



Power, politics and coalitions in the Pacific: lessons from collective action on gender and power

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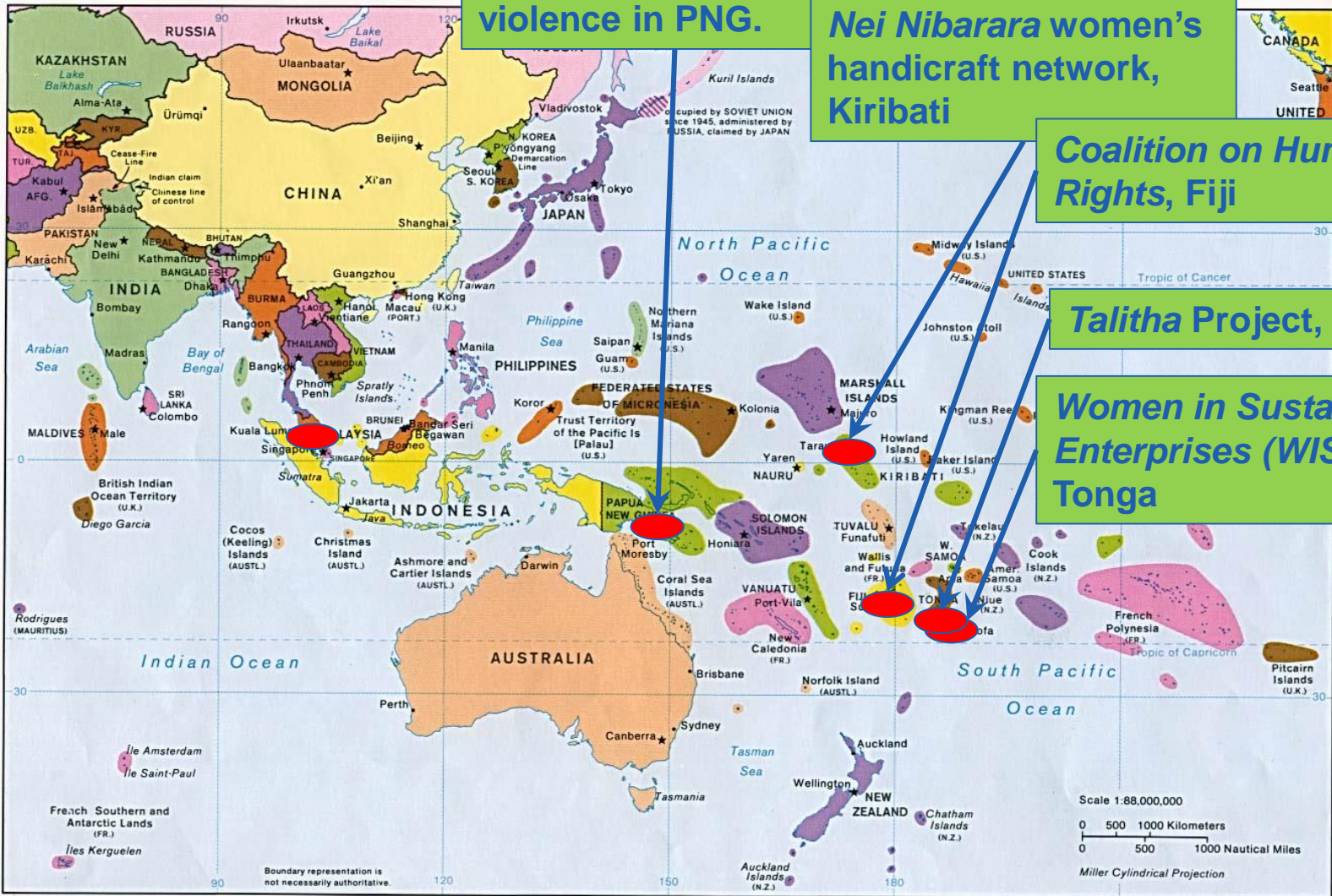
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Four Key Factors

Four key factors which emerged and seem to explain the formation and functioning of the coalitions.

- **Formative events:** important because their nature (locally or externally driven) seems to mould the future shape of a coalition and how it functions;
- **Shared ground or common purpose:** important because clarity of shared ground can help a coalition increase its support base, coherence and influence;
- **Leadership:** important because the nature of coalition leadership can determine its ability to respond to changing circumstances, broker relationships and divergent interests, challenge vested interests and be sustained over time
- **Ownership:** important because the degree to which a coalition's agenda is locally owned and its ways of working are politically salient seem to be key in determining effectiveness;

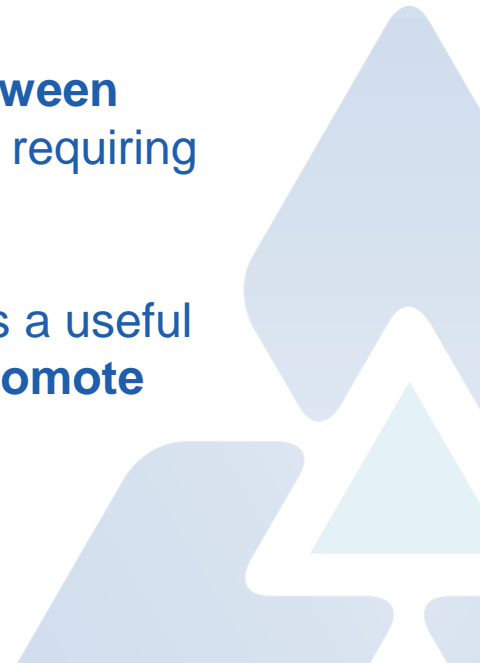
Power

Addressing different dimensions of power

- Lasting and transformative change in gender norms requires work that addresses different domains of change and engages with different dimensions of power.
- All but one of the coalitions engaged in work seeking to address ***visible power*** – i.e. gendered related rules, policies & laws etc.
- All coalitions sought to influence ***hidden power*** (‘who gets to the decision-making table and what gets on the agenda’) occurred largely through **using personal and organisational networks**.
- Participants acknowledged the transformative potential of engaging with ***invisible power*** (gender norms, values, religion, etc), but also articulated the difficulty associated with work in this space.
- However, **directly challenging gender & social norms is risky** and can create a backlash. It is important that local actors determine their own appetite for risk and are politically smart.

Key Findings

- **These factors together** seem to shape the ways in which coalitions address different types of power and the degree to which they can contribute to **more transformative change**, including changes in gender norms.
- **These coalitions are ‘gendered’** as are the political opportunities they confront. This determines recruitment processes, ways of working and strategies that are used, and support needs.
- The interactions between these four factors **differ between coalitions and contexts**, and are ongoing processes requiring flexible and adaptive support.
- Exploring these factors and how they interact provides a useful means of gauging **the propensity of coalitions to promote lasting and transformative change.**



Implications

A tentative hypothesis to be further tested is that Coalitions which:

- are formed in response to local events and critical junctures;
- are locally driven and owned;
- share common interests and sometimes values (or could navigate between conflicting values);
- have adaptive and distributed leadership, which is regularly renegotiated

are more likely to challenge gender norms directly or indirectly, and promote transformational change.

All four unlikely to be in place – but absence of all four may be an issue!

Implications for Donors & Funding Partners

- External actors can play a role in supporting the ability of coalitions to respond to critical junctures or **formative events** if and when they should arise.
- Support and resources should be provided for the debate and negotiation of coalition **shared interests and values**. Time and space is needed within which to reframe gender issues and engage with invisible power.
- Donors need to be wary of presupposing coalition **leadership** structure. Leadership styles and structure may vary over the course of a coalition life style.
- International support for issues that threaten elite interests can create backlash, but hybrid forms of **ownership** can help facilitate this.



"'Born great' sounds arrogant —
Why don't you just say that
you have a genetic propensity
towards greatness?"

Thank you for listening!

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