacities that we hope to give voice to through developing community based indicators of gender equality and economic empowerment. Using our place-based approach we sought to generate insights into culturally embedded conceptualisations of economy and gender, and accompanying aspirations for equality.

Conversations in the Pacific about gender equality and economic empowerment

From a starting point informed by diverse ecologies of productivity mapped onto ‘floating coconuts’, we engaged in a conversation between the research team, local NGO research partners and community members that worked towards synthesising local understandings of gender equality.⁸ For the workshops roughly equal numbers (around 10-15) of older (40+ years) and younger (18-40 years) women and men were recruited on a voluntary basis. Participants included those who lived in nuclear and extended families, and female-headed households, people who were single and married, those with children and those without. Our NGO partner researchers facilitated the community workshops in local language, with academic researchers as support persons. We draw on direct quotes from individual community members and accounts taken by the research team of what was said. In the examples offered below the use of italics denotes quotes taken from notes of workshops

⁸ Here we discuss only a small sub-set of the suite of 34 indicators that emerged. The full set of indicators can be found in Carnegie, Rowland, Gibson et al (2012).

recorded by NGO co-researchers. These statements and reflections arose during participation in four different group exercises: 1) an inventory of diverse economies focusing on individual daily work activities, 2) a mapping of distributions of labour, goods and cash within a network of family and community members, 3) a timeline of events that produced significant change and 4) role plays that reflected a concern to do with relations between men and women around which there was desire for change. What emerged from these exercises was both information on everyday practices (what was done) and information about aspirations (what people would like to see done).

The productivity of diverse economic activities

Most community members involved in the study were engaged in a diverse range of economic activities and workshop participants generated maps of the different forms of benefit that were gained from each. The diverse economy profiles of these communities were highly gendered, and while the gendered nature of the division of labour in itself was not considered problematic, there were concerns around how equitably the work was distributed.

Subsistence gardening and food production is important in both rural and urban squatter settlements, and has an important role to play in assuring food security:

Garden food really supports my family life. If I didn't [make a garden'] I'll suffer, my children will be hungry and my family will break down (Woman, Kuzi).

What stood out in our conversations was the gendered division of gardening labour, reflecting previous studies on the gendered division of livelihood roles in Pacific societies:

When a new garden field site is selected, all the family members work together to clear the garden site. The father and sons cut any trees down that are on the site; the mother and daughters remove any plants growing there. The men hoe the land so it is ready for planting. Women plant the garden and maintain it, weeding regularly and undertaking day-to-day garden maintenance. Women are also responsible for harvesting the produce and selling it in the market (Man, Kuzi).

While women and men shared the work of gardening, there were clear divisions around which sex was responsible for which types of labour.

We heard stories of where the division of labour was working well and people felt the situation was equitable, and we heard participants express dissatisfaction with the way labour was shared: *Men don't work hard in the garden, we women work really hard – we often care*

for the garden and the family (Young women, Burns Creek). While food security was an important factor in surviving well and was strongly linked to the subsistence labour of both women and men, in many circumstances it was also associated with a greater labour burden on women.

As in many other settings the greater workload for women often centred on the question of who took responsibility for the household work. While both women and men were taking up opportunities for paid employment, it was a common theme that the burden of household work was centred on women, and both women and men recognised a capacity for change in this regard. Stories were shared about men learning to take more responsibility and to provide more respect and recognition for the work that women do. One example of the aspiration for ‘better’ behaviour from men and boys (and a more even share of the work) was expressed by young girls who performed a drama in which the unequal household expectations of girls and boys was addressed and renegotiated in the domestic realm. In this drama a young girl is given household work to do *whilst her brother is encouraged to go and play soccer*. Change comes when *the father and the son decide to share the chores with the mother and daughter, and the mother and daughter are encouraged to rest when tired* (Young girls’ drama, Kuzi). The vision of change provided in this drama, and others, articulate a local vision of how a more equitable future might look.

In terms of indicator formation what emerged from this discussion was the need to monitor how different forms of work were being performed, how much time was being allocated to performing that work, and by whom. The indicator “*Average number of hours men and women of all ages spend working for cash, on a voluntary basis and in the household*” was proposed to enable baseline data to be collected on the division of labour within the diverse economy, and to allow comparison of change over time. In a society in which women’s formal labour force participation is very low and involvement in markets is informal, this indicator would expose the economic involvement of women and men in multiple ecologies of productivity. It would, for example, allow for changes to be tracked over time as more people performed activities for cash or renegotiated gender roles around household self-provisioning and domestic and care work. Attitudinal indicators relating to care work “*Percentage of men who feel that the time they spend parenting is adequate*” and “*Percentage of women who feel that the time their partner spends parenting is adequate*” could be used to offset the quantitative measure of time allocation.

Recognition of collective endeavour and distribution

Most of the activities people engaged in were not only tied to providing for the well-being of individuals or the immediate household but contributed to the livelihoods of the wider community. Work to foster and maintain relations with the extended family (*wantok*), church and community and the ability to make a contribution in these spheres was highly valued. It was common practice that *'the first harvest is gifted to the church. Other product is shared with relatives [for food] and the community for fund raising'* (Young woman, Koa Hill).

Another young (married) woman spoke of contributing garden produce for big celebrations like weddings or birthdays in her extended family: *I also feed other relatives and sometimes they give back money in hard times. They are happy with me, and so they just give me a big smile, which makes me feel good. Sometimes they don't give me anything, but I'm just happy with them* (Young married woman, Sausama). Being able to take part in such reciprocal exchanges is an important contribution to cultural maintenance in the community and its public nature produces valuable recognition for women, boosting their self-esteem:

I make flowers for the church every Sunday from my garden. In exchange I receive thanks and gifts of clothing from people in my church. I also get respect. I always do the decoration for free (Older woman, Wainibuku).

People came together to provide social security in community and religious networks of mutual aid and reciprocity, supporting each other in initiatives that could provide cash incomes. While informal groups existed for men and women, examples of collective economic engagements were especially important in generating in kind and cash incomes for women, and even more so for economically marginalised women such as widows and single mothers. Participants spoke of collective support in subsistence gardening work, especially *when women's husbands do not have time for gardening, and the women want bigger gardens*. In this circumstance women took *turns to work in each other's gardens* while also *pooling funds to pay for fuel and boat hire to take their produce to Gizo market* (Older women, Sausama). Another example was a women's group that created and sold flower arrangements. In this case the profits from the sale of flowers were not intended to create cash income for group members individually but were *used for group needs. Individual members do not receive income for their time*. The women worked together to *make decisions about spending the money as a collaborative group* and were able to build on the skills they learned to *earn individual income outside of the group* (Older women, Burns Creek).

Collective subjectivities were also important in relation to the distribution of resources. In some cases this was about the distribution of a cash surplus. The ability to raise cash enabled community members to fulfil obligations of gift giving and income sharing across wider community networks and extended family groups:

Now I can buy more food for the family, support the children at the school.... I even put one tenths [of my earnings] in the church. I got more respect from family and friends and my family respects my decisions (Young woman, Burns Creek).

The ability to gift a portion of income was widely regarded as an important source of respect and recognition for women and men. The presence of a cash income allowed households to meet their material needs as well as fulfil important social obligations and provide for greater community wellbeing.

From these discussions it seemed important to formulate an indicator of gendered distributions within the community. The “*Average amount of cash that women and men gift to wantoks, church and/or community members in the last week*” is an indicator that would benchmark one aspect of a collective economic subjectivity and form of valued recognition. This indicator also, of course, bears upon the diverse ecologies of productivity in any community and its change over time would help track the emergence or otherwise of more individualistic forms of recognition and personal rather than collective consumption. The indicator “*Percentage of women sharing the costs of doing business*” tracks another aspect of collective subjectivity focused on women supporting each other to further their income generating activities.

Equal valuing of women and men and household harmony

Many participants, both women and men, voiced the desire to ensure that the decisions about how income was distributed within the family were more equitable. People valued the few examples where distributions were perceived to be equitable, with women and men contributing to decision making around how resources were to be shared. Control over income generation and decision making about how to allocate income was managed differently in different households. In one example the father of the house decided how much money would be allocated to each household expense by dividing his garden into sections *this crop for the school fees, this crop for the clothing expenses, this part for my garden household use*. Only once the produce was sold did his wife have *access to the cash for the household needs* (Older man, Burns Creek). In another example, the task of selling was taken

by the mother of the house, then *cash is allocated by the father to the children, to the family food budget, and the rest is given to the mother to distribute* (Young woman, Koa Hill).

While there were examples where decisions over household distributions were seen to be shared equitably there was also widespread examples where both women and men identified problems around management of cash within the household. Men's profligacy was a commonly discussed problem: *The husband does the shopping and then doesn't give the wife the money. They do not help their wife meet other expenses* (Man, Wainibuku plenary discussion). An equally common response by women was to try to hide their earnings from their partners: *When I go and sell my cake at the market, I don't normally tell my husband how much I have earned. Instead I lie to him and hide the money in my purse in the house.* In many cases this was because people felt men could not be trusted to manage the money wisely, spending it on alcohol and cigarettes: *I need to hide my money so that we have enough to buy basic items. Sometimes my son finds out where my purse is hidden and tells his dad, and when that happens he takes money from my purse for smokes* (Older woman, Kuzi).

The necessity of hiding earnings came alongside women's desire for independent earnings and for more equitable decision-making around income expenditure. Questions of women's control over income were not straightforward, as the desire to have independent earnings co-exists with women's desire to build and maintain harmony in the household. While women and men expressed a desire for more equitable decision-making around income, there was also concern that the balance might tip too far towards women's self-reliance:

The older men ... felt that "women should not be too self-reliant" and that they need good partnership between women and men in the household. By getting self-reliant (working independently, making independent decisions, not communicating with their partners) the men believed that the women would lose confidence and trust in men. ... They said they thought it was good for single mothers or those with drunk or unreliable husbands to be self-reliant. But for those that are married, self-reliance affects relationships with women and men...The men felt women should respect men.
(Older men's comments, Burns Creek plenary discussion)

The concern of older men that women's economic empowerment should not displace men's economic role was mirrored by women. The desire for equality and balance was not necessarily a desire for women and men to share in the same decision making role, but to

have their contributions valued and respected even within different roles. As one woman explained, togetherness is the ‘best way’:

We plant crops together and I sell them in the market. We put half the money in the bank and use the other half to meet household needs. My husband makes decisions on what to plant and when, and we make shared decisions on where to sell and how to use the money we earn. My husband does most of the work and I sell the produce, but we discuss together all the decisions we make. It's the best way (Married woman, Wainibuku).

Through our conversations with community members it became clear that there was much value attached to what we came to speak of as ‘women’s and men’s togetherness’. A women’s drama exemplified the desire for sharing everyday experiences and women and men demonstrating love and affection:

A woman is at home with her kids. The father wakes up, and his wife has his breakfast ready on the table. He greets his wife nicely, with respectful, loving words and a hug. She greets him in the same way. They eat together as a family (Older women, Jittu).

Rather than reflecting widespread practice, ‘togetherness’ was aspirational, and came alongside a desire for men to behave ‘better’: focusing more on the needs of the household and respecting the contributions of women and girls.

We began to see this aspiration for ‘togetherness’ as a valued form of recognition around which many of participants’ aspirations for gender equality were articulated. An attitudinal indicator “*Women’s and men’s level of satisfaction with communication between themselves and their spouse/partner*” captures some of these aspirations for togetherness in the household. A set of paired indicators provide further information on both practices and attitudes related to women’s cash earnings: “*Percentage of women who control their own cash earnings*” and “*Percentage of women satisfied with their level of control over their cash earnings*”. Another indicator derived from participatory exercises “*Prevalence of different approaches to managing finance within households in the community*” tracks the way men and women manage household income – whether this is individually managed by one or both spouses, or managed together.⁹

⁹ For wider discussion and the full set of indicators see Carnegie, Rowland, Gibson et al 2012.

Political foundations for equitable change

As with research in other contexts that has demonstrated the connections between women's citizenship and collective action and economic empowerment (e.g. Kabeer 2011), our conversations in Fiji and the Solomon Islands touched on women's capacity to have a voice in the community and for people to feel safe. While in some cases women were encouraged to step into more leadership roles, there were also stories where both men and women actively undermined those women who were pioneering a greater voice for women in community level planning and decision-making. Women spoke about how their efforts to be involved in public deliberations or community organisations that included both men and women were thwarted:

Women want to be involved in planning in the community, church and in the family. Now men are stronger and do the planning, and they undermine women by telling them they don't know anything. If some women did this work [planning], other women folk might gossip about them and spread false news, they would be jealous (Older women, Sausama).

The casual undermining of women through silencing (by the men) or malicious gossip (by other women) sat alongside more overt forms of violence in many communities. A significant theme that emerged during fieldwork was the need for men to take more responsibility in creating communities where everyone felt safe. The underemployment of young men was well understood as a significant barrier to women feeling safe in public. Projects to establish piggery and chicken farms in one Solomon Islands community helped to reduce crime by occupying the young men *from Monday to Friday ... so they are not on the streets causing trouble... We [women] feel safer when they are not drinking during the week anymore (Young women's group, Burns Creek).*

Increased economic opportunities for young men helped to have positive flow on effects for the wider community, but men were also seen as needing to do more to help each other. In particular younger men articulated a desire for their elders to provide better leadership models, providing good role models for how young men should conduct themselves in the community and in relationships with women. The lack of good role models was frequently brought up. One young man, for example, argued that *elders should do things as a good role model [in relation to drinking and smoking] in the community. Right now, older people don't always provide a good role model for young men (Young man, Kuzi).*

In overview, what many participants desire with respect to gender equality seems to be based on the principles of equality and difference that were embedded in pre-colonial society. Understandings of gender equality seldom posited individual women's advancement as a central aim. Women's pursuit of an independent income was a desirable aim for gender equality that some women had put into practice. But this often ran alongside (and was in tension with), the desire for balanced and harmonious relationships with men, and greater respect and recognition of the different contributions made by women and men, as well as better leadership and role models to be provided by men for the benefit of the whole community. The importance of creating positive community-wide relations was reflected in the central role of a collective subject, both in terms of working collectively to support women's advancement (by taking on new leadership roles for example) and shape a safer community, and in collaborating for material wellbeing within the household. In many of the examples we discuss, economic empowerment and gender equality are inextricably linked. Maintaining food security via gardening, maintaining and strengthening community networks through gifting and voluntary labour alongside work in the cash and formal economy, and creating safe communities by reducing the economic disenfranchisement of men, especially young men, are all central to providing for material and social wellbeing. Overall, aspirations for change were articulated around a hope for greater respect, harmony and togetherness both within people's homes and across their wider communities.

Conclusion

Major changes are sweeping across the Pacific and the future offers uncertainties arising from unpredictable and increasingly extreme weather events and the unpredictable impacts of trade liberalisation. It is important that communities are able to monitor the changes that are occurring on the ground so that the 'development impact' can be fully understood from a gender perspective. By developing indicators that have meaning to citizens, ones that can be locally derived and that can be used as benchmarks to track change, communities can become more actively involved in steering development pathways and policies in desirable directions. Furthermore, the collaborative formulation of gender sensitive indicators has impact beyond their monitoring potential. Indicators do not just represent reality, they produce it (Leibowitz and Zwingel 2011, 365), making some realities "more real" and others less so (Law and Urry 2004). In our research we found that the community conversations opened up new avenues for men to appreciate what women did with their time, for women to express their

dissatisfaction with the lack of good role models for young men, and for women to voice the ways that they supported each other and at times undermined each other. The very discussion of gender difference had performative effects by raising the issue of fairness and harmony and stimulating aspirations for change.

There is no doubt that gender relations will change as the economies of Pacific Island nations are buffeted by international forces and especially as more people seek employment opportunities as seasonal migrant workers in Australia and New Zealand. It is an important time to be challenging dominant economic development pathways and opening a space for a diversity of alternatives (Leach et al 2014). We have argued that the way national and international gender equality indicators articulate economic advancement produces the non-existence of both diverse ecologies of productivity and gender recognition in the Pacific. The performative effect of these indicators is to foreclose the possibility that there might be different ways of pursuing development, and expanded, embedded conceptions of a “human rights subjectivity” in which place-based gender difference is respected and valued.

It is instructive to note that after the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of the late 2000s traditional economic practices and support systems offered a tenuous form of resilience for Pacific households and communities. Declining national exports, falling remittances, the loss of value of trust funds and lower tourist traffic impacted men and women in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in different ways (Feeny et al. 2013). Rising fuel prices limited householders’ ability to market their produce and women did more paid work outside the home to earn cash to make ends meet. Price hikes in imported food led to greater reliance on garden food and women’s workload reportedly increased (2013, 7, 9). Community based indicators such as those discussed in this paper could be used in future to benchmark gendered divisions of labour, distributional strategies and economic empowerment. Such indicators would help to monitor the resilience of a diversity of economic practices in the face of economic crisis, as well in the context of economic change wrought by free trade agreements.

The wider ramifications of this research point to the need for a more nuanced approach to advancing gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. The narrow focus on increasing women’s access to paid employment, entrepreneurship and market opportunities diverts attention from the value of women’s contribution in *diverse* economies, especially to

care and household work essential to creating a sufficient life. Presently the gender imbalance of this contribution is ignored by the mainstream development and human rights policy makers and is at odds with the gender equality aspirations of Pacific women. Gender equality is not only about women as individualised, profit maximising economic subjects, but also women as collective subjects who are embedded in interdependent households and communities who seek more sufficient ways of living *together with* husbands, partners, children, *wantok* and other community members.

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Figure 1 Diverse labour and leisure practices performed over the preceding week by women and men (Solomon Islands urban community)

Notes: Women's activities (on the left in orange) and men's (on the right in yellow) have been arranged on a floating coconut that shows formal employment above the waterline and work for cash in the informal sector, unpaid work in community and household economies and leisure activities under the waterline. Work for money and activities that generate cash are marked with a \$ sign. Activities that provide food directly are marked with an open mouth. Those that are gifted are marked with a wrapped present.

