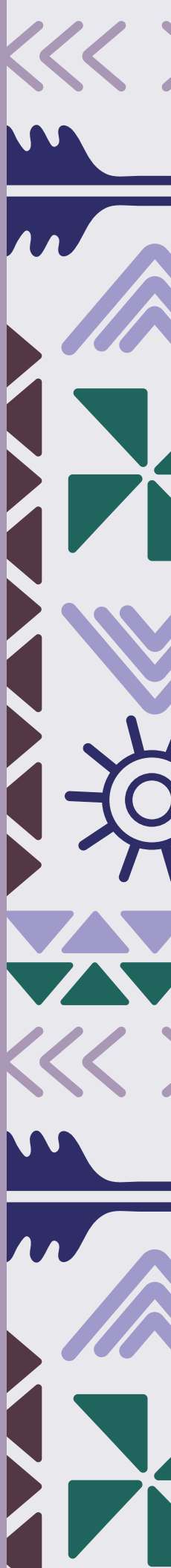




# PACIFIC FEMINIST FUND

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Designed & Led by  
Feminists in the Region



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**COMMISSIONING  
ORGANISATIONS**



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## LESS THAN 1% OF FUNDING IS REACHING WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS IN THE PACIFIC THROUGH DIRECT FUNDING

The need for a Pacific regional women's fund is clear. The 2020 study 'Where is the Money for Women and Girls in the Pacific? Mapping Funding Gaps, Opportunities and Trends', showed that while total aid for gender equality is rising, money for women's rights organisations (WROs) is not.

According to the study, commissioned by the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights - Asia and Pacific (UAFAP) and the Fiji Women's Fund (FWF), "less than 1% of funding is reaching women's organisations in the Pacific through direct funding."

Funding for Pacific Women's Organisations (PWOs) is changing rapidly, bringing in new partners and ways of working. PWO voices need to be amplified and facilitated in funding decisions to address the data gap in donor funding.

### THE STUDY'S FIRST PROPOSITION WAS FOR:

A Pacific Feminist Fund (PFF) led by feminists in the region

"that is a conduit for Pacific women's organisations to secure funding; to broaden the range of funders available; to represent and direct discussions within and outside the region; to amplify voices of organisations, and women and feminist movements in the region; to lead impact investing in women's rights and gender-based work; and to engage with Pacific Leaders, role models, celebrities and philanthropic networks to support Pacific women and girls."

Our region's demands and challenges are as unique and expansive as the oceanscape. Many modest grants are needed by a wide variety of groups across the many islands of the Pacific. Many feminists feel a new fundraising approach is required to hold state and other duty bearers accountable to their women's rights and human rights commitments. With this approach, feminists see their supporters as participants in civic participation and empowerment. A Pacific Feminist Fund would de-risk donations from diverse sources and deliver funds to Pacific women's and gender non-conforming organisations and groups. The Fund would also draw international and regional attention to the needs and priorities of women, girls, and transgender persons in the Pacific.







## BACKGROUND

Consultations with Pacific feminists/WROs, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+), and persons with disability advocates revealed a groundswell of support for a Pacific Feminist Fund.

Evidence tells us that women's rights activism and movements are the key drivers of legal and policy change for women's human rights and gender equality. Research over three decades (1975- 2005) in **70 countries found the mobilising of autonomous feminist movements to be more effective in combating gender-based violence (GBV) than the wealth of nations, political parties, or the number of women politicians.**

While making significant achievements, WROs and feminist movement actors remain under-resourced and under-recognised, fighting to operate in times of crisis and amidst shrinking space for civil society. The past decade has seen funders' increasing interest in supporting women and girls as key agents of change.

The most recent available data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries' aid projects shows that of the total funding targeting gender equality and women's empowerment, only 1.6% went directly to women's equality organisations and institutions.

Aid integrating gender equality is increasing overall but funding for dedicated gender equality programs lags behind. Of the USD1.6 billion in gross aid disbursements to the Pacific by OECD DAC members in 2017, USD13.3 million gross disbursements were made to WROs, of which only USD2.5 million gross disbursements were made directly to local, Pacific WROs.

This glaring gap confirms the need to channel resources through localised models, such as a regional Pacific women's fund that can enhance gender equality work across a myriad of fronts.

For many in the feminist movement, a new approach to mobilising funding is required. Fundraising is needed for stronger social movements and institutions that define their own agenda and develop responses covering the fullness of women's realities, holding the state and other duty bearers accountable for their commitments to women's rights.

As highlighted by the **'Where is the money for Pacific women and girls?'** study, the Pacific needs regional women's fund to fundraise for grassroots women's and gender non-conforming groups and organisations, mobilise non-financial resources and build regional alliances. The PFF would be modelled on values and lessons learnt from established global women's and feminist funds. The Fund would also have the mandate of the Pacific women's and feminist movement to globally and regionally amplify the needs and priorities of the region's women, girls and gender non-conforming people.





## SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

This report presents initial findings and recommendations from Pacific feminists/WROs, LGBTIQ+, and persons with disability advocates, exploring the design of a PFF led by feminists in the region. Consultations were guided by four key design areas -

- » **Mandate, Structure, Management and Governance;**
- » **Sources of Funding;**
- » **Financial Requirements; and**
- » **Risk Analysis.**

## THE CONSULTATIONS

The Terms of Reference guided consultations with four broad groupings:

- » **PFF Steering Committee (SC) and Advisory Group: scope, purpose, values, objectives**
- » **Pacific feminists and Women's Organisations: pros and cons of an independent PFF, governance, mandate, grants mechanisms, movement building, capacity development**
- » **Regional and Global Women's Funds: opportunities, challenges, governance, grants, movement building and capacity development experience, capital and financing, risk mitigation, social, political and interpersonal dynamics**
- » **Donor Organisations: interest in fund support, current and future funding limitations, funding mechanisms (short, medium, and long term)**

There were three feedback sessions to review findings and monitor progress alongside a feminist theory of change:

- » **focus group discussions with the PFF Steering Committee and Advisory Group**
- » **focus group discussions with Pacific Island feminists and women's organisations**
- » **participant online survey for additional feedback and views**

## CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS

COVID-19. Pandemic conditions restricted consultations to Zoom and email correspondence, with many expressing fatigue from engaging via Zoom and a preference for in-person, collective conversations.

Internet connectivity. Some consultations were interrupted by connectivity issues, hampering in-depth discussions.

Consultation with the North Pacific sub-region. The team was unable to secure responses or availability with persons/groups from the North Pacific.

Consultation with traditional donors. Due to time constraints, the team was unable to speak directly with traditional donors, relying instead on secondary information sources (websites, public statements, development policies, etc.).





# FINDINGS

Pacific feminists/women's rights activists or organisations (WRs), LGBTQ+ and disability rights advocates shared their collective vision, dreams and sense-making for a PFF.



They affirmed:

- » **A PFF must hold a vision of itself within the Pacific, recognising the region in all her diversity and complexities.**
- » **A PFF must listen to the hopes, expectations, and visions of the Fund felt by our island sisters, to hear and know what they are asking for in the big waves and in the small waves.**
- » **To be present all together in this region. In our feminisms.**

They shared:

- » **Their Hopes** - transformative feminist actions, Pacific feminist solidarity, shared learning, movement building, sustaining and connecting, growth and abundance.
- » **Their Expectations** - feminist values and principles, diversity, inclusion, transparency, accountability, power, solidarity, genuineness, to hold and give respect, recognition and fairness, value independence, centre justice, be disruptive, practice patience, apply Pacific ways of knowing, and recognise humanness in the funding ecosystem.
- » **Their Solutions** - governance structures and processes for feminist wealth resourcing, ways for co-existence of wealth and success, inclusive decision-making, intersectional "representation", commitment to feminist principles in action.
- » **Their Possibilities** - resourcing for Pacific feminist documenting, investment in Pacific knowledge management and championing, building with and for Pacific Sistership.

## MANDATE, STRUCTURE, MANAGEMENT, GOVERNANCE

All respondents expressed support for an independent feminist fund for the Pacific, recognising and working with the diversity of the region's peoples.

A common view is that feminist activism requires funding, but traditional funders are reluctant to support this work.

In terms of mandate, respondents see a PFF as responding to the challenges they face by bringing in "other types of funding modalities", access to funding, new kinds of funders, funding beyond the usual recipients, and funding strategies, feminist networks and mobilising.

Regarding structure, respondents thought that all key decision-making roles must be guided by feminist and Pacific values and principles, learning from early establishment stages and evolving as needed.

Pacific-led, inclusive and intersectional representation in the governance structure was deemed important by all, with the capacity, experience and qualifications needed by the fund.



Weaving is a common traditional practice for Pacific women

In terms of fund management, several respondents applauded the emerging **participatory grant-making approach** as inclusive, empowering, and addressing power inequalities in funding relationships. All respondents mentioned the need for grant mechanism decisions to be Pacific appropriate, context-relevant, and culturally astute.

Many respondents shared that the COVID-19 pandemic has informed the necessity for the PFF to be a **virtual funding mechanism**, while cautioning that connectivity challenges and online platform designs are often not user-friendly.

**Effectively communicating impact and change stories is vital for movement building.** Women's groups and funds must count what matters and narrate their impacts to help prove

the value of supporting women's rights and movements as a vital driver for change in the Pacific.

**Critical engagement in women's funding spaces is a way to gain political agency and "be at the table" to actively shape financing patterns and objectives** of the Pacific feminist funding ecosystem, without being co-opted in the process.

Regarding governance, a **technical, and skills-oriented** board at inception was emphasised by feminist funds as vital to the PFF's establishment.

**Most respondents thought that the role of the fund executive/director/manager should be held by a Pacific Island feminist, with some welcoming potential for a co-leadership modality.**



## SOURCES OF FUNDING

The Pacific financing environment is varied, complicated, and evolving at a frenetic pace. There is a compelling need for the PFF to play a role in diversifying feminist funding mechanisms and increase the pool of funders who appreciate the strength and effect of women's rights groups.

In mobilising resources, women's organisations need to collaborate to negotiate terms with donors, influence their funding preferences, and share information about donor practices and goals. With the PFF as a vehicle for collaborative Pacific feminist resource mobilisation, funding campaigns may be less alienating and disempowering for women's organisations.

## FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS

Feminist and women's funds revealed that capital and financing for the PFF's objective would require significant time and effort. To launch a new women's fund, the organisation will need a fundraising strategy covering all operations (including administration and overhead), grant-making, and an endowment.

Consultations further highlighted that it would take three to five years for the PFF to successfully implement the proposed feminist funding mechanism.

Regarding PFF's design, many Pacific feminists and women's rights activists were interested in using investment funding for a self-sustaining revenue stream. Pacific feminists requested that the PFF be bold and forward-thinking towards enabling financial independence. Further exploration is needed into investment funding, which remains a long-term goal for sustaining the movement.



## RISK ANALYSIS

The following risks mentioned in consultations were linked to the experiences and challenges faced by feminist/WROs, LGBTQ+, and disability groups in accessing funding, participating in decision making, and inclusion:

**THE FUND NAME** - One concern is that using the term feminist in its name may create resistance as some Pacific communities do not identify as feminist and reject the concept. The Pacific Feminist Forum, established in 2016, also requested reconsidering the Fund's name to avoid sharing the same acronym.

**DOMINANCE BY A FEW COUNTRIES** - Further risks relate to potential dominance of Pacific regional interests by a few countries, specifically Fiji and PNG, undermining the Fund's independence and regional approach.

**INSTABILITY** - The volatility of social, political, and economic environments in the country in which the Fund is based would affect the Fund's effectiveness in disbursing funds regionally.

**LACK OF SUPPORT FOR A FEMINIST AGENDA** - It was widely recognised that COVID-19 has shifted traditional donor funding to focus on economic recovery and reducing China's geopolitical influence in the region.

**TRUST AND RELATIONSHIP ISSUES CONTRIBUTING TO A TOXIC FUNDING ENVIRONMENT** - The donor-WRO relationship is often unbalanced and one-way (Guttenbeil-Likiliki, 2020). Donors can wield their authority despite sometimes lacking contextual awareness, compromising the trust needed to work together effectively.

**CAPACITY ISSUES** - Managing grants to a variety of small and mid-sized feminist organisations is difficult and time-consuming, given the challenges of Pacific geography and access to services. This calls for new working methods requiring political will, time, staffing, finances, and flexibility.



## DEEPER EXPLORATION

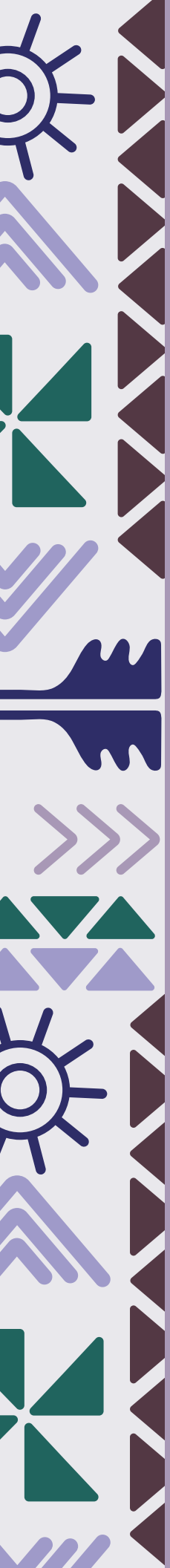
Further substantive consultations are needed to build clarity on the issues, meanings, and concerns to strengthen the PFF's mandate and promote Pacific feminist ownership of the Fund.

Areas for further exploration are:

- » **The PFF as an iterative process.** Like existing funds, the PFF should approach its inception stage as a process of learning and improving
- » **'Representation'.** This means many things to all, including nationality, thematic focus, technical expertise, skills-based representations, intersectional representation.
- » **Relationships and interconnectedness in the movement.** The Fund must understand, and situate its presence as part of Pacific relationships, recognising historical and emerging builders of the movement, acknowledging Pacific ways of knowing as relational, interdependent, shared and connected in spaces of Pacific feminist innovations.
- » **Participatory grant-making.** The PFF must consider Pacific nuances towards collective decisions-making and action, and Pacific-centred grant-making design, including a Pacific feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) framework.







**PACIFIC**  
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