



FWRM
FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

**Submission to the call for
contributions on the rights of older
women in Fiji**

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Fiji Women's Rights Movement
Monday 15th March 2021

Background

This year marks 35 years of persistent advocacy for the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) through evidence-based research, and movement building at national, regional and international levels. FWRM uses critical feminist analysis in the work we do in addressing gender inequality, violence and discrimination of all forms against women and girls in Fiji. We are committed to empowering women and girls of all backgrounds in Fiji by addressing systemic and structural barriers as well as lobbying for progressive legislative and policy frameworks that promote greater gender equality and non-discrimination.

Some of the early work that FWRM has done in Fiji on the rights of older women focused primarily on the work of the Fiji Women's Forum (FWF) under the Intergenerational Women's Leadership Program. In 2017, FWRM published the "*Women & Ageing Scoping Study on Perceptions of Ageing among Women in Fiji* ", which was aimed at documenting the intersectional realities of ageing Fijian women.

The scoping study recommended that more research was needed to document the poverty incidence of ageing Fijian women as this was a key issue from the older women who participated in the study. Additionally, the majority of the women in the 2017 study stated that the limited financial autonomy, independence, and the declining physical, emotional, psychological, and socio-economic support, have contributed significantly to the vulnerabilities of growing old.

In 2020, FWRM released a preliminary review of global to national commitments of Fiji in the context of ageing women and poverty. The report looked at key international and national frameworks for action on ageing women which includes existing national laws, policies and programmes, and as well as trends in poverty among ageing women in Fiji. Key findings from the report are as follows:

1. Fiji is lacking in its State reporting for the MIPAA, and as well as the SDGs that are specifically looking at ageing women.
2. Older women are the majority of older persons in Fiji according to the 2017 Census data released by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics.
3. The Fiji National Policy on Ageing 2011-15 is outdated and needs reviewing because it has not achieved the projected outputs outlined in its work plan.
4. Specific social protection schemes are available for ageing women however, it is operating in silos, lacks gender integration, inaccessible information and gender impact assessment to gauge its effectiveness for ageing women.

5. Fiji's national poverty line (% of the population) in 2013 was 34%, and less than 2% lived in extreme poverty under the international poverty line of \$1.90USD per person per day
6. Analysing the trend in poverty for older women in Fiji is a gap because of the limited data and research available.
7. Older women face significant vulnerabilities as they age because of income insecurity. The Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) comprises 52% male and 48% female members. Compulsory membership stands at 59% male and 41% Female. 44% of accounts have a balance of less than 10,000 FJD for within the age group of 50-54 years old. The FNPF pension includes 74% male and 26% female recipients.

FWRM acknowledges though that more work is needed to document the human rights issues facing older women in Fiji as this is an area significantly underreported. With all that being said, below are FWRM's contributions towards the work we have done thus far on the rights of older women in Fiji.

The rights of older women in international, regional and national law, policies and programmes

QUESTIONS	CONTRIBUTIONS	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
<p>Key legal instruments Fiji has ratified or adopted</p>	<p>International conventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Madrid International Platform of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), ● Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ● International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ● Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), ● Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing 1982 (resolution 37/51), ● United Nations Principles for Older Persons (Adopted by General Assembly resolution 46/91 of 16 December 1991), ● International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action 1994 (ICPD), ● Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995 <p>Regional conventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Moana Declaration 2013 <p>Local laws and policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Constitution of Fiji: The 2013 Constitution safeguards the rights and freedoms of every person irrespective of one's age and gender preferences: equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms recognised under the Constitution or any other written law. ● Fiji National Council for Older Persons Act 2012: In 2012, Fiji enacted the National Council for Older Persons Act 2012 intending to establish the National Council for Older Persons with 	<p>Challenges</p> <p>The Fiji National Policy on Ageing has yet to be reviewed. FWRM was part of a consultation in 2019 however, the policy has not been reviewed.</p> <p>Fiji has signed on to a number of international commitments and most have been domesticated. More effort and political will from the government is needed to strengthen the implementation of these commitments. The lack of understanding on human rights issues, Fiji's commitments and technical expertise often results in non-compliance in practice and adequate resources not being allocated to action the plans.</p> <p>Key questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are our leaders involving older people, and even more so older women, in the laws, policies and programmes that are initiated? 2. Do the existing services and social protection programmes have a lifecycle approach?

	<p>the goal of inclusivity, instilling dignity, and respect for human rights and meeting the basic needs of older persons through employment and related matters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fiji National Policy on Ageing 2011-15: In a nutshell, the Policy covers four (4) main goals that call for the recognition of the contribution of older persons to the social, cultural, economic and political sectors of society; strengthened social assistance for older persons; healthy living while ageing; and an enabling and supportive environment for the older persons. ● Fiji National Gender Policy: In 2014 Fiji adopted the National Gender Policy in efforts to promote gender equity, equality, social justice and sustainable development. The objectives of the policy are to "improve the quality of life" between men and women through gender equity and equality, promote the implementation of gender mainstreaming across all governmental agencies and remove all forms of existing gender inequality and discrimination in Fiji. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Allocating efficient resources towards older persons is much more than just celebrating events, renovating age-care homes or allocating \$10.00 Fiji dollars on travel allowance. 4. If economic security, or the lack thereof, add to the vulnerabilities when women age, how are our laws and policies addressing this? <p>The technical expertise, resource and political will needed in this area of work is lacking significantly.</p>
<p>What are some existing programmes that address the challenges faced by older women in Fiji?</p>	<p>Government-led programmes and/or initiatives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State-run and Private Aged Care homes: When an older person is unable to live independently, the Fiji government provides aged care homes or facilities. Over the years, the Social Welfare Department under the MOWCPA has assisted existing services for older persons like Aged Care homes by resourcing them, as well as provided funding targeted at awareness and improving services and facilities. In December 2014, the NCOP registered seven affiliate members aligning to the government's requirements on services for older persons, and grants were awarded to establish and improve institutions for older persons. Grants administered by NCOP were used to renovate the homes, improve services and organise recreational/communal events and activities. All registered Age Care homes must are required to 	<p>Gaps identified</p> <p>The human rights violations of older women in age-care homes is significantly underreported.</p> <p>And, celebrating the international day on the rights of older persons isn't exactly addressing any of the challenges older women face.</p>

	<p>comply with the National Minimum Standards for Age Care homes.¹</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Social protection programmes: older women can access include bus fare concession for elderly/disabled persons, poverty benefit scheme, disability allowance and age-care homes 3. Celebrating international day on the rights of older persons: the Older Persons Unit under the department of Social Welfare organises this event almost every year, hosting it at various age-care homes. <p>Fiji Women’s Rights Movement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research work on older women: Women & Ageing: Scoping study on perceptions of ageing among women in Fiji (2017) http://www.fwrn.org.fj/images/May-24-2017-Women--Ageing-Scoping-Study-on-Perceptions-of-Ageing-Among-Women-in-Fiji.pdf ● Research work on global to local commitments on ageing women and poverty in Fiji: Ageing women and Poverty in Fiji: A preliminary review of global to national commitments (2020) http://www.fwrn.org.fj/images/FWRM_Ageing_Women_Pove_rty_in_Fiji.pdf ● Intergenerational Women’s Leadership Programme are in the preliminary stages of developing an ageing women programme: http://www.fwrn.org.fj/images/FWRM_Ageing_Women_Pove_rty_in_Fiji.pdf 	
<p>How are the laws, policies and programmes implemented and monitored?</p>	<p>National Council for Older Persons (NCOP) The National Council for Older Persons serves as an umbrella body of all services and programs of older persons and for aged-care services</p>	<p>Challenges The Fiji national policy on ageing is outdated and has yet to be reviewed.</p>

¹ National Council for Older Persons. (2016). Annual Report 2013-2014. Parliamentary Paper No. 43 of 2016.

	<p>that provide such service, will need to be registered under the council. Objectives of the council include strengthening the partnership and collaboration between the Government and the various civil and private sector organisations and advocate on the rights and interests of older persons in Fiji and overseeing the collaboration and implementation of the Fiji National Policy on Ageing.</p> <p>Department of Social Welfare (Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation) – Older Persons Unit</p> <p>The Older Persons Unit under the department of Social Welfare oversees the administrative aspects of the implementation of the Fiji national policy on ageing, NCOP, age-care homes, projects and programmes. The Older Persons unit is also responsible for providing input towards different State reports on the status of older persons in Fiji.</p> <p>Minimum Standards for Residential Homes for the Elderly</p> <p>Fiji enacted the Minimum Standards for Residential Homes for the Elderly aimed to ensure that the needs and rights of older persons residing in institutional home settings are protected. The mandate applies to all age care homes seeking registration whilst existing Aged Care homes are intended to gradually adopt the mandated Standards, and compliance is monitored by the Department of Social Welfare annually.</p>	
<p>What type of statistical data are collected on older women, if any, and is it disaggregated by age,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNESCAP publishes yearly reports on the World Population Prospects. Data on older persons in the Pacific region can be retrieved from it.² 	<p>Gaps identified</p> <p>A lack of data collected on older women are in two folds:</p>

² As an example - United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/ (2019). World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights. Page 2 and 30. Retrieved from: https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_10KeyFindings.pdf

<p>gender, and other relevant factors?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Older Person’s Unit under the Department of Social Welfare had intended to conduct a baseline research on the status of older person in Fiji as part of the key performance indicators for the national policy on ageing. This research has yet to be conducted.³ • The Fiji Bureau of Statistics do capture some data around the population of older persons in Fiji however, there the data is not sex disaggregated.⁴ • Individual deprivation measurement (IDM) study conducted for Fiji does cover provides some data analysis around older women in Fiji.⁵ • UNFPA Pacific has also done some work around older persons in the Pacific but the data presented in the report for Fiji are from the Fiji Bureau of Statistics and the World Population Prospects.⁶ 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The methodologies used to collect and analysis data fail to include data that actually capture the individual i.e. sex, age, gender, socioeconomic status, location, services and programmes accessed. Please refer to the rationale on the IDM indicators used when measuring poverty in Fiji. The Indicators tell us who in the household is poor, to what extend and in what ways. 2. The other argument is that Fiji has too much data and a lack of technical expertise to analyse.
<p>How are older women defined for the purposes of law, policy and data collection?</p>	<p>In Fiji, the National Policy on Ageing 2011-2015 adopts the chronological definition of old age to be any person aged 60 years and over. Similarly, the policy defines the ‘oldest old’ as any older person aged 80 years and over.</p>	<p>Gaps identified The chronological definition of when old age begins is a very subjective standard because it looks at a person’s decline in functioning ability and physical appearance, without really looking at the individual as a whole. Human</p>

³ Appendix 1: Implementation Matrix: Fiji National Policy on Aging, 2011-2015 http://www.health.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/8_Fiji-Ageing-Policy.pdf (page 39)

⁴ Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2017 release 1 <https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/index.php/census-2017/census-2017-release-1> (page 3-5)

⁵ Australian National University (ANU) and the International Women’s Development Agency IWDA. (2016-2020). Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM). Retrieved from: https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/IDM_womendeliver_2pager.pdf

⁶ United Nations Population Fund. (2014). Population ageing in the Pacific Islands: a situation analysis. - Suva, Fiji. Page 10. Retrieved from: <https://pacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pubpdf/PopulationAgeinginthePacificIslandsASituationAnalysisReport.pdf>

		beings are much more than just muscles, bones and cells, and one's contribution to a community or society goes beyond the decline in functioning ability and physical appearance. Assessing what a person can do, and as well as their ability to adapt, is the more positive approach to defining "old".
Please indicate how older women take part in participatory mechanisms?	FWRM, through its research, advocacy and forum work, we include older women and their realities. The Fiji government on the other hand, lack this oversight when designing social protection programmes, laws and policies concerning older women.	Gaps identified More effort needed from the government in ensuring that older women are part of the participatory mechanism (consultations).
Economic, social and cultural realities lived by older women		
QUESTIONS	CONTRIBUTIONS	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
What are the specific challenges and concerns faced by older women, including on the basis of their accumulated life experience as compared to older men, in enjoying their economic, social and cultural rights (for example in terms of social protection, health, education, work, adequate standard of living, land	Older women experience higher incidence of poverty during old age because women in Fiji earn less, save less and are employed in less secure jobs compared to men. In Fiji. During old age, many older women have little to no retirement money left to be financially independent from their adult children and relatives. ⁷ Existing customary laws on access and ownership of land and resources in Fiji make more women dependent on men, and in some Pacific island countries, the existing statutory laws confirm these restrictions. Additionally, many older women are left widowed and do not have the support of a spouse which increases their vulnerabilities.	Challenges with social protection Lack of Access to Information and Assessment Gender Impact/Benefit/ Responsiveness of existing social protection Schemes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is hard to establish progress since the data on gender impact/benefits for the schemes is not publicly available. ● There are limited and disintegrated avenues of information on the social

⁷ Fiji National Provident Fund. (2018). Annual Report 2018. Page 3 and 4. Retrieved from: <https://myfnpf.com.fj/images/Annual-Report-2018-24.10.pdf>

COVID-19 Response Gender Working group. (2020). Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 on Women in Fiji. Page 4, 7-8. Retrieved from: http://fwrn.org.fj/images/Gender_and_COVID_Guidance_Note_-_Rapid_Gender_Analysis.pdf

<p>and property ownership)? Please provide related data and statistics, including disaggregated data, where available.</p>	<p>There have been cases where widowed women have been forcefully removed from their homes because of customary laws that restrict women from owning land once their husbands have died.</p> <p>Social protection programmes that older women can access include bus fare concession for elderly/disabled persons, poverty benefit scheme, disability allowance and age-care homes. Additionally, there are some forms of a social pension scheme for older people in Fiji and the Pacific region, but it has done little to reduce poverty incidence among older people, more so for older women who share a large proportion of the ageing population who live under the poverty line. The social protection programmes in Fiji are often criticized for operating in silos with insufficient gender integration, a lack of access to information and gender impact assessment to gauge its effectiveness.</p> <p>Income and/or economic security, or the lack thereof, impacts the health status of women as they age. Women spend a lifetime taking care of others before their own, and this attribute seeps to women's poor health seeking behaviours. We see this behaviour when women access cancer services in Fiji – women putting the needs of the family before their own.⁸ This type of behaviour has ramifications in the long run as women age. Additionally, the cases of Non Communicable Diseases is a pandemic in Fiji and a lot of women are diagnosed with</p>	<p>protection programmes and schemes via national budget accouchements and the various awareness campaigns by the different ministries overseeing the assigned schemes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A more important point to question and consider is whether improving access to social protection schemes is actually making a significant impact in addressing the challenges older women face. For instance, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MOW) publishes annual reports that do indicate an increasing majority of women who are accessing schemes such as the poverty benefit scheme; bus fare allowance and the social pension scheme however, there is little or no review publically available to illustrate on whether these schemes are actually working.¹⁰ <p>Gaps identified Human rights issues around menopause transition and its symptoms are</p>
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⁸ Breaking the Barriers: Understanding cancer services, screening and treatment available for women in Fiji. (2018). Fiji Women's Rights Movement <http://www.fwrn.org.fj/images/fwrn2017/PDFs/research/ICPD-Research-Report.pdf> (Page 23)

¹⁰ Social Protection (2019) Fiji Women's Rights Movement <http://www.fwrn.org.fj/publications/research-analysis/social-protection-factsheets>

	<p>NCDs as they age because of poor diet, nutrition, wellness and physical exercise.</p> <p>Improving Women’s Access to Health Services including Reproductive Health Services and Information. Women face multiple forms of discrimination due to their sex, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender expression, marital status etc. In a conservative society, it becomes difficult for women in all their diversity to access basic SRHR services.</p> <p>Sexual violence is a pandemic in Fiji, older women are victims of this. Older women in Fiji are vulnerable to sexual and/or physical abuse by their own family members. The incidents of rape and sexual assault on older women have increased over the years.⁹</p>	<p>underreported, and we do not see many people talking about it. Existing research in this area tells us that women face distress, poor quality of life, silence, shame and stigma when ageing and on menopause transition. In Fiji, this area remains an unexplored territory.</p> <p>Additionally, older women experience being neglected by their family members, and the cases of neglect and elderly abuse is underreported in age-care homes.</p>
<p>What forms of gender-based discrimination and inequality experienced by women throughout the life cycle have a particular impact on the enjoyment of their human rights in older age?</p>	<p>This question has already been answered in the previous questions.</p>	<p>Gaps identified</p> <p>There is just not enough research, information nor data to make a substantive contribution.</p>

⁹ The oldest victim survivor was 63 years old - Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls Rape Case Analysis. (2019) Fiji Women’s Rights Movement
http://www.fwrp.org.fj/images/Sexual_Violence_Against_Women_and_Girls_Rape_Case_Analysis_2019_updated.pdf

The oldest victim survivor was 71 years old - Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls Rape Case Analysis (2018)
<http://www.fwrp.org.fj/images/A2J/FWRM-2018-Rape-and-Trend-Analysis.pdf>

Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected older women differently than older men and how?	No specific work has been done that looks at older women during COVID-19 specifically.	✓
Please share examples of how older women participate in and contribute to economic, social and cultural life, including inter-generational solidarity and support.	This question has already been answered in the previous questions.	✓
Forms of discrimination against older women and gender-specific abuses		
QUESTIONS	CONTRIBUTIONS	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
What forms of structural and systematic discrimination do older women face (for example through laws, policies, traditional and customary practices, etc.) and what measures have been taken to address them?	This question has already been answered in the previous questions	Gaps identified There is just not enough research, information nor data to make a substantive contribution.
How do intersectional factors exacerbate the combined effect of ageism and sexism, including the perspective of older LGBTI women, older women with disabilities, older migrant women, older women belonging to indigenous and minority groups, etc.?	This question has already been answered in the previous questions	✓
What forms does gender-based violence and abuse against older women take and how is such violence prevalent? Please share	This question has already been answered in the previous questions	✓

<p>available data and statistics, including in relation to femicides.</p>		
<p>Please provide examples of how the life cycle perspective is integrated into policies and programmes to prevent and address gender-based violence against women and girls.</p>	<p>This question has already been answered in the previous questions</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Please share information about reporting, accountability, remedy and protective mechanisms available and targeted to older women victims of gender-based violence and discrimination.</p>	<p>This question has already been answered in the previous questions</p>	<p>✓ .</p>