

# Falling through the net? Gender and social protection in the Pacific

by Nayahamui Michelle Rooney  
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As part of UN Women's flagship report, *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2015*, UN Women commissioned a number of reports globally. This one – *Falling Through the Net? Gender and Social Protection in the Pacific* – takes as its starting point that Pacific women are hardworking, creative, resourceful and resilient. Yet, their predominant portrayal is one of vulnerable victimhood distinguished by limited opportunities for empowerment and intractable gender inequality and gender violence. While recognising women's agency this paper examines the gender dimensions and implications of social protection in relation to rapid transformations in the globalising economies in the Pacific region. The paper analyses the dynamics of gender and social protection in three countries of the region – Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Vanuatu – and explores how best to approach social protection so as to promote gender equality rather than risk reinscribing prevailing gender inequalities. The paper emphasises the need to move beyond bipolar divisions of customary and commodity economies or informal and formal economies to consider the everyday realities of making a living. Women will 'fall through the net' if social protection is unduly yoked to the public sphere of the state and the formal commodity economy in which women are marginalised. Women's own perceptions of their contemporary situation and their agency as both individuals and collectivities should be carefully heeded in finding creative solutions for gender equality in social protection for sustainable Pacific futures. The paper concludes by suggesting that efforts to ensure women's social protection in the Pacific need to be alert to the risks that women might 'fall through the net.' This paper was produced for UN Women's flagship report *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016* and has been released as part of the *UN Women Discussion*

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