



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

**Outcomes Report: The
Workshop on ‘Resilient
Skills and Livelihoods for
Women in the Small
States of the Pacific’**

Outcomes Report: The Workshop on 'Resilient Skills and Livelihoods for Women in the Small States of the Pacific'

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources, and technologies.

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Introduction

This report presents the activities and outcomes of the regional workshop in the Pacific organised by GIRLS Inspire Initiative in collaboration with the Partnership for Open, Distance and Flexible Learning in the Pacific (PACFOLD) under Workstream 2.2.

Workstream 2.2. aims to build the capacity of NGOs to develop structures and strategies to deliver leadership/vocational courses using diverse Open and Distance learning methodologies. The goal is to contribute to more equitable access to training and learning opportunities in the region by supporting marginalised learners and improving the knowledge and skills of youth for improved lives and livelihoods.

Context

Nine of the 33 small states member countries of the Commonwealth, with a population of 1.5 million or less, are in the Pacific (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu). These States have always faced unique development challenges due to specific factors such as island economies, strong dependence on trade, limited access to development finance, and the disproportionate impact of natural disasters and climate change but these are getting further compounded in a more globalised world with changing global commerce and telecommunications as well as new technological changes.

While most of these Pacific countries have low rates of out-of-school children, reports indicate that high enrolment does not necessarily translate into improved economic opportunities through employment and entrepreneurship. Data from the EQAP report shows that less than 30 per cent of adults have a post-secondary education¹. While, on the one hand, the human development indicators are slowly rising in these countries, on the other, the share of those in vulnerable employment continues to be high, and the female labour force participation rates continue to be low² despite some of these countries reporting higher dropout rates for boys. Gender is a complex phenomenon in the region, with the incidence of violence against women being high in several countries.

The region comprises many small island villages and locations, speaking 1,500 languages presenting a rare diversity of culture, which is both an asset and a challenge in terms of education and employment. The climate change induced migration, both within and outside the nations, adds another dimension to this challenge.

The availability of data on the status of women and girls in the skills sector in the region, specifically in resilient skills that mitigate climate change, the practice of sustainable agricultural, manufacturing and leveraging of open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) for lifelong learning is inadequate in the region. However, what is known is that there are significant gender disparities in ICT access and use, with a higher proportion of females than males being adversely affected, implying that pre-existing socio-economic inequities of gender are reflected in the experience of ODFL. A recent study by COL on the ICT use and access in the nine small states of the Pacific reported the presence of gender-differentiated access to and ownership of ICT devices, especially in rural areas, with less ICT equipment in girls' schools, sharing of devices in households with more girls having to borrow from parents or male siblings, and gendered stereotypes about girls' ability to learn ICT skills³. Another case study conducted specifically to better understand the issue of the digital gender gap in the region reinforced these findings. This study also raised concerns regarding the need for women mentors or women ICT teachers, highlighting the need to address the issue of isolation for those girls and women who want to learn non-stereotypical skills and employment options, especially in rural, remote and far-flung areas.

Preliminary findings from a scoping study on the livelihoods and status of women and girls confirmed existing gaps in data to inform programming for livelihoods and empowerment. There is not much data available per country in existing global instruments. The data that is available shows that the informal economy (e.g., subsistence agriculture or fishing) participation is prevalent among girls and young women, offering flexibility but often lacking job security, lack of social protection and few opportunities to transition into formal training. There are indications that high rates of youth unemployment due to low economic growth, early dropout and lack of market-relevant skills are prevalent. Data from the International Labor Organisation (2017) estimates that in the Solomon Islands, 10,000 job seekers enter the labour market each year, but only 400 new jobs are created; in PNG, fewer than one in eight school leavers secure a job.

The study made the following recommendations:

1. Build in-country capacity to generate and use gender-based data for planning, programme monitoring and evaluation.
2. Identify advocacy spaces for addressing the adverse digital divide against women, women's economic participation, gender-responsive skills-development and well-being, using ICT and ODFL.
3. Build collaborative networks between youth, gender, education and training sectors to jointly identify needs and gaps and to create targeted ODFL-oriented interventions for women and girls.

4. Design contextual interventions for ensuring equal access to context-specific lifelong quality education, encouraging girls' enrolment and retention in skills-based and STEM streams and in non-traditional sectors, including remote work.

The Workshop

In this context, we proposed a regional workshop to bring together officials from government, civil society organisations and other relevant agencies from the nine countries to co-create targeted interventions for lifelong learning of girls and women. It was envisaged that using a combination of ODFL learning opportunities, addressing the issue of the digital gender gap and associated gender issues, these interventions would improve the employability and effective labour force participation of girls and women.

The three-day workshop was held from 5 - 7 November 2024. It was attended by representatives from twelve NGOs, seven government departments and one academic institution (Annex I- List of Participants).

The thematic objectives of the workshop were to:

1. **Share knowledge and skills for future programming around resilient skills for women's livelihood:** enhance knowledge and skills among stakeholders (government officials, NGOs, professionals and practitioners) to create targeted ODFL-oriented interventions for women and girls through joint identification of needs and gaps, leading to articulation of future projects and partnerships.
2. **Build a cohort of trainers of trainers:** Building the capacity for trainers in participatory methodologies for engaging young women and girls, digital and financial literacy, gender-responsive programming and using OER. Each trainer will be expected to train 200 women and girls, either directly registered participants or in collaboration with similar organisations. This would ensure the reach of at least 1,000 women and girls.
3. **Facilitate collaboration and networking among key stakeholders:** facilitate collaboration among regional actors (government, civil society, professionals, and academia) to share best practices, resources and innovative solutions, leading to a network of mutual support and action.
4. **Enable policy advocacy and strategy development:** identification of advocacy spaces for addressing the adverse digital divide against women, women's economic participation, gender-responsive skills-development and well-being, using ICT and ODFL.

The three-day regional workshop on Women, Skills and Resilient Livelihoods in the Small States of the Pacific brought together 21 participants (17 women and four men, including one visually challenged participant), from nine countries: Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea (PNG),

Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. According to the PACFOLD director, Dr Rajni Chand, this was the first time that all nine Commonwealth countries from the South of the Pacific were represented in a COL workshop.

Day 1: A Day for Introducing Individuals, Organisations and Ideas

The first day of the workshop focused on introductions: Dr Chand gave an introduction of the work of PACFOLD in the Pacific, while Dr Karen Nyangara, Gender Adviser, gave an overview of COL and GIRLS Inspire. The participating individuals also had a chance to introduce themselves, their organisations and departments.

After the introductory sessions, Dr Jyotsna Jha, COLs Director skills, presented the findings of the scoping study, which highlighted the regional as well as the country-specific issues related to secondary education, skills training, and workforce participation with gender as a marker. The presentation underscored three issues: (i) the low participation levels of both girls and boys at the secondary level in almost all nine countries, (ii) gender disparities against girls in some and against boys in some in schooling but against women in all in workforce participation, (iii) the paucity of authentic and comparable data. The presentation can be found in Annex II.

Dame Carol Kidu from the Ginigoada Foundation, PNG, led a series of pop-up panels that gave all participants an opportunity to discuss the challenges and successes of initiatives by different actors for the economic empowerment, education and skills and gender equality of youth in their various countries. A Pacific Islander context-specific, flexible model, *Tok Stori*, was used to discuss critical topics. It was interesting to see how quickly this informal approach to the panel discussions helped participants to quickly shift from isolated formality to a sense of amity and mutual understanding of the shared nature of challenges and diverse approaches to overcoming them.

Dr Sandeep Mysore from the University of New South Wales, Australia then gave the keynote lecture on 'Digital Social Innovations (DSI) for facilitating women and youth's participation in the digital economy of the Small Island Developing States.' In addition to introducing the notion of digital social innovation, he shared case studies of Impact Sourcing and Mentoring Networks as illustration of successful DSIs, especially in terms of opening opportunities for women and youth residing in remote locations and facing multiple marginalisation. Sandeep, who is a faculty of Information Systems and Technology Management, is also associated with the Digital Sustainability Knowledge Hub (DS Hub) at UNSW Sydney Business School. He would be interested in being part of the network if that emerges.

Day 2: A Day for Reflection and Training

The second day of the workshop focused on reflection and training. Dr Jha began by facilitating a session where three groups of NGOs and one of the government and universities discussed the same questions to bring their respective perspectives to the fore. The discussions made the two groups appreciate each other's positions, constraints and aspirations, in addition to discussing and finding the shared challenges with respect to issues around resilient livelihoods and skills education for that.

Thereafter Dr Nyangara led Trainer of Trainer sessions on the four areas: Human Rights, Financial Literacy, eCommerce and Leadership. Participants were active creators of content through group and individual activities for the first two sessions. In the third TOT, participants learned how to adapt content from the participant's handbooks available on OAsis to their contexts. There was time to conduct a mini-course on OER concepts and use. Even those who had no prior knowledge of OERs were able to find links to videos, wikiHow's and open textbooks that they could use to supplement the resources available in the COL [Financial Literacy](#) and [eCommerce](#) handbooks. Participants' feedback indicated that they appreciated the activity-based approaches followed for these sessions. In addition, participants who initially struggled with concepts of resilience and skilling were able to understand through the activity-driven training, which offered an immersive and engaging approach to learning.

Day 3: A Day for Ideation and Planning

The third and last day of the workshop focused on ideation and planning. Dr Jha led the sessions on ideation, introducing the notions of reframing and problem-solving, which generated a lot of interest when participants started applying the concepts to the challenges that they identified the previous day. The objective was to introduce elements of design and creative thinking so that participants could formulate their projects with innovative ideas. Dr Nyangara then gave an orientation on COL's Results-Based Management and proposal writing frameworks.

Since proposal writing can be intimidating, rather than inundating the participants with a host of technical documents, each participant was asked to allocate a sentence to 5W's (what, why, who, when, where) to envision their one great idea. Later, they used 1H (How will we proceed?) to fill out a simplified project proposal form. Having the TOT topics as common areas of training, NGOs used the concepts of social innovation and reframing to come up with one skill they will proceed to incorporate into their proposals. Government officials initially appeared to struggle a little more with ideas for policy and programming, but one-on-one discussions helped us uncover issues on skilling, policy institutional change and community outreach that spoke to the

Workstream 2.2 and to capacity building that COL can support. We also attempted to have country teams identify potential activities for collaboration to gain buy-in and incorporate scale-up and sustainability from the start. Given the need for government officials to consult before commitment, this will need longer follow-up than the time the workshop availed.

Outcomes of the Workshop

The workshop led to several positive outcomes for the region, especially in the context of enhancing mutual learning and opening roads for collaborative work in skill development, with a special focus on girls and women in the Pacific. Some of the key outcomes are:

Better Understanding of and Appreciation for Common Challenges

During the workshop, a presentation of a scoping study on Women, Skills and Resilient Livelihoods in the Pacific underscored three issues: (i) low participation levels of both girls and boys at the secondary level in almost all nine countries, (ii) gender disparity against girls in some and against boys in some in schooling but against women in all in workforce participation, (iii) availability of authentic and comparable data. The NGOs, government and universities came away from discussions with a better appreciation for each other's positions, constraints and aspirations with respect to issues around resilient livelihoods and skills education for that. Hearing first-hand from many participants that they face the same challenge underscores the need to build collaborative networks between governments, CSOs and COL to establish in-country and regional platforms and to build capacity in gender-responsive programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Opening Doors for Government – NGO Collaborations

Most countries were represented by both government and NGO representatives. Several of them expressed that it was the first time they had sat together and discussed challenges, opening the door for better mutual respect and collaboration in future. This is an important outcome for the Pacific project and COL, where skill development through both community capacity development as well as institutionalisation are priorities.

During the process of proposal writing, COL developed a better understanding of how NGOs operate in the Pacific. In Nauru, Tonga and Tuvalu, the organisations are affiliated with Ministries. In Tonga, this association is further linked to the Office of Her Majesty the Queen. In the Solomon Islands, one of the new partners heads a coalition of organisations that promote education and

advocate for policy reform. These spheres of influence are being closely analysed to enhance COLs impact for scalable, sustainable and significant outcomes.

Onboarding Eight NGO Partners for Skill Development

COL has onboarded eight new NGO partners from seven of the nine countries represented. Kiribati, which has no NGOs, was already a COL partner, while Nauru dropped off on communication after initially showing potential to be an active partner. While the process with Nauru has stalled, attempts are still being made to contact Ms Annabelle Scotty at the Directorate of Youth Affairs, who was spearheading the proposal development.

Partners were supported to develop six-month proposals, and emphasis was placed on delimiting activities to what could be achieved in the time frame. Five hundred and fifty young women will receive training in diverse vocational skills, human rights, leadership and financial literacy. It is envisaged that these skills will lead to increased entrepreneurship, employment, and empowerment.

The process of onboarding NGOs in a region where such agreements have not been common is also challenging. For instance, the writing and signing of the Contribution Agreements was expected to be finalised by 31 December 2024. However, many organisations were unable to complete their proposals in time, and the extended Christmas and New Year breaks took up quite a bit of time. A lot more capacity building is needed to familiarise the partners with COL processes and ensure a smoother transition from conceptualisation to implementation.

After signing the Contribution agreements, further delays were common in the release of funds as organisations sent in banking details piecemeal! However, the GIRLS Inspire Initiative has been successful in following a stage-wise capacity development programme for the NGOs where they were first sent a guide and a dedicated link to their designated OneDrive folder, which serves as the central repository for project-related documents and deliverables, followed by an orientation session via Zoom to discuss submission expectations and show partners how to access each document.

The details of the Contribution Agreements are in Annex III.

Next Steps

The scoping study, the data available, and discussions with partners during proposal development point to disproportionate challenges facing girls and young women seeking skills for

employment or entrepreneurship in the Pacific. A majority of the female workforce operates in the informal economy, with precarious work conditions and limited access to skills development. The new partnerships present a unique opportunity for COL to increase equitable and inclusive access to quality learning opportunities, especially for women, girls and persons with disabilities. Through capacity building in locally relevant skills, partners are contributing to improving lives and livelihoods for over 500 young women. The experience of collaborating with the eight partners for skill development among youth in the Pacific will be documented for their success in achieving the outputs and preparedness for long-term partnerships in the future. The potential for establishing a network of these organisations to enable mutual learning and knowledge-sharing would also be examined and, if needed, promoted in future.

Annex I: List of Participants

Dr Rajni Chand – Director, Centre for Flexible Learning, USP, PACFOLD

Dr Jyotsna Jha – Director, Skills, COL

Dr Karen Nyangara – Gender Adviser, COL

Government Representatives

Annabelle Scotty – Director, Youth Affairs, Nauru

Tulia Naivogo Tabuatalei – Divisional Women Interest Officer – West, Department for Women Ministry for Women, Children & Social Protection, Fiji

Tarateima Tewareka – Senior Youth Dev Officer MWYSSA, Kiribati

Eera Teakai – Senior Youth Dev Officer MWYSSA, Kiribati

Makelesi Kioa – Acting CEO, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Women Affairs and Gender, Tonga

Tanene Teo – Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, Gender Affairs Dept, Office of the Prime Minister, Tuvalu

Civil Society Representatives

Alanieta Rose Atama – Focal Point- Gender and Human Rights, Alliance for Future Generations, Fiji

Simina Capelle – Director, Administration and Finance, Women Empowerment Association, Nauru

Dame Carol Kidu – Patron, Ginigoada Foundation, PNG

Dr Genevieve Nelson – Kokoda Track Foundation Ltd, PNG

Doris Tulifau – CEO, Brown Girl Woke, Samoa

Selina Berah – Executive Board Member, Guadalcanal Province Council of Women, Solomon Islands

Jack Kalisto – National Coordinator Coalition of Education of Solomon Islands

Edwin Babanisi – Project Manager, Blind and Visually Impaired People of Solomon Islands

Roselyn Babanisi – Office Manager, Blind and Visually Impaired People of Solomon Islands

Anaseini Ulakai – Samoa Umbrella for NGO'S

Filgia Taukiei – Director, Fatulei Association Tuvalu

Noel Sawia – Youth Challenge, Vanuatu

Sabrina Rasu – CEO, Vanuatu Young Women For Change

Academic Institution

Dr. Sandeep Mysore, USNW Business School, Keynote speaker

Prof Tuiloma Susana Tauaa – National University of Samoa

Annex II: Presentation- Scoping Study on Livelihoods for Women and Girls In the Pacific

Livelihoods for Women and Girls in the Pacific: Mapping National and Community Mechanisms

Presented by
Dr. Jyotsna Jha,
Director, Skills




Image: South Pacific Map



Gender, ICT and ODFL (open, distance and flexible learning)

- Significant gender disparities in ICT ownership, access and use.
- Few female teachers, role models and mentors in non-stereotypical and ICT based occupations.
- Very little data available on women and girls in open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) for lifelong learning in the skills sector.



Picture Source: COL

Context of the Study

- Shared challenges of island economies: dispersed populations, strong dependence on trade, limited access to development finance, disproportionate impact of natural disasters and climate change, varied access to technology and telecommunications.
- Key role of women and girls in knowledge and resilient skills to mitigate climate change, practice sustainable agriculture.
- Achieving gender parity in education enrollment and completion is an essential first step towards achieving gender equality in education. Gender issues are complex in the region and disadvantage both girls and boys in different contexts and situations.
- Show strong success in low numbers of out of school children but these do not necessarily translate into improved economic opportunities through employment and entrepreneurship.

What does the available data tell us about the status of girls' completion rates at the secondary education level, the levels of their existing skills and the employment pattern among girls and young women?



Learning to make dress patterns in PNG
Picture credit: COL

Secondary School Completion: Policy Initiatives


- Targeted financial support through enhance girls' education scholarship programs in Fiji, Tonga, and Nauru
- Community and rural education initiatives in Tuvalu to engage
- Inclusive and flexible learning options in PNG and SI National Education Plan.
- Focus on STEM and non-traditional fields in Samoa and Vanuatu's Gender (and educ) policies.

Some Facts and figures: Transition in Secondary Education

Country	Lower Secondary education	Females	Upper Secondary Education	Females
Fiji (2021)	63.7	66.1	25.9	26.1
Kiribati (2020)	84.7	85.0	45.9	47.8
Nauru (2021)	69.7	72.5	31.5	32.9
Papua New Guinea (2018)	30.5	24.4	9.1	6.4
Samoa (2019)	89.7	92.4	39.6	42.8
Solomon Islands (2013)	42.9	38.2	25.3	22.9
Tonga (2021)	94.2	94.2	68.8	70.2
Tuvalu (2022)	47.7	47.0	38.9	40.1
Vanuatu (2020)	44.5	43.0	19.2	17.6

Source: World Bank Group 2023

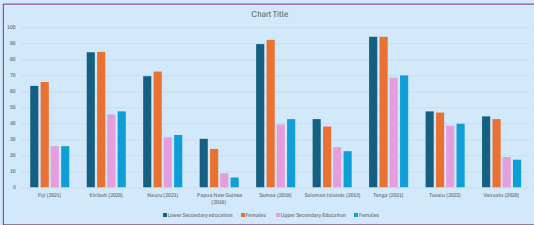
Skilling and Open Distance Learning (ODL) Initiatives



1. Flexible Open and Distance Education (FODE) Centres in PNG and Distance Learning Centers in SI are alternative pathways to completing secondary education and skilling.
2. Technical College of Fiji offers ODL courses in trades such as carpentry, plumbing, and hospitality.
3. Universities and technical colleges in Fiji, Kiribati Nauru, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and Tuvalu, offer technical and vocational training via ODL.
4. Samoa Qualifications Authority supports business and IT courses through ODL.

Photo credit: Misiona Simo, [Samoa Observer](#)

Transition in Secondary Education



Source: World Bank Group 2023

Emerging messages from these numbers

- In general, upper secondary participation rates are low for both girls and boys
- Within that somewhere girls are slightly better and somewhere slightly worse
- Girls worse in places where participation rates are low for lower secondary as well



Photo: COL

Recommendations



Build in-country capacity to generate and use gender-based data for planning, programme monitoring and evaluation.



Build collaborative networks between the youth and gender education and training actors to jointly identify needs gaps and to create targeted L-oriented interventions for women and girls.



Identify advocacy spaces for addressing adverse digital divide against women, women's economic participation, gender-responsive skills-development and well-being, using ICT and ODFL.



Design contextual interventions for ensuring equal access to context specific lifelong quality education, encouraging girls' enrollment and retention in skills-based and STEM streams and in non-traditional sectors including remote work.

Some Facts and Figures: Females in Employment



45.5%
75.6%



44.1%
78.1%



38.3%
76.8%



35.6%
63.2%



37.5%
81.1%



38.1%
71.1%



50.4%
75.1%

Female
Male

Methodology

- COL Focal Points in each country contacted and informed of the process, requested for contacts.
- Snowballing method used to reach 50 contacts: 17 from the government, 22 from the NGO community and 11 from the academia and the research community.
- After an introductory meeting, NGO requested for a profile and meetings.
- Data on education and skilling collated from online reports, KII's and COL documents.
- Challenges
 - Connectivity issues
 - Slow response/No response
 - Lack of up-to-date data

Employment Patterns among Girls and Young Women

There is not much data available per country in existing global instruments.

The informal economy participation is prevalent among girls and young women, offering flexibility but often lacking job security, lack of social protection and few opportunities to transition into formal training.

High rates of youth unemployment due to low economic growth, early dropout and lack of market-relevant skills prevalent.

The ILO (2017) estimates that in the Solomon Islands, 10,000 job seekers enter the labor market each year, but only 400 new jobs are created; in PNG, fewer than 1 in 8 school leavers secures a job.

High engagement in the informal economy, e.g., subsistence agriculture or fishing.



Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2023, World Economic Forum

Annex III: Breakdown of Contribution Agreements (CA)

Partner	Country	CA#	Target	Budget (NZD)	Date signed (2025)
1. Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development (FRIEND)	Fiji	C25-318	90 young women (cultivation, nutrition, microgreens)	26,715	21 February
2. Ginigoada Foundation (GF)	Papua New Guinea	C25-328	60 women & girls (tailoring)	10,086	28 February
3. Brown Girl Woke (BGW)	Samoa	C25-314	50 young women & girls (sewing, handicrafts, agriculture or customer service)	24,699	13 February
4. Coalition for Education, Solomon Islands (COESI)	Solomon Islands	C25-326	30 women (vocational courses at centres)	8,621 (plus fees directly to the centres)	21 February
5. Apunepara Ha'amwaora Natural Resource Association (AHNRA)	Solomon Islands	C25-333	60 young women (beekeeping & farming)	27,185	4 March
6. Langafonua 'a Fafine-Tonga National Women's Council (WNC)	Tonga	C25-329	50 young women (handicrafts)	28,070	3 March
7. Fatulei Association-Tuvalu	Tuvalu	C25-330	50 young women (handicrafts, drawing, carving & painting)	26,012	11 March

Partner	Country	CA#	Target	Budget (NZD)	Date signed (2025)
Women for Change(WFC)					
8. Youth Challenge Vanuatu (YCV)	Vanuatu	C25-313	150 women & girls (vocational skills)	30,525	19 February