

**FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
SUBMISSION
To the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Select Committee
On the Inquiry into New Zealand's Relationship with South Pacific
Island Countries**

Introduction

This submission is from the New Zealand Family Planning Association's International Development unit (FPAID). FPAID works domestically and internationally to increase awareness and action around international population and development issues. The unit's main focus is sexual and reproductive health. FPAID was formed in 1996 in order to further the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. In partnership with organizations in South East Asia and the Pacific, FPAID manages projects that advance access to quality sexual and reproductive health information and services. We also work to expand the capacity of these organizations. FPAID provides secretariat services for the New Zealand Parliamentarians' Group on Population and Development (NZPPD).

FPAID would like to appear before the committee to speak to this submission. The people appearing will be Joanna Spratt (FPAID Manager) and Jackie Edmond (NZFPA Chief Executive).

We welcome this inquiry into New Zealand's relationship with countries in the South Pacific and are pleased to have the opportunity to highlight the important and serious issues of population and development that exist, in various forms, across the Pacific.

1. General Summary

1.1. Efforts to assist Pacific Island Forum (PIF) countries to develop sustainable economies need to address the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all people.

- HIV devastates economies and the spread of this virus across the Pacific will only be prevented and halted through the investment in sexual health.
- Gender inequality prevents half of the population of PIF countries from participating fully in social, economic, civil and political life.
- PIF countries have large youth populations who are entering their reproductive years. In order to safeguard the future of the Pacific

their needs for comprehensive, quality sexual and reproductive health information and services must be met.

2. New Zealand's key interests and responsibilities in countries belonging to the Pacific Forum

2.1. In examining New Zealand's relationship with PIF countries FPAID would like to highlight the importance of ensuring that all PIF country people are able to enjoy good sexual and reproductive health. This is important as a development goal in itself. However, good sexual and reproductive health underpins the elimination of poverty and the achievement of sustainable economic growth. The following key areas highlight how important sexual and reproductive health is in achieving development:

- maximizing changes in populations in order to achieve sustainable economic growth
- the sexual and reproductive health of young people
- infant and maternal mortality
- gender inequality, and
- HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), and
- environmental sustainability.

2.2. Population changes and economic growth

FPAID recognizes the vast diversity of peoples across the Pacific. This diversity is reflected in the different population structures of each country and accompanying development implications. The majority of PIF countries are comprised of young populations. Many are at a stage where they can take advantage of the first demographic 'dividend' or 'window', or take action to achieve this dividend.

Decreasing infant mortality rates through access to improved living conditions and health care leads to a situation whereby couples desire smaller family sizes. When this desire for fewer children is met, a country enters a phase where there is a larger proportion of working age adults (15-65 years of age) to dependents (those under 15 years of age and those over 65 years of age). This is called a 'demographic window'. At this point a county can put in place policies that maximize this large productive workforce to stimulate economic growth.

Key to this is enabling couples in their reproductive years to choose the number and spacing of their children. They require access to comprehensive, quality sexual and reproductive health information and services. This is lacking in many Pacific Island Countries. For example, the contraceptive prevalence rate in the Solomon Islands is only 15% and in Kiribati it is 21%, highlighting poor access to these services.

2.3. **Sexual and reproductive health of young people**

Most PIF countries have large youth populations moving into their productive and reproductive years. In Papua New Guinea the median age is 20, in Samoa it is 19.5 and in the Solomon Islands it is 19 (Median age is the age that divides the population into two equal halves.) At these ages a significant proportion of youth are already sexually active. In order to preserve their health, their ability to gain an education and to enable them to contribute to the economy, young people need access to quality, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services.

Statistics show that the youth of PIF countries are not being provided the information and services they need. Pregnant women under the age of 25 years in Samoa attending antenatal clinics were found to have a rate of chlamydia of 40% (in NZ we are worried about our rates of 4-7%). In Papua New Guinea, the highest rates of HIV infection are in young women aged 14-25 years. Unplanned pregnancies in women aged 15 to 19 years are high across the Pacific, for example, in Samoa there are 83 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 years. In NZ we are concerned about a rate of 32 births/1,000 15-19 year old women. In many Pacific Island Countries, young pregnant women have no choice but to leave school.

2.4. **Infant mortality**

Ensuring that all children are wanted children contributes to their survival. When couples are able to manage their fertility, they have the number and spacing of children that they can provide for. Infant mortality is high in some PIF countries, such as PNG with an infant death rate of 62 per 1,000 live births and Kiribati with a rate of 43 deaths, compared to New Zealand's infant mortality rate of 6 (2003).

2.5. **Maternal mortality**

Maternal mortality is also unacceptably high in several PIF countries. In PNG the average maternal mortality ratio is 300 deaths per 100,000 live births, ranging from 77 up to 570. In the Solomon Islands the ratio is 195 deaths per 100,000 live births. This is compared to a NZ ratio of 5. Enabling women and couples to control their fertility assists in preventing maternal mortality by ensuring that women have children when they are ready – physically, financially, socially and mentally. Sexual and reproductive health services include antenatal, delivery and post-natal care, essential care to provide in efforts to reduce maternal mortality.

2.6. **Gender equality**

Across the PIF countries, gender inequality is pervasive and stifles the potential of women and their desires to access opportunities. The Pacific region has the lowest number of women parliamentarians in the entire world. While there have been some improvements this remains an outstandingly neglected area. The low status of women is related to: high levels of violence against women; persistent high maternal mortality in some countries; low female literacy; and lack of access to land and household resources. Gender

inequality is one of the key factors driving the generalized HIV epidemic in Papua New Guinea.

2.7. The ability of women to access sexual and reproductive health services and information, as well as other services, is closely related to their status in society. Women who are able to control their own fertility are more likely to be educated and to contribute to the economy. In order to empower women the ability of men to work to promote the basic rights of women is also necessary. The realization of women's rights will enable their full participation in their country's development, contributing to building sustainable economies.

2.8. **HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)**

In PIF countries HIV is driven by gender inequality, poor sexual health, stigma and discrimination. The dominant modes of transmission are through heterosexual intercourse, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. This is markedly different to the HIV epidemic in New Zealand. HIV is a sexual and reproductive health concern that should be addressed as such. The establishment of vertical systems to provide HIV-only services will not assist in providing comprehensive health services and information, reducing gender inequality – particularly sexual violence – or to halt stigma and discrimination.

The only PIF country that has a generalized HIV epidemic is PNG. While reported numbers are low (around 13,000), there are estimated to be around 64,000 of the population living with HIV in PNG. The country's weak health infrastructure is struggling to cope. A worst case scenario in PNG is that 38% of the productive workforce will be dead by 2020 (Centre for International Economics, 2020). While political leadership is growing, there needs to be much greater urgency around providing a holistic response before the epidemic escalates into one of the world's worst.

Although the current prevalence of HIV in most other PIF countries is low, recent research shows that STIs are highly prevalent. The presence of STIs increases the chance of being infected by HIV up to ten times. STIs must be prevented and treated to halt the spread of HIV. There is a high prevalence of STIs in PIF countries. For example a study (WHO, 2006) in six PIF countries showed a regional prevalence of Chlamydia in around 18% in pregnant women tested. STIs are a significant health burden leading to life-long impacts such as infertility, ectopic pregnancy and still-births. Reducing STIs will improve the health of all and prevent the spread of HIV.

2.9. **Environmental sustainability**

Environmental issues have been highlighted by the recent emphasis on climate change. There are diverse environmental issues across the Pacific, and many have existed for some time. Population growth in some countries, such as Vanuatu and Kiribati, has led to a situation whereby communities

have exceeded the carrying capacity of their land. For example, in Vanuatu couples are beginning to want to restrict their family sizes so that they can adequately provide for their children, and to ensure that there is enough land for inheritance. However, they do not have access to the services they need to do so. Similarly in Kiribati, on the island of South Tarawa, overcrowding has been an issue for some time, leading to severe environmental degradation. Rising sea levels have made fresh water scarce for several years in Kiribati. Ensuring choice for couples enhances environmental sustainability.

3. Strategic threats for New Zealand's relationship with Pacific Island Forum members

- 3.1. Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, are borderless. Many New Zealanders travel to Pacific Island countries for holidays and can transmit sexually transmitted infections while they are on holiday, or bring them home. It is important to work in meaningful partnership with Pacific Island countries to address the issues around sexual health.
- 3.2. Many PIF countries have large youth populations who don't have access to opportunities, such as health services and employment. Research has shown that in countries where there are large proportions of people under the age of 30 years, whose opportunities have not been invested in, there are higher rates of civil conflict and a lack of democracy. Countries such as the Solomon Islands and PNG which have recently experienced conflict have large populations of young people. It is important for New Zealand's ongoing relationship with the Pacific that an emphasis is placed on investing in young people and providing them with appropriate services and employment, contributing to the prevention of conflict, rather than intervening when it is too late.
- 3.3. In relation to population issues, New Zealand's engagement in relationships would be best focused on choice and the realization of human rights. People from PIF countries value their families and their environment and want to ensure they can protect them. Providing choices is much more effective and important than using approaches based on the concept of population control.

4. Opportunities to advance New Zealand's relationship with governments and peoples in the Pacific Island Forum countries

- 4.1. New Zealand is unique in that it has a large population of people from PIF countries, many of whom are closely connected to their homeland through friends and family. There are numerous opportunities to capitalize on the rich resources in our country in building relationships with PIF country

governments and people. A commitment to cultural sensitivity, ownership and autonomy has developed in the provision of public services to New Zealand people. This is also evident in the way New Zealand's international development community approach their work. Ensuring that this approach is maximized provides a good basis to continue in building quality relationships with Pacific Island country governments and their people.

- 4.2. New Zealand has been at the fore-front of law reform in relation to sexual and reproductive health. There are excellent opportunities to share our experience and lessons learned in relation to homosexual law reform, prostitution law reform and civil unions. Many Pacific Island countries are confronting these issues and New Zealand can provide support and advice in this area.
- 4.3. New Zealand has done relatively well in relation to women's empowerment, although there is still progress to be made. There are opportunities for sharing lessons learned, and legislative and policy approaches taken to getting more women into parliament and positions of influence.
- 4.4. Parliamentary groups such as the New Zealand Parliamentarians' Group on Population and Development (NZPPD) and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, are part of global networks of parliamentarians. These networks provide opportunities for New Zealand parliamentarians to support and mentor their colleagues in Pacific Island Countries, particularly women. There is a great deal New Zealand can contribute in relation to assisting women to stand for election and supporting them once they are elected.

5. Current and potential actions to encourage sustainable economic development in, and two way trade with, Pacific Island Forum countries

- 5.1. Achieving sustainable economic development is closely linked to the social conditions that communities live within. It is imperative that actions taken to improve economic growth do not have negative consequences for the well-being of people in PIF countries. All trade-related agreements and policies need to have comprehensive, independent social impact assessments undertaken prior to implementation. This will ensure that they do not have negative impacts on the living conditions and well-being of PIF country people.

The empowerment of women is paramount to achieving sustainable economic growth. Investing in comprehensive health information and services, including sexual and reproductive health, prevents STIs, including HIV, and infant and maternal mortality. This ensures a healthy population that can gain an education, contribute productively to the formal and informal economy, and contribute to sustainable economic development.

Providing appropriate and secure employment opportunities for youth is also important in encouraging sustainable economic growth.

6. Strategic objectives for expenditure of New Zealand Official Development Assistance in Pacific Island Forum countries

- 6.1. The primary focus of New Zealand's Official Development Assistance programme should be poverty eradication. This involves a broad definition of poverty including absolute poverty (which is increasing in some Pacific Island countries, such as PNG), poverty of opportunity and vulnerability to poverty.
- 6.2. In order to achieve poverty eradication, it is important to focus on the realization of human rights, including social, economic and cultural rights.
- 6.3. As outlined above, investing in the empowerment of women, young people, and in the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all is essential to achieve poverty eradication and sustainable economic growth. Working towards the full implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and the Beijing Fourth Conference for Women Platform for Action will ensure that PIF countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and are able to build societies that are healthy, egalitarian, peaceful and productive.

7. Identify the appropriate level and type of aid

- 7.1. The New Zealand government needs to commit to and set a timeframe towards achieving 0.7% of Gross National Income to Official Development Assistance by 2015.
- 7.2. In recognition of the need to ensure that aid given is well-managed and appropriately targeted, and that it keeps up with absorptive capacity, we support graduated steps towards this target. Aid should be given based on strong principles of poverty elimination, guided by carefully developed strategy and policy, working to build relationships and meaningful partnerships.
- 7.3. In general FPAID supports the Paris Declaration principles of harmonization and alignment. However, there are possibilities for this to exclude small civil society organizations, or those that are not 'welcomed' by the country's government. Aid should also support small civil society organizations. Efforts should be taken to ensure that increased aid is not merely channeled to regional and multilateral organizations (although these are important also). It is necessary to provide a well-thought through approach in order to balance the various bilateral, regional and multilateral

needs, and to ensure that all levels and sectors of society are supported through ODA. This will contribute to building healthy and active democratic societies in developing countries.