Pacific Leadership Program
- CEDAW and Tonga

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#genderpp
History of Pacific Leadership Program

• PLP aimed to support locally-determined leadership and collective action in Pacific countries

• Phase 1 began in 2008 – Phase 3 ended in December 2017
  – In 10 years, the program supported numerous initiatives focused on strengthening leadership practice and knowledge about developmental leadership
  – A number of initiatives addressed gender reforms

• In 2016, a history of PLP considered the program through the lens of thinking and working politically, which found:
  – The appetite for the kinds of change envisaged by PLP varied over time
  – A range of factors associated with the politics of the donor influenced the ability of PLP to succeed (risk aversion, desire for measureable results, discomfort with uncertainty etc)
Example of one case study: CEDAW in Tonga

- Context of Tonga:
  - High hierarchical cultural values
  - Strong influence of church institutions on all aspects of life
  - Shift in power: changes in political leadership
  - Gender inequality in all aspects of society and economic life
PLP Role

- In 2014, PLP was exploring opportunities to support women coalitions for change
What did we learn?

• Importance of front-liners to be strategic and have political capital:
  – have a good enough knowledge of context
  – ability to recognize an opportunity
  – relevant network to support change processes

• Balancing power dynamics:
  – ability to manage expectations of both the donor and the coalition

• Framing of information is critical when supporting and communicating sensitive reforms

• Timing is critical
What has happened since?

• Government of Tonga has still not ratified CEDAW but have agreed to do more awareness-raising, as requested by the coalition of women and the public

• Change has occurred in people’s understanding of CEDAW
  – In December 2017, during a radio talk-show, after the elections people talked about CEDAW as not being as threatening as they thought it would be and agreed that it was okay for women to be leaders
  – In 2014, only 6% of the population voted for women, and by 2017, 14% of the population did

• Women who were working in silos, are now working collectively

• Women are now strategizing differently to working and thinking politically, working inclusively and using other methods to address change
Reflections

• Deep knowledge of the context is essential
  – Continuity and cultural competency of Pacific Islander staff, and particularly their ability to understand the context, the cultural values/norms and the potential for change, were crucial for any of the success achieved

• It's highly important to be able to identify what kind of input is needed at particular times

• PLP’s experience shows that program work with leaders and coalitions can play a role in contributing to leadership-led developmental change, as long as there is a supportive donor enabling environment.