

Approaches to engaging men in support of women's leadership in the Pacific

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Key findings and implications

- Men's support for women's leadership is critical. Because men often hold more power, change requires them to make space for women to lead. Given this, programs working on gender equality and women's empowerment need to be more intentional about engaging with men.
- Men's allyship for gender equality begins at home, with men respecting women's views and sharing household responsibilities. Allyship in the workplace involves valuing women's ideas, supporting their decisions, and encouraging them to take on training, educational or other professional development opportunities.
- To change their attitudes towards women's leadership – and their behaviours – men need to have safe spaces where they are comfortable but also challenged to engage in critical reflection about the power and privileges that they have in many societies and question harmful forms of masculinity.
- Male advocates for women's leadership can provide important role models for other men, particularly when they are people who have influence and authority. While some literature cautions against reinforcing gender stereotypes that 'men only listen to men', Pacific practitioners have used this strategy effectively to overcome resistance to discussions of gender equality.
- For educational programs such as WLI, good pedagogy suggests that active and participatory approaches that build men's knowledge and awareness, engage their emotions, and develop their allyship skills are most effective. Practices such as talanoa (storytelling) or approaching the tanoa (kava bowl) can provide culturally recognised ways of engaging men in discussions.
- Western concepts and language such as gender and feminism can alienate men or provoke resistance. Gender equality needs to be communicated in a way that resonates with Pacific men (and women). Framing gender equality as being about men and women working together, for example, is in line with Pacific values around relationships and cooperation.
- Positive cultural and religious norms in many Pacific cultures can be harnessed in support of gender equality. This includes the emphasis on respect and avenues for women's voices to be heard at the community level and biblical messages about love, caring and sharing and equality.

Introduction

In the three decades since the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the topic of men's allyship for gender equality has grown in prominence in global efforts to address gender inequality. (MenEngage Alliance and UN Women, 2014). Over that time, governments and civil society organisations across the globe have developed programs working with men and boys to prevent and address gender-based violence and build men's support for gender equality. While robust evaluation of these programs is sparse, there are some emerging lessons about what strategies and approaches are effective in changing men's attitudes and behaviours (Flood, 2019, pp. 50-55).

In the Pacific, work on addressing gender inequality has been a key concern of Pacific governments, civil society and development organisations, particularly given high rates of gender-based violence in many countries, low levels of women's representation in politics, and other gender inequalities. Organisations working on these issues have developed principles for engaging with men and promising practices are beginning to emerge (see especially The Regional Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women and UN Women, 2020; Fleming et al., 2020a). However, there is still very little practical guidance on how those wanting to work with men can do so in ways that are most effective in bringing about lasting change in men's attitudes and behaviour.

This report brings together insights from both Pacific and global efforts to engage with men. It was developed with a view to informing how the Australia Awards *Women Leading and Influencing* (WLI) program (wliprogram.org) engages men in its program activities. WLI is an on-Award (in Australia) and reintegration (in Pacific) enrichment program supporting women to lead and influence change that promotes positive development outcomes in their home countries. WLI's core offering is the Women's Developmental Leadership Program (WDLP), an 18-month leadership development program for 30 women Australia Awards scholars from across the Pacific each year.

Engagement with men to increase their support for women's leadership is a new focus for WLI. Although WLI maintains a primary focus on women, experience from the first four years of the program indicated that women participants were interested in developing their skills in communicating with men and sharing their experiences of leadership with men. WLI participants and program staff also recognised that men's support was fundamental to help shift gender norms and promote wider community acceptance and support for women's leadership in the Pacific. In response, the program began opening activities to selected men. In addition to learning and networking events, this included *LeadershipConnect*, a 6-month online leadership course open to all Australia Awards scholars in the Pacific as well as WDLP participants, and Leadership Lab, a 4-month course which supports participants to work through a practical leadership issue. Men can also access an online networking platform for all WLI participants and alumni, as well as coaching and other support. They may also be included in projects funded under WLI's Leadership Fund small grants scheme by invitation of women leading these projects.

Reflecting on the inclusion of men in these activities, an independent strategic review of the program (Hayes, 2020) argued that WLI had the potential to play an important role in providing learning spaces where men could reflect on gender issues and hear from women about their lived experience. In doing so, the program could contribute to developing or deepening men's support for women's leadership and in turn to a more enabling environment for women's leadership.

This study focuses on exploring effective approaches to engaging with men in the Pacific. It is based on a review of academic and grey literature which aimed to draw out practical guidance. Alongside the literature review, interviews with individuals and organisations whose work includes engaging with men to address gender-based violence and gender equality in the Pacific were also conducted. These aimed to gather insights from Pacific practitioners about the different approaches they had used and how effective these had been. Pacific members of the research team conducted 11 individual interviews (8 women, 3 men) either face to face, via telephone, or online with individuals and organisations from Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Vanuatu. Despite considerable efforts, researchers were not able to conduct interviews with a number of the key Pacific organisations working in these areas due to their busy schedules. As a result, the majority of the practitioners interviewed as part of this study are from Papua New Guinea. While the literature review includes reports of programs from several Pacific countries, the overrepresentation of Papua New Guinean perspectives is an important limitation of the study.

In addition to the interviews with Pacific practitioners, an open invitation for WLI participants and alumni to participate in the study was also issued through the WLI online networking platform. Twelve female WLI alumni took part in individual interviews and 5 participated in a focus group discussion (4 women, 1 man). The WLI alumni represented Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Vanuatu, and Kiribati. The interviews and focus group discussions aimed to explore participant and alumni perspectives on the role of men in supporting women's leadership.

Both the interviews and focus group discussions were guided by five key questions (see box below), with researchers providing space for participants to share their views and experiences by asking open-ended questions.

Key questions guiding the interviews and focus group discussions

- How important is men’s support to strengthening women’s leadership in the Pacific? What does men’s ‘allyship’ look like in practice?
- To what extent do men support women’s leadership in communities or in the workplace? What do men and women need to do differently? What is holding back progress?
- Are there good examples of men’s support for women’s leadership or men and women working together for change? What can we learn from these examples?
- What approaches have been used in the Pacific to cultivate greater support from men for women’s leadership? How successful have they been? What are the reasons they have been more (or less) successful?
- How could WLI engage with men most effectively, both within its current suite of program offerings and through new program offerings?

To analyse the data, interview notes were reviewed to identify key themes. Interpretation of the data drew on both the global literature and the literature on the Pacific and was ‘sense-checked’ with Pacific members of the team.

This report outlines the findings of the study. The first part of the report reviews the current literature on effective approaches to engaging men. The second part of the report presents the findings from the interviews and focus group discussion. The final part of the report suggests some implications for programs interested in working with men to support women’s leadership.

Developing male allyship for gender equality: Global and Pacific perspectives

Much of the existing literature on engaging men – both global and on the Pacific - is written from the perspective of preventing violence against women or other types of violence such as tribal conflict and, to a lesser extent on engaging with men to promote gender equality. Many of the principles and approaches identified in this literature also apply to the more specific issue of men’s support for women’s leadership. Given WLI’s scope, the literature review focused on interventions which engaged with men on an individual level, rather than those focused on community- or policy-level change. However, both the global literature and the literature on the Pacific acknowledge that addressing gender equality requires change at multiple levels, as a 2018 report from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights states:

Changes in attitudes, behaviours and norms at an individual level are not sufficient to drive change at societal level. To make systemic change, efforts need to be undertaken at multiple levels, in the home, in the community, in local and national institutions and through legal and policy frameworks and across public and private spaces. (OHCHR, 2018, p. 14)

This requires a comprehensive, multi-level approach which aims at gender *transformation* (Carson et al., 2015; Flood, 2019; Fisher, 2019, pp. 60-61; The Regional Pacific Women’s Network Against Violence Against Women and UN Women, 2020, p. 19; Fleming et al., 2020a). This is often best achieved by “engaging with and within religious, traditional and government institutions and systems” (Masta, 2021, p. 173).

It is also important to note that most of the literature on the Pacific is focused on Fiji and Papua New Guinea. Given that gender relations across the Pacific are highly diverse, the points outlined here should be taken as a starting point for discussions about effective ways to engage men in different Pacific contexts.

Changing men’s attitudes and behaviours

Although male engagement programs are often focused on shifting men’s individual attitudes and behaviours, it is important that these are situated in the context of broader social norms and structures. Social norms about gender shape the roles and positions that men and women occupy, often in ways that give men more power and status. These norms influence people’s attitudes and behaviour, the way families and communities are structured, and the way that social institutions - such as health, education, politics, employment and the legal system - function (OHCHR, 2018). Building understanding of this is important for developing men’s awareness of the root causes of gender inequality (OHCHR, 2018; Glinski et al., 2018; Fisher, 2019, p. 57). It also provides a foundation for more critical self-reflection in which men are encouraged to think about their own and other men’s privilege and power and identify ways they can be allies to women (Flood, 2019; Masta, 2021). For example, an evaluation of the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre’s work on violence prevention found that:

Community workshop processes reflecting about the work that women and men do on a daily basis helped to shift awareness amongst men about the work that women do for families and communities ... [T]hrough the training men were able to recognise their power relative to women and children, how they use it and being (sic) held accountable for how they use their power. (Fleming et al., 2020b, p. 25)

Although it is important to build men’s understanding of how social norms and structures impact on gender roles, discussions should avoid giving the impression that men and women are simply ‘pawns of the patriarchy’ but instead emphasise men’s ability to make change in their personal lives, communities, workplaces and beyond (Glinski et al., 2018; Fisher, 2019, p. 61; Eves, 2007, pp. 62-63).

More specifically, global evidence and emerging promising practice in the Pacific suggests that interventions with men should explicitly address how social norms shape masculinities (Flood, 2015; Eves, 2007, p. 60). This includes fostering discussions about what it means to be a man (or a woman) in a particular context and the impacts this has on men and women, including on their interpersonal relationships. It also includes challenging unhelpful forms of masculinity and femininity and encouraging new ways of thinking about these that work in service of more equitable relationships (Flood, 2019; Fisher, 2019, pp. 57-58; Fleming et al., 2020a; Fleming et al., 2020b; Masta, 2021; The Regional Pacific Women’s Network Against Violence Against Women and UN Women, 2020, p. 18).

This needs to be done in a considered way to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes that contribute to gender inequality, such as men “feeling that they need to ‘protect’ women by limiting their freedom, mobility, or privacy” (The Regional Pacific Women’s Network Against Violence Against Women and UN Women, 2020, p. 15-16; see also Eves, 2007, p. 61). Moreover, while individual men may develop more positive masculinities, it can be difficult to adhere to these at the community-level, particularly when there are strong social expectations about the kinds of roles that men are expected to play or behaviours they are expected to demonstrate.

Tailoring programs to different social and cultural contexts

Given the Pacific’s diversity, it is critical that programs seeking to engage with men take into consideration different social and cultural norms and other aspects of context. This involves understanding the norms, values and practices specific to a context that maintain gender inequality and using these to inform program content and delivery (The Regional Pacific Women’s Network Against Violence Against Women and UN Women, 2020, p. 19-20; Masta, 2021, pp. 161-163; Eves, 2007, p. 64).

One way in which male engagement programs have adapted to the local context is by using biblical framing, recognising the importance of Christianity across the Pacific. In Fiji, for example, the House of Sarah’s violence against women prevention program has drawn on analysis of biblical teachings to promote gender equality in churches. This has included the idea that both men and women are equally created in the image of God and that everyone is equally entitled to just treatment (Fleming et al., 2020a, pp. 17-18). An evaluation of the program found that this framing had helped to translate the language of human rights – which many had seen as a foreign concept – into something more familiar and accepted (ibid., p. 15; see also Masta, 2021, pp. 162-173). This approach has also been used successfully in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea. In both cases, discussions also included consideration of local cultural values and kinship and community obligations (Forsyth, 2019; Gibbs, 2016). Christianity therefore provided “a lens through which traditional culture and human rights can co-exist to serve the purpose of harmony and human dignity” (Masta, 2021, p. 167).

The literature also emphasises the importance of framing men’s role in addressing gender inequality in a positive and affirming way. Rather than blaming men for their failures or focusing on how their attitudes or behaviour have contributed to the problem, interventions are more effective in engaging men’s interest when they highlight that gender equality can benefit men as well and that men can play a positive role in contributing to efforts to address discrimination (Carson et al., 2015; Glinski et al., 2018; Flood, 2019; Jain, 2021; Eves, 2007, p. 64; Masta, 2021; Fleming et al., 2020a, p. 17; The Regional Pacific Women’s Network Against Violence Against Women and UN Women, 2020, p. 18). However, it is important that this

positive framing does not excuse men’s sexist attitudes or behaviour (Masta, 2021). Nor should it present the benefits to men as only positive: a more gender equal society will require men to give up some of their power and privilege to make space for women. This should be acknowledged and openly discussed (Flood, 2019, p. 106).

Providing safe spaces for critical reflection

A key strategy for engaging men in discussions about gender equality is to provide spaces where men feel comfortable about expressing themselves but are also challenged to engage in critical reflection about gender, power and inequality. Specifically, research shows that a non-judgmental environment where men can discuss their beliefs, values and experiences openly can make men more receptive to challenging messages and support men to consider alternative versions of masculinity (Flood, 2019, p. 166; Masta, 2021, p. 164-165).

Careful consideration of group composition and dynamics and skilled facilitation is required to ensure that spaces allow for genuine and open sharing. This may mean a combination of single-gender and mixed groups, or a sequenced approach (Fleming et al., 2020b; Eves, 2007, p. 60). There are arguments for both single-gender and mixed groups. For example, men may be more comfortable and therefore more likely to share their views honestly and openly if women are not in the room. This may be particularly true in cultures (and sub-cultures) where men are taught not to express their emotions or appear vulnerable. In this view, single-gender groups are more likely to foster the kind of critical reflection that is required to deepen understanding of – and commitment to – gender equality. All male groups may also offer opportunities to use peer influence to promote more positive attitudes and behaviours among men (Flood, 2015; Flood, 2019, p. 206; Glinski et al., 2018; Masta, 2021, pp. 164-165).

However, there is also value in mixed-gender groups, including providing opportunities for men to hear from women’s lived experience, encouraging critical discussion between men and women about gender, masculinity and femininity, and providing women with experience in challenging sexist attitudes and behaviours (Flood, 2019, p. 206-207). In convening mixed groups, it is important to be mindful of the impact of social and cultural dynamics, particularly where these mean that women are reluctant to challenge dominant gender norms in the presence of men, or where women are expected to listen quietly and not disagree with others (Glinski et al., 2018).

Engaging male advocates

A common approach in interventions seeking to engage men is to invest in male advocates for gender equality. Male advocates – particularly if they are influential people or community leaders - can act as important role models for other men (The Regional Pacific Women’s Network Against Violence Against Women and UN Women, 2020, p. 19; OHCHR, 2018; Jain, 2021; Eves, 2007, p. 63; Vanuatu Women’s Centre, 2022, pp. 42-43). In the Pacific, the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre (FWCC) has played a key role in developing male advocacy programs. For example, FWCC’s Male Advocacy for Women’s Human Rights and Against Violence Against Women program, which started in

2002, has now been expanded and in some cases adapted to Tonga, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and the Cook Islands (The Regional Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women and UN Women, 2020, p. 12).

While some literature suggests that engaging men's advocates needs to be balanced against the risk of reinforcing a patriarchal view that 'men only listen to other men' (The Regional Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women and UN Women, 2020), others see it as an important strategy. In reflecting on the Vanuatu Women's Centre's male advocacy program, Miriam Bule suggests that "Men will listen and believe in men, and that is a strategy that Vanuatu Women's Centre uses to get through [the] challenge [of gaining recognition from traditional and religious leaders in the country]" (Vanuatu Women's Centre, 2022, p. 103). Several informants in Masta's study of organisations working on male engagement programs in Fiji and Papua New Guinea also found that the approach of "[m]en leading discussions with men ... is more effective (2021, p. 162)."

Potential male advocates should be carefully screened before being engaged in advocacy work (Fleming et al., 2020a, p. 11, 16). They should also undergo training to ensure they are challenged to consider their own power and privilege and be provided with ongoing support from women and women's groups (Vanuatu Women's Centre, 2022, pp. 50-51; Eves, 2007; Fisher, 2019; OHCHR, 2018; Masta, 2021).

Effective pedagogy

Alongside guidance on the practical content of men's engagement programs, there are also emerging global promising practices around effective approaches to teaching and learning. These largely reflect Western educational philosophies and pedagogies. It is therefore worth considering how approaches from other cultures and contexts could be used to engage effectively with men (see for example Veikune et al., 2020).

The available literature suggests that the most effective programs are those that use active and participatory learning approaches to engage men in the content (Flood, 2019, p. 196). Describing the approach to men's engagement workshops in Western Province in Papua New Guinea, for example, Gibbs explains that:

[t]he workshops involved presentations, free discussion and dramatic presentations. Typically facilitators provided a brief introduction to a theme, then participants would meet in groups to share their own experiences and later report back to the full assembly—verbally, in writing, graphically or in the form of drama. Group reporting often raised questions and issues that could be discussed by the larger group (Gibbs, 2016, p. 130)

Effective programs also address knowledge, emotions and behaviour. For example, using personal stories of discrimination can encourage empathy, while role-plays and drama can help men think critically about how they behave in real-life situations and how they could respond differently. Role plays also help develop skills which can support allyship such as active listening, empathy, conflict resolution, and negotiation (Flood, 2019, pp. 197- 199; see also Eves, 2007, p. 59-60). This approach makes programs more practically useful and relevant. It also helps build men's sense that there is something they can do to support the women they

know, including those in their families, communities and workplaces (Flood, 2019, pp. 195). For example, a review of World Vision Vanuatu's Men's Behaviour Change Program for perpetrators of gender-based violence found that the program's effectiveness was linked to:

its Christian framing (which provided authority and a familiar means through which to transmit messages); its resonance with the real issues men face today and the practical steps suggested to address them in a staged manner; the emotional engagement with the concepts it engendered in the participants; and the opportunity it offered men to both realise and acknowledge their past behaviour and to forge new paths for themselves (Forsyth, 2019, p. 3).

While the learning environment should be respectful and supportive, Fisher (2019) argues that this should not be at the expense of having a "robust, probing discussion". Instead, he advocates for "a more directive and challenging pedagogy" which he describes as a "pro-feminist pedagogy" to "push male participants beyond the superficial level of acceptance to a more complex understanding of the web of patriarchal gender power relations" (2019, pp. 59-60).

Practical ways to increase men's support for gender equality and address resistance

Flood (2019, p. 325ff) identifies a number of ways that programs can encourage men's support for gender inequality and address resistance. These include:

- Make it real, by using personal stories, anecdotes, and local examples.
- Draw on culturally appropriate materials such as religious texts or oral traditions.
- Personalise women's experiences by having men listen to women's own stories and their impact.
- Make analogies to other forms of inequality, including race and class.
- Appeal to universal values such as human rights, fairness, and justice.
- Include exercises that raise awareness of how everyone's lives are shaped by privilege and injustice such as 'Privilege Walks'.
- Engage men in observing and documenting incidents and behaviours in their community or workplace that highlight gender inequality or analyse how men and women are represented in the media or film and television.
- Use gender-reversal scenarios in which men are asked to 'imagine walking in women's shoes'.
- Invite men to consider how an alien or other outsider might view gender relations in their society.

Schrammel (2018) and Ali (2019) provide a variety of practical exercises which can be used to engage with men on issues of gender equality and gender-based violence.

Effective programs also recognise that change takes time. Longer, more intensive programs are therefore more likely to result in positive changes in men's attitudes and behaviour and, importantly, change that lasts (Fleming et al., 2020b; Masta, 2021, p. 172). In

relation to violence prevention and healthy relationship programs in schools, for example, Flood recommends a minimum of 5 one-hour sessions, repeated over successive years (Flood, 2019, p. 203). The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre's (FWCC) prevention programming in communities engaged men and women in an intensive 5-day program. This had resulted in:

... visible changes in the attitudes of men to their wives and to household chores with men now visibly cooking, helping their wives with the washing and helping out with the children. Community members also spoke of improved communication, less violence and fighting and stronger unity amongst couples following the sessions with FWCC (Fleming et al., 2020b, p. 17).

The Vanuatu Women's Centre's male advocate training for Chiefs, church leaders and police is also a 5-day program (Vanuatu Women's Centre, 2022, pp. 51-53) while the program Gibbs was involved in included annual workshops of 4-5 days held over a number of years (2016, p. 131). FWCC has also run month-long regional workshops on men and gender-based violence (Eves, 2007, p. 59; Vanuatu Women's Centre, 2022, p. 47).

In addition to duration and intensity, a key determinant of effectiveness is the knowledge and skills of facilitators. Those leading programs need to have expertise in gender issues and an ability to create a safe learning environment, discuss sensitive topics, and respond effectively to resistance without being judgemental (Flood, 2019, p. 208). There are some benefits to using male facilitators, including the fact that male facilitators have firsthand experiences of masculinity and can act as role models for other men. They may also be perceived as more credible by other men. However, co-facilitation with women can provide a good example of men and women working together and give men an opportunity to hear a women's perspective (Flood, 2019, p. 212). It is also "in line with Pacific cultural values and sensitivities" of men and women working together in the community (Masta, 2021, p.160-161).

Accountability to women and the women's movement

A final critical element of effective approaches to engaging men is that they remain accountable to women and the women's movement. This involves maintaining a focus on women's lived experiences, protecting women-only spaces, and ensuring that programs and activities do not become dominated by men, including by promoting women's leadership in activities to engage men. Engagement with men should also not take away attention or funding from efforts to empower women. Partnering with women's rights organisations in planning, implementing, and evaluating male engagement programs is an important part of being accountable and helps build the movement of allyship between men and women. It also values and enables programs to draw on the experiences of women's organisations (The Regional Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women and UN Women 2020; Fleming et al., 2020a; OHCHR 2018; Masta, 2021, pp. 168-171).

Building men's support for women's leadership: Practitioner and alumni insights

Given the limited documentation of effective approaches to engaging with men in the Pacific, this study sought to learn from the experiences and views of practitioners that engage men in their programs. Interviews were conducted with 8 women representing organisations with significant experience working in the area of violence prevention, gender equality and male engagement as well as 3 men, including two male advocates who have worked extensively with men. The study also sought to learn from the lived experience of WLI alumni on the importance of men to women's leadership, what male allyship for gender equality looks like, and how men could best be engaged in supporting women's leadership. Insights from these two groups are presented below.

Why men's support for women's leadership matters

Both practitioners and alumni agreed that men's support for women's leadership – and for gender equality more broadly – is critical. As a female practitioner from Papua New Guinea expressed it: "I don't think you can achieve any form of system change in gender equality unless men are involved in the process". A female practitioner from Fiji likewise commented: "In the Pacific, it is our way of life, the communal way, that is driving the need for programs to work better with men. We are not individual people...and so we need to engage men to bring about transformative change." An alumnus from Vanuatu likewise reflected: "We need the support of men to advance, whether it's in leadership roles, in social, political, or economic life at the community level or the national level."

Because men often occupy a more powerful position in society, they need to get behind any change and be "part of the solution", particularly as change requires men to be willing to share power or "make space" for women. As a male practitioner from Vanuatu said:

We don't need to build capacity. Women in Melanesia are so smart and they have agency. We just need to give them space and we as men have to hold them up because we can... Men are gatekeepers and they need to open up the pathways for women to allow them to reach their potential as leaders.

A female practitioner from Fiji also argued that in the context of the church, the support of men in leadership roles was critical in promoting women's leadership.

Both male and female practitioners also emphasised the need to focus efforts beyond engaging with individual men to developing a "critical mass of men supporting women in leadership and influencing roles". As one practitioner said: "to build a movement ...you need to engage many voices, including men".

To underscore the importance of men's support, a number of practitioners and alumni gave personal examples of male family members and male colleagues and superiors who had supported their leadership or demonstrated 'allyship'. For example, an alumnus from Papua New Guinea explained that her grandfather – who was a chief in Manus – had been a key ally for

gender equality. He had gained a greater appreciation of the importance of girls' education through an exchange program to Bougainville, which has higher rates of gender parity in education than other regions of Papua New Guinea. As a result, he began promoting girls' education in his and other communities. He also encouraged her to pursue an education: "[he] would tell me to go to school and be somebody... He was the person who most influenced me ...to be what I want to be, to excel in leadership, but to bring others along with me."

An alumnus from the Solomon Islands also emphasised the importance of male family members' support for women's leadership, explaining that this begins at home: "Allyship is men working behind the scenes to support women. Women are limited from leadership spaces because their time is taken up doing household chores or rearing children." But men's support needs to go beyond practical things, as a male practitioner from Papua New Guinea argued: "In family units men and boys should begin to support women - their mothers and sisters - by respecting them, recognising their value and giving them space to speak, to raise concerns, and to listen and support them." An alumnus from Vanuatu likewise reflected on the importance of men's support for women's leadership in their professions and in politics:

When women advance in their careers it is firstly because they have a supportive father and if they are married, a supportive husband ...The support starts at the family level. Women leaders who are chiefs, or religious or national leaders, they are doing well because they are supported by male leaders or their husband. We've heard stories of women MP's who have tried to run for elections on their own with only the support of women. They haven't gone anywhere.

Practitioners and alumni also provided insights into the importance of men's support for women's leadership in the workplace. In professional contexts, this involves seeking women's views and listening to their ideas, supporting their decisions, providing them with opportunities to attend meetings with senior staff or act in higher roles. These contribute to making women feel "recognised and capable". An alumnus from Kiribati, for example, acknowledged that while some men in her male-dominated field 'opposed her opinions', others had been very supportive, listening to her and taking her ideas and opinions on board.

Encouraging women to take on training or educational opportunities was also part of allyship, as an alumnus from Samoa reflected in relation to the support her boss had shown for her education:

I still remember when I first told him that I was applying for a scholarship. He really supported me, and he also gave me advice on where to study. He encouraged me to apply to Australia. That really motivated me. He believed in me. He told me that going abroad and studying is the future of our organisation.

Given the critical role of men in supporting women's leadership, many practitioners and alumni felt that not enough was being done to engage with men. Consistent with Masta's findings that men often feel "overlooked" in programs working to prevent violence against women (2021, p. 160), several practitioners expressed the view that the focus on women's rights and women's empowerment had excluded men. A male practitioner from Papua New Guinea, for example, said

that: "Men are missing out on opportunities for empowerment. Instead of focusing too much on women, make programs gender inclusive so men can also learn new ideas to support women in their spaces." An alumnus from Vanuatu was also critical of limited engagement with men in existing donor programs on women's empowerment: "We are pumping funding into programs, but we are not seeing changes. We are repeating the same story year after year. We need to start being more intentional about including men and boys." A male practitioner from Vanuatu likewise emphasised the importance of including men in donor programs aiming to address gender inequality and gender-based violence:

The problem with a lot of gender programs in the Pacific is that they are led by women for women. The perpetrators are men; however, these programs tend to group only women together and expect men to change...I don't think that is possible. That is why gender programs fail in the Pacific.

In line with this view, both practitioners and alumni were universally in favour of an approach that was inclusive of both men and women, while also acknowledging the importance of men-only and women-only spaces. An alumnus from Kiribati suggested having "separate programs for men and women but also bring[ing] them together" while an alumnus from Tonga likewise reflected that: "If we live in an all-woman world then having women separate from men would work. But not in this world. Men and women need to be brought together."

Interviewees also suggested that male role models could make a difference in changing social perceptions of women leaders and men's roles in supporting them, as a male practitioner from Vanuatu argued: "We need to recognise that men can help other men change." An alumnus from Tonga suggested that:

We need to identify key people who have influence and authority. For example, in Tonga, an MP or someone with royal blood were to champion the cause, men will support. Men have to see other men do it, but these men have to be in authority.

Finding such men was not always easy since it required men who are comfortable in their own masculinity and leadership and are not deterred by pressure from other men. As an alumnus from Papua New Guinea explained, these need to be: "men who are not scared of losing face. They have nothing to hide, they are visionary, they support women, and they call out for girls and women to be empowered and respected."

Language and framing

Both practitioners and alumni agreed that raising men's awareness of gender inequality and providing them with opportunities to examine their own biases and "hear what women experience on a daily basis" was important for building their support for women's leadership. As a female practitioner from Papua New Guinea explained: "Inequality needs to be explained well. The men will understand once they are educated about perceptions." Another reflected: "In the past, my husband didn't like discussions about gender equality. Slowly I saw an awakening, an understanding about social justice... This awakening needs to happen for the root causes of gender inequality to be addressed." However, a number of practitioners and alumni acknowledged that raising awareness of gender

inequality could be “confrontational” and that many men perceived equality as a “threat” to men’s authority and position. A male practitioner from Vanuatu, for example, pointed out that men often saw creating space for women as “a risky business” because it required them to give up power and therefore entailed “big losses”. Some practitioners and alumni suggested that this could be addressed by drawing on positive forms of masculinity in which men are “a protector, defender, supporter”. However, as the literature review suggested, there is a risk that unless framed carefully, this approach can reinforce negative gender stereotypes.

Discussions about how to frame gender equality were a recurring theme in interviews with both practitioners and alumni. An alumnus from Tonga felt that gender equality “should be sold in a positive way” while a practitioner from Papua New Guinea suggested that:

Advocacy for gender issues needs to change the tone. Don’t say, “Women’s Forum or Conference”. Men easily get turned off and say “Ah, that’s a women’s meeting. Let them go, discuss, and solve their issues. Women’s issues are community issues... They should also target men.

A female practitioner from Fiji was also of the opinion that framing programs or topics in terms of ‘women’ or ‘gender’ gender “put men off”. Instead, she suggested that “the topic has to be able to speak to both genders so that at least you bring them into the room.” Once men were involved in the program, they could then be invited to participate in discussions about gender equality and women’s leadership.

Several practitioners and alumni commented on the fact that concepts and terms linked to gender equality were often seen as something that had been imported from elsewhere. A practitioner from Papua New Guinea noted that even the current Prime Minister said that ‘gender issues’ had been introduced by the West while an alumnus from Vanuatu reflected that:

Language such as gender and feminism are limiting the participation of women and more so men... When we say women must be given equal rights, we are causing a division and widening a gap. I think it’s because the concepts and terminology and language are foreign and not sensitive to our culture.

A male practitioner from Vanuatu emphasised the need to “think in a political way” about how to engage men most effectively in conversations about gender equality. This involved helping men to “realise that they have the power to make the change”, which “sometimes means playing to their egos”.

Alumni from Papua New Guinea and Tonga also commented on the limitations of donor efforts to promote gender equality and social inclusion, describing it as a “tick-box” that was “not necessarily changing mentality and attitudes”. The alumnus from Tonga went on to say: “Maybe we are coming at it from the wrong angle. We need to change the conversation, so we are not pushing women’s rights but it’s about equal access to resources.” She felt this framing would emphasise the positive impacts of gender equality for everyone, not only women.

In line with findings from other studies in the Pacific (Gibbs, 2016; Forsyth, 2019; Fleming et al., 2020a; Masta, 2021), practitioners and alumni suggested that discussions on gender equality needed to be framed in

ways that resonate with people in the Pacific. An alumnus from Vanuatu commented that: “The danger is using a framework from a different cultural context and applying it to another cultural context.” Instead, as a female practitioner from Papua New Guinea proposed, human rights, gender equality, and feminism could be explained using biblical concepts of “love, care and share” or explained “using Melanesian ways of communicating these terms.” A female practitioner from Fiji also advocated for a faith-based approach to addressing gender issues: “Churches have a dominant influence, so we need to work through these existing structures. We Pacific people are people of faith... The bible influences our attitudes towards each other.” She went on to explain that her organisation had used a faith-based approach as part of efforts to prevent gender-based violence. She reflected that men involved in the program had “begun to examine themselves and realise that they are not living up to the standard in the bible.” As a result, men’s attitudes towards gender-based violence had changed. After 4 years, 98% of men who participated in a survey no longer saw gender-based violence as a private matter but as something in which others (bystanders) could intervene. The baseline was only 40%.

Harnessing culture

The topic of culture was a common one raised in interviews with both practitioners and alumni. Many felt that “deep-rooted” cultural norms around gender roles were at the heart of gender inequality. An alumnus from Tonga explained that this stemmed from both conservative forms of Christianity which are highly patriarchal as well as Tongan customs and traditions:

I think culture is holding back progress. Because we [Tongans] are very conservative and Christian. Then you have the nobility who are all men and the laws where men own land. So inherently you are born unequal.

An alumnus from Solomon Islands likewise reflected that culture limited women’s ability to lead:

Because of patriarchy and culture, we can’t talk back. Having been educated [through the Australia Awards scholarship] when I come back home to my village, I have to leave all that behind and respect the cultural protocols [of being a woman] or else they will say that I have no respect and I have been influenced by Western ideals. So, it’s culture that affects women’s leadership.

Many responses highlighted that culture was changing as a result of the expansion of education and “influences from the outside world”. Some felt that this had brought positive impacts, as an alumnus from Samoa observed:

In comparison to 20 years ago things are changing, especially for men. They’ve come to realise that society is changing, and they have to adapt to having women in leadership roles ... In the villages, men are seen as leaders. [They] sit on the village council and are the decision makers for the village. But we are starting to see women in village councils now.

Positive change was also happening in churches, as a female practitioner from Papua New Guinea noted: “I see change in men’s attitude in our local church. Women are moving up into positions usually held by men. I see men acknowledging women’s leadership ability and creating spaces for women to lead.” A female practitioner from Fiji also acknowledged that

there had been change in representation of women in leadership positions in the church at synod and diocese level. This was achieved through a change of policy within the church which had the support of men. However, others felt that cultural change had damaged “the strong social fabric” of family and community and eroded values such as family unity and respect. As a practitioner from Bougainville reflected:

In the past, women were consulted about community issues. But not anymore. Men are holding onto power [and] women are often told to shut up and listen. In Bougainville this kind of attitude would not be tolerated in the past. But life these days is influenced by the outside world. This is both good and bad. We need to discard the bad - lack of respect for women, child abuse, women’s workload, sexual and reproductive violence.

Others felt that it was important to draw attention to the ways that Pacific cultures and traditions supported women’s leadership. As one practitioner from Papua New Guinea expressed it:

The general discourse within international development [is that the] space around masculinities in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific is a very negative discourse. It focuses entirely on negative norms. The culture has positive norms, but we never talk about those things. ...We need to talk about the positive norms that enable men to contribute positively.

Similarly, an alumnus from Vanuatu argued:

We can’t continue to blame our culture ... Our culture promotes respect and promotes women’s leadership. In matrilineal culture women are chiefs and we own land and resources, and we can stand up and speak. In Vanuatu, men set the pace, but before men make decisions for the village, they talk to their wives about it, what she hears from the community, the informal discussions. Sometimes I feel that we overplay that we don’t have a voice. There are avenues in our culture that women have a voice and that needs to be acknowledged.

Several other responses drew attention to the ways that aspects of Pacific culture could be used to generate men’s support for women’s leadership, which a female practitioner from Fiji described as “using culture to change culture”. . A practitioner from Papua New Guinea, for example, discussed the *ples singsing* arena in Western Highlands villages where, “Men facilitate, orate, and talk. But they allow women to talk in public too. The space given to talk comes with respect for what you do for the community.” An alumnus from Tonga similarly recommended:

If you want to get support for women or any work, our usual approach is through *talanoa* (storytelling) approaching the *tanoa* (kava bowl) at the village or community level. Pacific societies are communal and community-oriented, and approval is through traditional structures and practices.

Working together

A key theme in the interviews was the need to emphasise that gender equality is about “shared leadership” and men and women “working together to make change.” As a female practitioner from Papua New Guinea said: “No one is competing. We all need to appreciate and respect each other. Work together as a team, as a family, as a community.” This approach recognises that both men and women have a role to play and that “both contribute to development at home, in the community, at church, and in the province and

nation.” It also resonates with the emphasis on relationships and cooperation in many Pacific cultures (see also Masta, 2021, p. 161). As a female practitioner from Fiji argued: “People need to see men and women working together... We try to show communities that men and women can work alongside each other really well. In fact, they need each other.” This view is also reflected in the comment made by an alumnus from Kiribati, who said that: “Men and women are a team ... We grew up in communities where men and women support each other to achieve things.” An alumnus from Solomon Islands likewise suggested that programs to build men’s support for gender equality needed to “build on our culture, what brings us together as a community or family unit.” A practitioner from Bougainville gave an example of how her organisation had put this into practice:

We introduced Family Farm Teams which targets attitude change at the family and community level. We have seen reversed roles where men are truly taking on more domestic roles and allowing women to take part in women’s meetings and community meetings. Women are even going to sleep earlier than they used to ... [Men and women are] working together as a family unit.

Many participants felt that emphasising the important leadership role that women already play in the family, community and church was an effective way of building men’s support for women’s leadership more broadly, as a female practitioner from Fiji commented: “For men it’s about helping them recognise the value and contribution of women as leaders.” An alumnus from the Solomon Islands explained that: “My sister-in-law got into local government because she supported community work and this was admired by men... If men see women displaying leadership at the community level, they will support them to get into political positions.” Others emphasised that women’s roles in the community and church provided them with recognition and respect and was giving them access to decision-making spaces at the community-level. However, practitioners also recognised that community leadership was not necessarily translating into greater recognition at higher levels of government.

Implications

Both the global and Pacific literature – and practitioners and alumni consulted for this study agreed that men’s support for women’s leadership is critical. Men need to be part of the solution and be willing to share power and make space for women to lead. However, while there are some good examples of donor, private sector, government and non-government organisation programs that engage with men, there is scope for men to be involved more intentionally in work to address gender inequality. The findings of the study have a number of broad implications for programs interested in engaging with men to support gender equality and women’s leadership. These include:

Provide safe but challenging spaces: Deep and sustainable change in men’s attitudes towards women’s leadership and their behaviour requires men to do more than build their awareness about gender inequality. It requires them to think critically about the power and privileges that they have and question social norms about men’s and women’s roles that perpetuate inequality. This requires a safe, open, learning

environment where men feel comfortable talking about sensitive topics. However, those facilitating discussions should also adopt a 'pro-feminist pedagogy' which challenges men and holds them accountable. A combination of single-gender and mixed-gender groups is often best for achieving this.

Engage male advocates for gender equality: Male advocates can provide important role models for other men, particularly when they are people who have influence and authority. While some literature cautions against reinforcing gender stereotypes that 'men only listen to men', Pacific practitioners have used this strategy effectively to overcome resistance to discussions of gender equality.

Suggestions for WLI's engagement with men

Alumni mentioned several aspects of WLI's existing activities that they found useful in terms of engaging with men. In particular, they felt that *LeadershipConnect* provided valuable opportunities for men and women to hear each other's perspectives and learn from each other. As an alumnus from the Solomon Islands expressed it: "The involvement of men in WLI is such a good opportunity as men can learn how to support women better and women can help men challenge their preconceived views." *LeadershipConnect* also provided opportunities for women to "speak up in front of a male audience." Women also appreciated hearing from both male and female guest speakers. Some suggested that it would be useful to hear from both older and younger men and to consider having male mentors, acknowledging that it can be challenging for men and women to have this kind of relationship in the Pacific context. Several felt it was important that men engaged in WLI be challenged to "take ownership" and be clear about what they would do to support women's leadership, including by "having honest conversations with their female colleagues about the barriers they face at work." Others mentioned the need for face-to-face interaction in Pacific countries alongside online forums to help build relationships.

A number of alumni mentioned the need for WLI to continue engagement with men beyond programs such as *LeadershipConnect* to maintain momentum and so that "the learning continues". Suggestions included involving men in small community projects, such as "creating peer groups or advocacy networks" or working with women to "address an issue on gender-based violence or leadership" which could "provide an incentive for men to continue the good work."

Beyond WLI, both alumni and practitioners felt that male Australia Awards alumni were an important cohort to engage. Several suggested the need to understand what these alumni were already doing to "influence change in male-dominated workplaces" and sharing these more widely as examples for other men. Another suggested that other DFAT-funded programs focused on women's empowerment could increase their engagement with men.

Engage with men's knowledge, emotions and behaviour: For educational programs such as WLI, good pedagogy suggests that active and participatory approaches that build men's knowledge and awareness, engage their emotions, and develop their allyship skills are most effective. Practices such as *talanoa* (storytelling) or approaching the *tanoa* (kava bowl) can also provide culturally recognised ways of engaging men in discussions.

Use language and framing that resonates in the context: Western concepts and language such as gender and feminism can alienate men or provoke resistance. Gender equality needs to be communicated in a way that resonates with Pacific men (and women). Framing gender equality as being about men and women working together, for example, is in line with Pacific values around relationships and cooperation.

Consider ways that positive cultural norms can be repurposed in the service of gender equality: Positive cultural and religious norms in many Pacific cultures can be harnessed in support of gender equality. This includes the emphasis on respect and avenues for women's voices to be heard at the community level and biblical messages about love, caring and sharing and equality.

Work with – and be accountable to – Pacific women and women's organisations: Many women's organisations in the Pacific have deep expertise and experience in helping men to see gender equality as being in their own interests and navigating men's resistance. They also have firsthand understanding of the nuances of different Pacific contexts and greater legitimacy among Pacific men and women. Partnerships with these organisations are therefore critical in ensuring that programs engaging with men are both effective and accountable to Pacific women and women's' organisations.

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