



## Empowerment, Inclusiveness & Equality: Tracking Sustainable Development in the Pacific

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At this year's Pacific Islands Forum, Leaders endorsed the region's first Pacific Sustainable Development Report. The Report illustrates how we are progressing in terms of improving the quality of life for Pacific people, and ensuring empowerment, inclusiveness and equality.

It provides the first evaluation of progress under the [Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development](#). The Roadmap was adopted by the Forum in 2017 and guides reporting and accountability for our global and regional development commitments.

With its region wide focus, the Report reminds us that we share many development challenges. It also highlights the value of collective approaches for building a stronger Pacific. Our *Blue Pacific* identity urges us act together for the good of all, which of course lies at heart of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and its underlying promise to leave no one behind.

The report highlights mixed results. There is encouraging progress in terms of access to health, education, energy services and information. The returns from our oceanic resources are increasing. We are doing more to conserve and protect our oceans. We are taking concrete steps to better manage our waste. We continue to strengthen our capacity to plan for and address climate and disaster impacts.

While this is encouraging, we still have much to do. Poverty remains an issue with one in every four Pacific Islander living below national poverty lines. Unemployment, particularly of women and young people is high, with youth unemployment averaging 23 % compared with a global rate of 13.1 %. Our women are not benefitting equally from economic opportunities with our men outnumbering our women 2 to 1 in formal employment with even worse figures of 3 to 1 in Melanesia.

Violence against women must be of serious concern to us all. 2 out of 3 women have reported being subject to intimate partner violence. This is one of the highest incidence rates of violence against women anywhere in the world. In parallel, women representation in Pacific parliaments is still the lowest globally at 7.7%.

We see trends of sustained economic growth however it is often inequitable. With approximately 1.5 million Pacific islanders living with some form of disability, it is particularly distressing to know that persons with disabilities are among the poorest, most marginalized with lower economic, health and education outcomes.

Also of very serious concern is the increasing incidence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). NCDs now represent the leading cause of premature deaths in the region. Seven Pacific countries are in the top 10 countries globally with the highest rates of diabetes. In 10 Pacific countries, 5 out of 10 people are overweight and on average 7 out of 10 deaths are caused by NCDs with rates as high as 84% in Fiji and Samoa.

Beyond our immediate success and challenges the Report emphasises the significant potential and opportunity for sustainable development in our region. Prime examples include our oceanic resources or improved connectivity, and its ability to open up access to markets, finance and business opportunities. Then there's the potential for increasing transportation links between Forum island countries to facilitate mobility of our people and strengthen trading relations. Each of these could make a big difference if we can continue to work together on ways to progress them.

Our region has demonstrated collaborative leadership in the way we have approached the 2030 Agenda and our future development. The Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development, and this first report on progress, is the culmination of extensive work done over the last two years by government and non-government agencies and organisations. I would like to thank everyone for their efforts to date.

This report is an important milestone of our progress. It tells us that sustainable development in the Pacific will require an ongoing and concerted effort by all stakeholders including governments, schools, business, communities, and individuals. We each have a role to play in building the strong and prosperous Pacific that we all deserve.

The executive summary of the [Pacific Sustainable Development Report is available here](#).