



# Promising practices from Fiji in empowering women economically

Learnings from Talanoa Treks, Ra Naari Parishad,  
Rise Beyond the Reef, and the Fiji Women's Fund





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is jointly authored by eight women who work with the Fiji Women's Fund and three of the Fund's partner organisations - Talanoa Treks, Ra Naari Parishad, and, Rise Beyond the Reef.<sup>1</sup> The paper aims to contribute to improved women's economic empowerment programs by sharing the experiences of these three partners. The authors document the learnings of practitioners in Fiji and compare these with the existing literature for the audience of practitioners in the Pacific and abroad. The Fiji Women's Fund supports the documentation of research from practice, so that the expertise of practitioners is recognised, and, to increase the body of knowledge generated from the Global South.

The paper examines the experiences and learnings of the three partners using the Gender at Work framework,<sup>2</sup> developed by Rao and Kelleher, which highlights the inter-linked dimensions of change required to achieve sustainable progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. The paper documents the similar journey taken by all three partner organisations, through each of the four quadrants of this framework. All three entities supported the establishment of a formal, collective structure being established, to provide women access to training and income-generating opportunities. Women accessed these opportunities to improve their skills, capabilities, income and assets. These changes, in turn, had an influence on the way the women themselves, and the men in their lives, think about what it means to be a woman or a man and the possibilities available. For example, there is evidence of positive changes to what women and men are doing in their households. Husbands, sons and partners are helping women beneficiaries by taking on some of the care tasks that were previously left to the women. The greatest evidence of change is within households, as changes to exclusionary practices at the village level are less evident.

<sup>1</sup>Farida Fleming, Alparti Josephine, Janet Lotawa, Marita Manley, Sereima Maraivalu, Daventry Mudaliar, Elena Ranadi and Michelle Reddy.

<sup>2</sup>Kelleher, D. and Rao, A., Gender at Work Framework, accessed at <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>



Broader literature supports the findings from the experiences of the three organisations, on empowering women economically. The paper documents other research that illustrates the importance of collectives to empowerment, while recognising issues that need to be managed within these types of structures. The broader literature similarly identifies the need for conscious attention to the existing workload of women and the need to effect changes to this workload as part of economic empowerment. Most importantly, literature supports the partner organisations' emphasis on focusing on markets when developing economic empowerment initiatives.

An important consideration, given the high rates of domestic violence in Fiji, is that economic empowerment initiatives do no harm. That is, it is important that women are not exposed to any harm from family members, partners or husbands that they would not otherwise have faced if not for the increased capacity, confidence, income or assets gained from economic empowerment initiatives.

Rise Beyond the Reef's finding, through its 2019 Impact Assessment, that women are not reporting additional violence as a result of their economic empowerment, is important given this context.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper originated from a panel discussion at the annual Reflection and Planning Workshop of Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development's (*Pacific Women*) Fiji Program and Fiji Women's Fund in Suva, in October 2018. Fiji Women's Fund Manager, Michelle Reddy, organised the panel session so that workshop participants could learn from the women's economic empowerment practices of three organisations, namely: Ra Naari Parishad, Rise Beyond the Reef and Talanoa Treks (a description of each organisation follows below). Alparti Josephine and Daventry Mudaliar represented Ra Naari Parishad; Janet Lotawa and Sereima Maraivalu shared the experiences of Rise Beyond the Reef and Marita Manley and Elina Ranadi spoke for Talanoa Treks. Farida Fleming documented the session and worked with each organisation to further analyse their findings and document them in the form of this paper. The three partners also presented a panel session at the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*) Learning Forum on Women's Economic Empowerment in May 2019. This second set of presentations helped to refine this paper.

**Ra Naari Parishad (RNP)** is a rural women's membership organisation based in Rakiraki. Ra Naari Parishad was established in 1989 following the first military coup in Fiji to provide a safe space for Indo-Fijian women to discuss and address their social, political and financial concerns. In the past 30 years, the organisation has grown and evolved as it has responded to the needs of its members. Ra Naari Parishad (RNP) now has more than 150 members spread across fourteen community Women's Clubs, two full-time staff, an active group of volunteers, an Executive Committee, a Management Board and three Trustees. RNP supports rural women in Ra to live more empowered and engaged lives by increasing access to income and skills development opportunities; providing leadership training; improving water and sanitation services; promoting disaster preparedness, and, enhancing connections with other women-led networks and coalitions. A grant from the Fiji Women's Fund enabled RNP to provide bee hives to three Mother's Clubs, training in bee keeping to women, men and community leaders, and, ongoing mentoring support from RNP's experienced bee keepers.

**Rise Beyond the Reef (RBTR)** is an NGO founded to address the unique development needs of rural and remote communities in Fiji. RBTR's focus is improving women's and children's lives through ecologically sustainable income-generating projects using traditional skills and materials, while addressing gender inequalities, building women leaders, and empowering women and girls facing domestic violence.

RBTR's flagship initiative is the Traditional Contemporary Arts & Crafts Income-Generating Program. RBTR delivers this program in 23 communities: 10 villages and settlements in the Yakete District in the Ba Province and in the seven villages of the Tikina Nabukadra in the Ra Province, two villages in Tikina Sasa, Macuata and four villages on Nairai Island. The program provides women with: (a) community liaisons and leadership development opportunities; (b) income development opportunities; (c) skill development and lifelong learning; (d) additional markets via private sector partnership creation; and (e) promotion and preservation of traditional arts and skills. RBTR's efforts also focus on reintroducing traditional crops and expanding local farmers' agricultural skills and crops which results in more diverse, and thus more resilient, income sources.

**Talanoa Treks** is a social enterprise working with three communities in the interior of Viti Levu to increase income through hiking tourism. Talanoa Treks partners with the Nabalesere, Senituatua (Nubatautau) and

Vuevata (Naga) Women's Clubs. Talanoa Treks has worked to increase each community's income through their community enterprises, and in the process, strengthen the voice and income-generating opportunities of women in these communities.

Talanoa Treks has supported the three communities to earn an income from tourism. It has also facilitated other partnerships that have supported the communities in addressing broader community development needs in the areas of agriculture, cultural heritage, water security and post-cyclone rehabilitation.

**Fiji Women's Fund** (the Fund) is an initiative of the Australian Government's Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program. The Fund has committed AU \$10.5 million for the period 2017-2022 for funding and capacity development support for women's groups, networks and organisations in Fiji, to expand and enhance their work on women's empowerment and gender equality.

The Fund also provides capacity development support by providing training for all grantees on:

- Financial management including fraud and anti-bribery;
- Child safeguarding and protection;
- Monitoring, evaluation and learning; and
- Gender equality and social inclusion.

The Fund has the following three outcomes it aims to achieve by 2022:

- **Grantees' capacity strengthened:** Women's groups, organisations, or networks supported by the Fund are empowered and have improved capacity to contribute to transformative change that improves women's lives.
- **Grantees' influence strengthened:** Women's groups, organisations, or networks supported by the Fund are more influential at different levels (individual/systemic and formal/informal) and are contributing to transformative change in women's lives.
- **Independent Fund:** The Fund has transitioned to an independent local entity status and has secured funding from donors, the private sector, and local philanthropy.



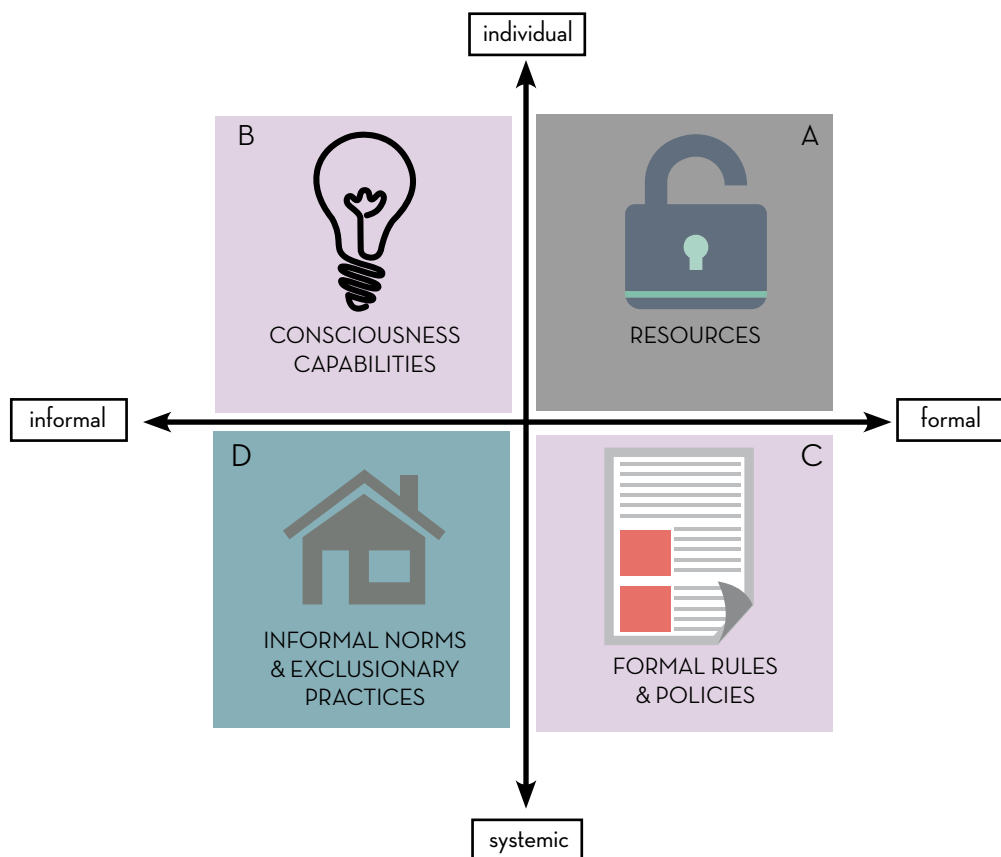


## FRAMEWORK FOR THINKING

This section of the paper onwards includes findings from a process of collective analysis. From here on, the terms 'we' and 'our' are used when communicating collective findings. The third person, 'they' or 'their' or the name of the organisation is used when referring to findings of a single organisation.

Below is a graphic of the Gender at Work framework, a well-known and frequently used tool for gender analysis. The framework was used to structure our thinking and this paper. The paper discusses the work of each of our organisations using the framework's areas of focus, namely, the changes required in individuals and in systems, to progress towards gender equality. Gender equality requires formal changes - to explicit rules and understandings - as well as changes to internalised and tacit understandings. For example, changes to resources are required to progress gender equality in areas such as increases to women's income, assets and access to services (Box A). Additionally, changes to the consciousness and capability of women and men at an individual level, increases their knowledge of gender inequality and results in improved attitudes to gender-based violence (Box B). Gender equality requires changes to formal rules to local laws and village or government policies - for example (Box C) - as well as changes to informal discriminatory norms and deep structures in religious and cultural norms (Box D).

Figure 1: Gender at Work framework

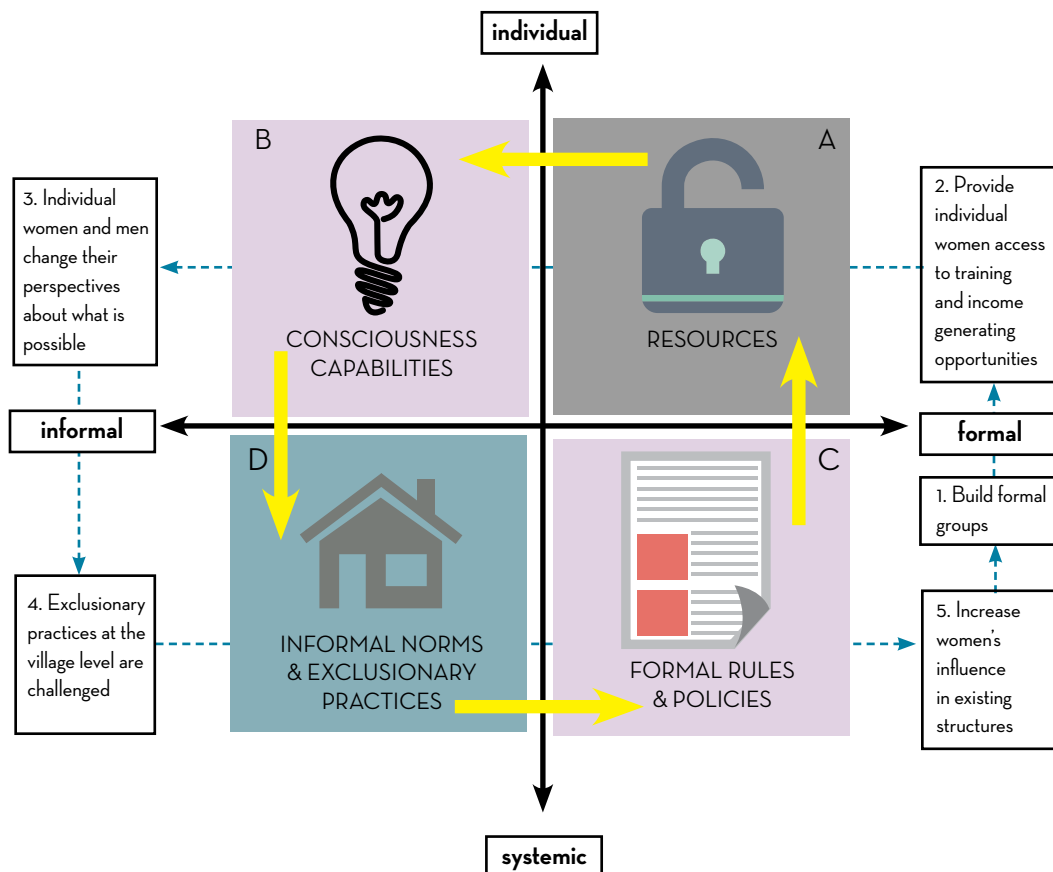




## COMMONALITIES IN OUR JOURNEY

We discovered that we have some important areas of commonality in our work. These commonalities became evident through our discussions during the 2018 panel session, follow up emails in 2019, and in our 2019 panel session. We have illustrated our common journey in Figure 2. Each of our organisations started the work of empowering women by supporting a formal collective structure. In each case, our organisations supported the formation of the collective structure. These collectives provide a setting in which individual women can access increased resources in the form of training, support to start micro-businesses, and in some instances, access to health services. The groups also provide a safe space for women to develop and practise leadership, decision-making, and influencing skills. Having such access to resources and opportunities leads to a shift in the way women members think about themselves and what they are able to do. These changes to women’s knowledge, skills and attitudes, have challenged the informal, communal norms and practices that exclude women. Women are therefore increasing their influence in their existing communal structures by applying their increased skills and drawing on the changing attitudes in the household and in the challenges to community norms. The work of each of our organisations can be understood as a cycle through the four quadrants. This cycle is not finished or complete. Rather, the journey is ongoing and change in each of the four quadrants requires reinforcement and expansion. The rest of the paper describes the work we have undertaken in each quadrant in more detail. Additionally, the paper raises a number of issues that impede the economic empowerment of women.

Figure 2: Journey of each partner through the Gender at Work framework



# STEP 1

DEVELOPING WOMEN'S GROUPS AND COMMITTEES  
AND INCREASING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION ON  
VILLAGE COMMITTEES



As previously stated, each of our organisations started the work of economic empowerment by supporting the formation of a collective structure. Each collective has a structure and members have delegated roles and responsibilities. For example, RNP supports Mother's Clubs. RBTR works with a women's committee in each village and RBTR Village and District Coordinators attend all Bose va Koro (Village) and Bose Tikina (Tikina Council) meetings. Talanoa Treks works with tourism committees, which include both men and women. These groups then link back to the organisation itself, to provide value to individual women and men as explained in more detail in the paragraphs below.

RNP's Mother's Clubs are groups of five or more Indo-Fijian women based in a village. These groups are self-initiated by at least one woman from the village and aim to improve the economic and social situation of their women members. Members elect a President, Vice-President and Treasurer, who lead and administer the group and register the Club with RNP's head office. The Mother's Clubs meet regularly to discuss issues that are important to them and work on collective projects together. Each month, the President, Vice-President and Treasurer of each club hold a group meeting at the RNP head office in Rakiraki. The groups decide how to be involved in economic empowerment initiatives and how benefits will be distributed. In those cases where the RNP head office provides technical advice and funding support, a share of the profits from economic projects is given back to the head office, with the remainder split among the women.

RBTR's Women's Committees comprise women producers in each village. Each committee elects a Coordinator, who organises and delivers training sessions to upskill members in producing cultural artefacts and cultivating plants to support this production, distributes and manages work flow across the village producers, and, ensures all production meets the required quality standards. RBTR encourages each Women's Committee to include women who are traditionally viewed as 'outsiders' in their village – that is, women who have married into the village and who often have the lowest status. RBTR encourages these women to become Village Coordinators. In this way, the women's economic empowerment initiative is addressing issues of gender as well as class hierarchy. Village Coordinators are supported by District and Regional Coordinators. These District and Regional Coordinators coordinate production and address problems that arise, as well as report to Village and Tikina Council meetings, which is a new role for women within their indigenous governance structures. RBTR provides support to women across the entire value chain. The organisation provides training in production, product design, quality assurance, and the market for goods.

The Village Tourism Committees that Talanoa Treks works with aim to ensure economic and social benefit to the village from sustainable tourism initiatives. The Village Tourism Committee, including both women and men; manages the provision of services by the village to Talanoa Treks' hiking tourists and ensures the quality of those services. The formal roles on the Committee are the Chair or President (who is Talanoa Trek's point of contact), Treasurer and Secretary. The Committee reports to their Bose Va Koro (Village Meeting) once a month. Talanoa Treks shares annual financial reports during a review meeting at the end of the year. The Committee allocates women and men to provide catering and guiding services and nominates one woman from the women's committee to manage the construction of communal kitchens in each village, to be used for tourism as well as communal purposes. The communal kitchen Project Manager is responsible for the oversight of kitchen design, procurement of materials and management of the build. Talanoa Treks, as with RBTR, buys the services from the women and men in the community.



## COMPARISON OF FINDINGS FROM STEP 1 WITH THE LITERATURE

Research from the Pacific, Asia and Africa supports the approach that each of our organisations took intuitively by understanding the importance of collectives in empowerment initiatives and employing their use. For example, International Women's Development Agency's (IWDA) Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) initiatives in the Solomon Islands and Timor Leste are based on Savings and Loan Groups and UN Women's Markets for Change is based on market vendor associations. IWDA's synthesis of findings from four evaluations shows that the groups were central to the improvement in individual women's skills and understanding and their financial practices, as well as changes within the household and community.<sup>3</sup> Equally, the UN Women's Markets for Change mid-term review showed that the market vendor association was a way of bringing women together to build skills in financial management and marketing as well as advocate for improved conditions in the market (for example, dormitories for female market vendors who travel far from rural areas) and the realisation of their rights (running water and adequate numbers of toilets for women market vendors).<sup>4</sup> CARE's approach to women's economic empowerment is to work through collectives including economically-oriented groups such as Village Savings and Loan Associations, producer groups and agricultural cooperatives as well as groups such as self-help associations.<sup>5</sup> Analysis from three, large multi-country projects in Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Kenya, Mali, Malawi, and Tanzania showed that the approach of working with collectives is having a positive effect on women's economic empowerment, with a particularly strong effect on income, leadership, domestic decision making, production, violence and time use. Interestingly, in CARE's research on these three multi-country projects, the gender composition of the collective affects the outcomes. The most successful collectives are those with a balanced gender mix of collective members and women leaders. IWDA, UN Women and CARE's prioritisation of working with women's collectives supports our approach.

One of the issues is whether groups are managed by community members who are already advantaged and who perpetuate their existing advantage. For example, RNP has found that key positions within mother's groups are often taken by older women. RBTR has tried to manage this issue by having term limits (two years) for the role of Coordinators. Having a limit ensures that important positions are rotated between women. However, there can also be issues of continuity if the term is too short. It is important to consider and support collectives to manage issues as they arise.

<sup>3</sup>Fleming, F. (2016), Women's economic empowerment: Synthesis report, IWDA <https://bit.ly/33eMltR>

<sup>4</sup>Fleming, F. and Tabualevu, M. (2018), UN Women Markets for Change Midterm Review Report, Assai, pg. 23-24 <https://bit.ly/2pOxEvV>

<sup>5</sup>CARE, (2016), The Role Of Collectives In Achieving Women's Economic Empowerment: A Cross-Project Analysis <https://bit.ly/35nVxyf>

## STEP 2

### BUILDING SKILLS AND COLLECTIVE ASSETS OF INDIVIDUAL WOMEN AND MEN

Each of our organisations builds the skills of women, and some men, and funds collective assets, after supporting the establishment of formal groups outlined in Step 1. Women then increase their income and assets by putting these new skills into practice and using these collective assets. Women either sell their products on the open market (RNP members) or, to our organisations (Talanoa Treks and RBTR). Of importance is the fact that we focus on income generating activities that are high-value and can replace other low-value and time-intensive earning activities such as selling at the market. Women are spending their increased income on family priorities, for example, their children's education. In addition, there is evidence of women's discretionary spending being directed towards their own individual priorities. RBTR's research shows that women artisans have increased status due to their increased income and assets, which then allows them to employ the leadership and decision-making skills they are also learning through the economic empowerment initiatives.<sup>6</sup>

The programs of each organisation support individual women, and some men, to increase their technical skills. For example, RNP members undertook financial literacy and beekeeping training; community members engaged by RBTR were trained in how to produce cultural artefacts (weaving, sewing and painting techniques as well as planting and tending raw materials for weaving); and community members who work with Talanoa Treks were trained in how to provide accommodation, catering and hiking services at the standards expected by international tourists as illustrated by the quote below:

“With this funding, we are trying to support the women to address some of their identified needs and priorities. We started by trying to support women to be contracted as guides by their village enterprises which is slowly showing results in terms of increasing numbers of female guides.”

Marita Manley, Talanoa Treks

<sup>6</sup>Vunisea, L. (2019), Rise Beyond the Reef Impact Assessment, Rise Beyond the Reef <https://bit.ly/2MO5FFw>



Our organisations work to build the collective assets of women, and some men, through our economic empowerment initiatives. For example, the three women’s groups that Talanoa Treks engages with, have completed the construction of communal kitchens; communities working with RBTR have planted voi voi gardens<sup>7</sup>; and, three women’s clubs working with RNP now have beehives. All of the resource inputs are designed to support women advance economically, in a sustainable way. For instance, the range of resources and materials RBTR provides to communities supports them to produce cultural artefacts, as explained by Janet Lotawa in the quote below.

“ Post storm, if producers do not have enough raw materials, we source from women’s groups in regions that were not impacted and provide the raw materials to groups that suffered greater environmental impacts. This is an important way to support circular economies in disaster recovery. For longer term planning, we help communities establish “voivoi plant banks.” Communities are organised to conduct quarterly clean-ups and harvest and are in charge of looking after their own plants. We started with 100 plants and we have five varieties. The idea is that after one year they can harvest any amount they want for production. They can’t harvest and sell. We subsidise transport costs for them to harvest for communities that have to travel a longer distance. They can also harvest, reshoot and plant at their house. In our Ra communities, where they had more voi voi planted to begin with, we help them with fencing. ”

Janet Lotawa, Rise Beyond the Reef

Some women require additional support to access income generating activities given their care responsibilities. RNP began to provide childcare for members after recognising this was an issue for some of them. The Rakiraki Women’s Crisis Centre trained some of RNP’s members; those members are available at group meetings and trainings to provide childcare so that other members can participate fully.

Women are increasing their income and assets through each organisations’ economic empowerment initiatives. For example, women working with RBTR have earned FJ \$81,449 to date in 2019 and FJ \$439,100 since 2015. 100 per cent of respondents in RBTR’s 2019 Impact Assessment stated that income earned from RBTR provided a reliable, alternative source of income. Talanoa Treks has supported the three communities it works with, to earn more than FJ \$200,000 from tourism in the first four years. The increases in income and assets is making a material difference to the lives of women members.

<sup>7</sup> Voi Voi is a plant used for weaving. Initially, RBTR provided Voi Voi materials for weaving. As part of a more sustainable approach, RBTR now provides Voi Voi plants to each village who then create a communal garden. Artists harvest the Voi Voi that they need to make the craft products but cannot harvest the plants to sell. After one year the artists can harvest any amount they want for other income generation activities. RBTR subsidises the transport for artists to harvest the Voi Voi and in some cases contribute to the cost of fencing. Artists can also harvest, reshoot and plant Voi Voi at their own houses.

An important issue our organisations have grappled with is how to ensure women benefit individually, while not undermining the Fijian tradition of *solesolevaki* (working together). Each of our organisations manages this issue differently. Each of us finances collective assets as mentioned previously. Talanoa Treks pays the collective for the goods or services produced and leaves it to the group to decide on rates of individual recompense. In contrast, RBTR pays each artisan individually for the goods produced within each period. Each organisation has tried to ensure an appropriate balance between supporting social solidarity and encouraging individual initiative.

There are examples of women increasing their assets as a result of our economic empowerment programs. RBTR's Impact Assessment found a number of stories of home renovations as a result of increased income. One woman in Yaloku stated she had shared the costs of extension to her home with her husband, bought household items, and paid for transportation of goods from town to the village as a result of her increased income.<sup>8</sup> These were all major economic and life-changing activities for the woman.

Critical to increasing women's income and assets is a focus on markets. We have found that detailed attention to market opportunities is missing from many conversations about women's economic empowerment. There is a danger of being consumed by discussions on gender to the point that we do not deal with the development of the mechanisms that will then promote the shifting of norms that WEE programming has the potential to drive. It is an urgent issue. It is important to consider the market as fundamental to WEE programming. Engaging market or small business development experts in WEE programming discussions is an important step. Doing so will help to address the potentially self-perpetuating gap in understanding in this area and which could cause women's economic empowerment programs to flounder when it comes to market and earning opportunities.

An important dimension of WEE programming is to identify activities that connect women to high-value markets. We do this because we know women have limited time - given their care responsibilities, and, because we know that most women are currently trying to earn incomes through time-intensive activities that do not generate significant income. For example, most of the women in RBTR's program previously relied on selling harvests from the wild, in the market. In Ra, women would earn FJ \$2-3 per dozen husked coconuts to sell to middle-men who would then sell the goods in the city. In contrast, RBTR develops products that do not target the saturated local markets, but rather connect women directly to the tourist gift market. This means the same women make FJ \$6 from one coconut candle shade at village gate compared with supplying coconuts to the local market. Producing goods within the village also improves the women's lifestyle. Producing in one's own village is in stark contrast with getting to and staying at the market and returning - over a 3-4 day period - which is exhausting and expensive. WEE programs can do more to help establish formalised structures in remote settings to support village-gate supply chains - that is, situations where women can be involved in high-value production from where they live.

RBTR's 2019 Impact Assessment found that women in all communities talked about how the money earned has helped them educate their children at secondary and tertiary level.<sup>9</sup> Because these communities are geographically isolated, most of the children attend boarding schools. Instead of the previous dependence on money from *basa* (selling goods at the market) to pay for their children's school needs, the women now have a more reliable source of income. Women consistently spoke of earnings contributing to community and church obligations as well as to

<sup>8</sup>Vunisea, L. (2019), Rise Beyond the Reef Impact Assessment, Rise Beyond the Reef

<sup>9</sup>ibid

children's education. Additionally, there is evidence of women having discretionary spending, which is meaningful to them, as illustrated by the stories and quotes below:

“The Village Coordinator for Yaloku Village very proudly informed the meeting and she said she shares her story all the time to other women from other communities, that she had her gold tooth done for \$60.00. She used to hide her teeth while talking but now from money earned through her handicraft activities, she has been able to pay for her tooth herself.”  
Rise Beyond the Reef Impact Assessment

“We have bought new dresses and personal items and the biggest change for us is the ability to feel like women. We no longer have to wear old clothes (suwai) to go to the gardens all the time to plant or forage the forests for fruits and wild crops. There is now time to wear good clothes in the village. Now we have bought items for ourselves, are presentable and have a reliable source of income. Now we do not have to stress over taking goods to the market.”  
Yaloku women producers.





Women are also learning and practicing leadership and decision-making skills through the economic empowerment initiatives. These skills are as important as the technical skills outlined above from an empowerment perspective. For example, RBTR's Village Coordinators are trained in their roles and responsibilities as leaders in the community.<sup>10</sup> The group or organisational structure also provides a safe setting where women can build and test their leadership and decision-making skills. For example, a District Coordinator at the Coordinator's Retreat raised the issue of a male member of a community (who is a policeman), incorrectly challenging the Village Coordinator that each of the women producing for RBTR must have a business license. The Coordinator's Retreat provided a forum to discuss and problem solve – with the two District Coordinators working together to address the issue.

## COMPARISON OF FINDINGS FROM STEP 2 WITH THE LITERATURE

Buying products from the women, in addition to supporting them with resource and training inputs, addresses a common risk identified in the literature on women's economic empowerment, which is: women learn skills that are not required by the market or have no link to the market. For example, IWDA's 2012 Learning Paper shows that women supported through IWDA WEE programming tended to develop income generation ideas without consistent attention to available markets, potential profitability, or an analysis of economic opportunities in new and developing sectors.<sup>11</sup> This is a critical issue and one that demands further examination by those who deliver WEE programming. Our experience tells us (and this is supported by the literature), that it is irresponsible to develop WEE programming without sufficient attention to the market.

The importance of the safe, collective setting for women to practise leadership skills that our programs provide, is supported in the broader literature on women's economic empowerment in the Pacific and internationally. For example, IWDA's 2014 paper on women's savings clubs in Solomon Islands refers to the need for 'safe spaces.'<sup>12</sup> 'Safe spaces' is a term widely used by feminists and those engaged in women's empowerment work to describe women-only forums where existing gender hierarchies are less present and provide women with 'a safe experimentation environment'.<sup>13</sup> These spaces provide a forum for women to develop and rehearse their leadership skills which then equip them to take part in decision-making in the wider community.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Vunisea, L. (2019), Rise Beyond the Reef Impact Assessment, Rise Beyond the Reef, pg. 24

<sup>11</sup>Rowland, C. (2012), Learning Paper: IWDA and women's economic empowerment, International Women's Development Agency, pg. 7

<sup>12</sup>Brislane, J. and Crawford, J. (2014), Savings clubs: A contextualised response to financial, livelihood and empowerment priorities, Gender Matters #5, IWDA

<sup>13</sup>Kets de Vries, M. & Korotov, K. (2007) 'Creating Transformational Executive Education Programs', Academy of Management Learning & Education, 6(3), pg. 383

<sup>14</sup>Kirton, G. & G. Healy, G. (2004) 'Shaping Union and Gender Identities', British Journal of Industrial Relations, 42(2), pg. 313

# STEP 3

## SUPPORTING CHANGES IN THE HOUSEHOLD



Each of our organisations has seen individual and household-level attitudinal change as an effect of the economic empowerment activities. Many family members are changing their behaviours, with husbands or partners and other family members taking on more care responsibilities to support the women who are earning an income. There are also a minority of family members who have been unsupportive or actively resist changes to established - and discriminatory - gender norms. Significantly, however, RBTR's Impact Assessment has shown no violent backlash against women due to increased income or status.

The first step in changing attitudes and behaviour has been raising awareness of the work that women currently do. For example, women in the communities where Talanoa Treks is engaged, raised the issue of care responsibilities as the main barrier to getting involved with guiding, back in 2016. Women identified the amount of additional responsibilities they managed compared with their husbands: childcare, laundry, cooking, cleaning. These unpaid activities restricted women's ability to put themselves forward as guides. Additionally, issues such as jealousy, husbands actively preventing their wives from exercising, and low fitness levels impeded women's ability to act as guides - as identified during Talanoa Treks' guide training in 2017 - led by a gender specialist. One strategy RBTR employs is to ask the women at the beginning of their involvement about the number of hours they have to spend on the project and how much money they would like to earn. There is often a discrepancy between the two, which provides an entry point for conversations on how to address women's expectations. Another strategy that has worked for RBTR in monitoring women's workloads is the presence of Village Coordinators in each village who are paid staff. Village Coordinators are able to pass on information about women in the village who have been involved in a funeral or other village obligations and who may need time off from craft production. All of these strategies support us in identifying women's workload as an issue that must be managed in order to reap the benefits of women's economic empowerment.

Each of our organisations has evidence of shifting attitudes towards gendered work in the household. For example, RBTR has found that gender roles are shifting in communities where women are earning a significant amount of income. Equally, RNP has found men taking on child minding and house work as well as providing support for women's projects/business. Talanoa Treks has found that married women who have support from within the family have become trekking guides.

Attitudinal shifts are not complete across households or communities and each of our organisations continues to encounter and respond to resistance. For example, some married women in the communities that Talanoa Treks is involved, cannot access the guiding opportunity due to a lack of support from within the family. RNP had to work against the cultural barrier of bees as a bad omen. And the following story from another organisation provides a salient reminder of the resistance to change that women encounter and have to respond to:

“One of the challenges that one of the women in our group faced was when she was chased out of the home and made to sleep in her outdoor kitchen because she had attended one of the training session. She was made to sleep outside with their dogs in the kitchen throughout a cold night. The woman was resistant enough to persevere on and she was also the first woman to attend the second training session the very next day. Even before she left for the training, she had already made breakfast ready for her family. ”





## COMPARISON OF FINDINGS FROM STEP 3 WITH THE LITERATURE

The wider literature echoes the burden of care responsibilities of women that we have found constitutes a barrier to accessing economic opportunities. The literature shows that women do more work than men, once all productive (housework, care, and market) activities are taken into account.<sup>15</sup> And although women work more than men, they earn less. The differences in pay between the sexes hold true across developed and developing countries, and though the differences have declined over time (mostly due to increases in girls' education), they remain significant.<sup>16</sup>

The major reason women earn less than men is because women have less time because they are disproportionately responsible for housework and care activities in the home. These household level responsibilities are the perpetuation of community norms and beliefs. IWDA research shows that the situation of a huge workload and no power has been described as 'slavery' by women in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea.<sup>17</sup>

The attitudinal change among the women themselves and their family members is a priority. Unless this attitudinal change occurs, women will not be able to negotiate a more equitable sharing of unpaid household and care work and community obligations and achieve greater control over their own lives and the wider decisions that affect them. The risk, identified by IWDA, is described well in the quote on the following page.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Berniell and Sánchez-Páramo 2011b. "Overview of Time Use Data Used for the Analysis of Gender Differences in Time Use Patterns." Background paper for the WDR 2012.

<sup>16</sup>Blau, Francine D., and Lawrence M. Kahn. 2000. "Gender Differences in Pay." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14 (4): 75–99.; Terrell, Katherine. 1992. "Female-Male Earnings Differentials and Occupational Structure." *International Labour Review* 131 (4–5): 387–404.; and Hertz, Tom, Ana Paula de la O Campos, Alberto Zezza, Carlo Azzarri, Paul Winters, Esteban J. Quiñones, and Benjamin Davis. 2009. "Wage Inequality in International Perspective: Effects of Location, Sector, and Gender." Paper presented at the FAOIFAD-ILO Workshop on Gaps, Trends and Current Research in Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty, Rome, March 31.

<sup>17</sup>IWDA Gender Matters #5

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, pg 14



“ Without this, women are likely to end up responsible for both paid and unpaid work, with increased efforts not translating into increased rewards. ”

Another important point raised in the literature is the risk that advancing women economically can lead to increased violence. For example, the Australian Government's study *Violence Against Women in Melanesia and Timor-Leste*, undertaken in Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Timor-Leste, found that interventions aimed at empowering women can generate violent backlash.<sup>19</sup> Another example is research done by Women's World Banking in PNG and Samoa that showed a strong linkage between money, household conflict and violence.<sup>20</sup> This research found that many men were using violence against their wives in relation to expenditure and that women felt it necessary to hide money and keep it a secret from their husbands and other family members as a result.<sup>21</sup>

Ensuring that economic empowerment programs do not increase the risk of violence is even more important in Fiji, given the high rates of violence women already face. Fiji Women's Crisis Centre's research shows that 64 per cent of women in Fiji who have ever been in an intimate relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their partner in their lifetime, and 24 per cent are suffering from physical or sexual partner violence today.<sup>22</sup> Added to this, women in rural areas experience higher rates of abuse than those in urban areas - especially economic abuse. For example, 33 per cent of rural women have had their husband or partner take their earnings or savings against their will and/or had their husband or partner refuse to give them money for household expenses, even when he had money for other things. This compares with 24 per cent of urban women having such an experience. Ensuring economic empowerment programs do no further harm to women in Fiji, specifically those in rural areas, is important given their existing context.

Two pieces of research undertaken in 2019 by Fund partners in Fiji have found no links between economic empowerment and increases in violence in their programs. RBTR's 2019 Impact Assessment found no evidence of increased violence against women as a result of RBTR's economic empowerment initiative. Rather, men and women interviewed for RBTR's impact report said that increased earnings helped to relieve stress and tension in their relationships and household settings. This finding is echoed by the findings from the Spa Academy review.<sup>23</sup> Spa Academy tracked the experiences of women from poor households who were scholarship recipients. It also found no evidence of violence against women linked to increased income. Both of these pieces of research, conducted in Fiji, provide important findings that are useful for other practitioners in Fiji and the Pacific to consider. They underscore the importance of documenting the experiences of rural and remote women in economic empowerment programs and undertaking area and country specific research.

<sup>19</sup>Commonwealth of Australia, *Violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on global and regional promising approaches*, 2008, pg. 59 <https://bit.ly/2pXNWGi>

<sup>20</sup>Banthia, A., Tyroler, C., Schoeffel, P., and Saho, R., (2013), *Deepening Financial Inclusion for Women in the Pacific Islands: An assessment of the gender issues surrounding women's ability to access and control financial resources in Papua New Guinea and Samoa*, Women's World Banking <sup>21</sup>*Ibid*, pg. 32 <https://bit.ly/2lBvB8j>

<sup>22</sup>Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, *Somebody's Life, Everybody's business! National Research on Women's Health and Life Experiences in Fiji (2010/2011): A survey exploring the prevalence, incidence and attitudes to intimate partner violence in Fiji*, 2013, pg. 2 <https://bit.ly/2pXNWGi>

<sup>23</sup>Fleming, F (2019), *Review of Spa Academy Rural Scholarship Program*, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Support Unit

# STEP 4

## ADDRESSING ISSUES OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE COMMUNITY



Discrimination against women is a continuing issue at the community level. There are more examples of ongoing resistance at the community level in contrast with the examples of behaviour change at the individual and household level. Negative attitudes and active resistance are driven by men as well as women in the community. Additionally, women continue to be excluded from systems of power. Where our organisations establish their own systems, these also face some resistance and push-back.

Ra Naari Parishad faced negative community attitudes as it started its economic empowerment work. Community-level negative attitudes were perpetuated within the women's groups. For example, some women's groups saw bee farms as a bad omen and did not want to be involved. In this instance, negative attitudes to women's economic empowerment meant that women were not even able to access the bee-farm opportunity.

RBTR has encountered active resistance in implementing economic empowerment work. Interestingly, most of the pushback has come from women in the community and is in contrast with an assumed solidarity between women. RBTR has seen divisions between women, based on interest and class, stand in the way of women's advancement. For example, the challenge noted previously about the male police officer was triggered by his wife. This woman was not producing in the village women's group and had become competitive because she was working on another income generating project under another organisation. Additionally, women themselves can maintain traditional roles. For example, RBTR's Impact Assessment found that more than 98 per cent of all respondents affirmed the role of men as leaders and their role as the "helper" (*dauniveivuke*). Almost all women stated that there was a line they would not cross (*sega ni takosova na noqu laini*) and that they respected the traditional roles in place. The next phase of RBTR's programming is an intentional focus on understanding sources of resistance and developing support amongst women and, specifically, men in the community.

During the preliminary stages of our work, building allies is an important part of shifting negative community attitudes over the long term. For example, Talanoa Treks describes the important space that has been created through men and women working together on tourism initiatives in the quote below:

“ After every tour departs, the women are all together and they can talk about the business and everything. There are key men who have been very helpful in supporting the women to advance their issues and back them up... There are so many issues that are raised at those meetings. ”

## COMPARISON OF FINDINGS FROM STEP 4 WITH THE LITERATURE

Our findings of a lack of progress in influencing informal community norms to date, while achieving progress in a number of different areas (establishing formal groups, increasing women's resources, and changing household level attitudes and practices) is echoed in the wider literature. For example, CARE's 2018 review of its PNG portfolio found that few programs worked at all three levels of CARE's Gender Equality and Women's Voice Framework: agency, relations and structures.<sup>24</sup> The review recommended working at all three levels to lead to lasting changes in gender equality. For example, initiatives focused on contributing to change primarily at the community level, could be reinforced by household-focused interventions. It may be useful for us to consider these findings further in the future. And it may be useful to consider aligning our work with other programs or partners who are engaged at different levels where it is not possible to work simultaneously at all levels ourselves.



<sup>24</sup>Robinson, K., Rohanraj, P., Brown, H., Gender Equality Consultant CARE International's portfolio review -Working for impact in Papua New Guinea, CARE, 2018, pg. 42



# STEP 5

## INCREASING WOMEN'S INFLUENCE IN EXISTING VILLAGE STRUCTURES



The formal roles women have gained through our economic empowerment initiatives has increased the influence of these women within existing structures. For example, RBTR Village Coordinators have been enabled to speak freely in village meetings and make decisions at women's discussions due to their formal roles. The new formalised leadership roles can provide a means to navigate issues within their community. For example, because the Village Coordinator and her community referred to in the example below are earning a healthy living from the program, her complaints to local government authorities about her Turaga ni Koro, were taken seriously. The local government authorities see the value of the program she is leading because of its earnings.

“The Turaga ni Koro in one village where one organisation works wanted to make decisions on how orders from the organisation were distributed in his village. This is the role of the Village Coordinator with input from the Production Coordinator at headquarters, based on the organisation's program structure. The Turaga ni Koro sent harassing Facebook messages to the office who reiterated that any issues in his village must be sorted first through the District Coordinator, who is the representative for the region. He refused at first to accept this and wanted to bypass her role altogether. The grantee again reiterated that he had to sit with the women in his community and the District Coordinator and his Village Coordinator to solve the issue. The grantee stated that they would no longer be able to continue the program in his community unless this chain of command was followed. The Turaga ni Koro eventually sat and resolved the issue with the District Coordinator and his Village Coordinator. ”

Talanoa Treks has another example of how women have been supported to increase their influence. The women in Nabalasere came to Talanoa Treks to say that they were not getting an equitable share of the payments going to the village. Talanoa Treks supported the women to negotiate through the existing village channels. Based on this advice, the women raised the issue in the Tourism Committee and the Village Committee and were able to negotiate the redistribution of the benefits to make sure they were getting a fair share of the proceeds.

While women are included in the structures that are tied to the economic empowerment initiatives funded by our organisations, they have not broken into traditional leadership spaces through their economic empowerment. For example, RBTR's Impact Assessment found that 95 per cent of respondents said there was no correlation between increased economic empowerment and increased representation on village committees. Rise Beyond the Reef's program does not aim to change the traditional structures directly, but rather, to develop other spheres of influence for, and led by women, within traditional communities, that over time are supported by the traditional structure. The focus is on building a groundswell to shift norms. Over time, the communities themselves will be the ones to reconcile these structures.

## WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE FOR INDIVIDUAL WOMEN - STORIES OF IMPACT

We have tried to explain our approach to empowering women via economic pathways. We have used a framework to help analyse and explain our work. But we need to also consider changes from the perspective of the women themselves. On the next page is a story told by a woman in one of the communities we work with.



In the image above, the Fund supported the upgrade of kitchen and other facilities in each of the Talanoa Treks communities to provide a safe working space for women to earn an income by providing meals and accommodation to hikers. These facilities has helped to reduce the workload of women as they can now work collectively in one room. Prior to this, each woman would prepare food individually on open fires in their own home kitchens.



“ I came all the way from the interior of Navosa. I'd like to share some stories that are coming across in the village I'm staying in. We are in the rural area and things are hard. Women have to do more work than men and we have to struggle for everything but we do not lose hope because we are the mothers of the family and we have to stand up for everything because any child in the family, whenever they want anything, they will come to ask their mum. They'll never go to their fathers. Sometimes women go through big problems; sometimes their husband torments them because they don't go to the farms. We have to go to the farms every day. I am very grateful for some of the workshops that are brought to our villages by Talanoa Treks which has helped people begin to change their lives. The women's voices in many villages are not heard because of our culture but I'm very grateful because in the village where I live, the voices of the women are heard. I am the Project Manager in my village, and we are constructing a kitchen from the money given to us by the Fiji Women's Fund.. Before this all the ladies had to cook their food in various houses and various places. They weren't able to come together and cook their food but I am very grateful today, the kitchen is almost completed. At the moment we are already using the kitchen even though it's not completed. The women are really happy that they can come together in one-room, share ingredients and cooking utensils and sit together as one team to do the things that they want. As the Project manager, I used to evaluate the things that have been done for the ladies in the village. Sometimes they don't know how to evaluate the things in the village but I am very grateful for two workshops I attended. I learnt a lot of lessons. That is how I came up with the idea to construct a kitchen. Some challenges I initially faced was when they asked me who was going to construct/build the kitchen because there are several carpenters within the village but I chose another man from another village as I'd seen that he could build things well so the men in our village said things at me but it did not discourage me. I did not know what to do but I had to do something so they can see that though I'm a woman, I can do something for my village. They have to see that I can do whatever men can do. From that day, I just decided I'll stand my ground and will have to tell the entire village about the man I had chosen to construct the kitchen for us. So now whenever they come into the kitchen, they just say thank you. Those are some of the things I go through but I thank Talanoa Treks because they have been generating income in the village as they bring lots of opportunities to our village. Through the partnership with Talanoa Treks, we have been able to earn and now we can afford to buy the things we want especially for our kids.<sup>25</sup> ”

<sup>25</sup>Ranadi, E., Pacific Women Fiji Annual Reflection and Planning Workshop 2018, Promising Practice in Women's Economic Empowerment session



## CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to document the experiences and insights of three organisations working to empower women economically in Fiji: Ra Naari Parishad, Rise Beyond the Reef and Talanoa Treks. Our approach starts with building collectives of women who come together and build their skills and experiences at the individual, member-level and overall, collective-level, in relation to market opportunities. Women in our programs (as well as their families) benefit by taking advantage of their increased capabilities. Alongside the women, men realise that they need to change their attitudes and behaviours, so women can actualise the high-value market opportunities provided by our programs.

The paper examined the existing literature outlining the need to ensure economic empowerment programs do no harm. Such research is useful to inform programs alongside existing surveys of the prevalence of violence against women and girls in Fiji. Additionally, the two studies undertaken in Fiji by Fund partners examining the links between economic empowerment and violence provide a useful (and local) understanding of managing the risk of violence. Continuing to ensure women's safety in economic empowerment programs is an area of focus for the future and is connected to an emphasis on effecting community-level change, beyond individuals and families, as a result of our initiatives. We look forward to continuing to embed and expand our efforts at the individual and household level and increasing our efforts at the community level in the future.





