



Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

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Field visit

Report on the field visit of the UN-Women Executive Board to New Zealand and Vanuatu 2023

I. Introduction

1. A UN-Women Executive Board delegation undertook a field visit to New Zealand and Vanuatu from 12 to 20 August 2023 as mandated/encouraged by Executive Board decision 2017/8. The last field visit of the Executive Board was undertaken to Ecuador in October 2022. The delegation was led by Sergiy Kyslytsya, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations in his capacity as the President of the UN-Women Executive Board, and included the Vice-Presidents and additional members of the Executive Board (see the annex for a full list of the delegation).

2. The purpose of the field visit was to provide the Executive Board with increased knowledge and understanding of the impact of the programming portfolio of the UN-Women Country Office in Vanuatu as well as the Multi-Country Office in Fiji and the Asia and the Pacific Regional Office in Bangkok, and how UN-Women contributes to the implementation of the host country's national development priorities. Furthermore, the visit aimed at enhancing the Executive Board's understanding of the extent and ways in which the United Nations organizations work together and contribute to the achievement of national development plans and global development agendas. The delegation sought to gather knowledge and insights into the extent of UN-Women's collaboration and partnership with the Government of Vanuatu, development partners, civil society organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders in fulfilling its mandate. The visit was also aimed at enhancing the Executive Board's understanding of UN-Women's role, through its Strategic Note and as part of

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the United Nations country team, in supporting Vanuatu to deliver on its national development agenda and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and evaluating best practices of United Nations programming in Vanuatu and its transferable value to the system at large.

3. The visit included a stop-over in Auckland, New Zealand, which provided the delegation with an opportunity to meet with representatives of UN-Women Aotearoa New Zealand (a National Committee) and the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The delegation also met with the Right Honourable Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, Dame Cindy Kiro, the Governor-General of New Zealand, and Members of the New Zealand Parliament. The delegation's agenda included visits to holy sites of the Māori people and an opportunity to learn more about Māori culture.

4. The delegation would like to thank the Governments of New Zealand and Vanuatu for the warm welcome and for providing ample opportunities to engage in fruitful discussions, including with high-level dignitaries. The delegation would also like to express its appreciation to the UN-Women Country Office in Vanuatu, as well as the Multi-Country Office in Fiji and the Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, for the preparations and successful implementation of the field visit and for the warm hospitality extended to the delegation. The delegation also wishes to express its appreciation to the United Nations Resident Coordinators in the Pacific region, participating agencies and other partners for their cooperation and availability for useful exchanges. Finally, the delegation would like to thank UN-Women Aotearoa New Zealand for its availability and work on providing an interesting programme for the New Zealand leg of the visit.

II. Agenda/visit details

New Zealand

5. The first leg of the journey consisted of three days in Auckland, New Zealand, where the delegation learned more about the work of UN-Women Aotearoa New Zealand and met with Members of Parliament and representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. High-level meetings included the Right Honourable Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, and Dame Cindy Kiro, the Governor-General of New Zealand.

6. The delegation's agenda included visits to holy sites of the Māori people and an opportunity to learn more about Māori culture, history and customs from local guides. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the delegation also had the opportunity to engage with representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGO), including Māori women. Dame Cindy Kiro, who attended a dinner with the delegation and UN-Women Aotearoa New Zealand and UN-Women Australia, is the first Māori woman to serve as Governor-General of New Zealand. The delegation had a fruitful discussion with Dame Cindy Kiro, together with representatives from UN-Women Aotearoa New Zealand and UN-Women Australia.

Vanuatu

7. The delegation's agenda in Vanuatu included a whole range of meetings and engagements in the capital, Port Vila, and a field visit to the island of Pélé. The delegation was received at the high level, including by the Minister of Climate Change. Due to changes in the Government at the time of the visit, senior government officials and other high-level civil servants covered most planned high-level meetings. A series of engagements was also arranged with United Nations organization representatives, UN-Women's programme partners, donors, including Australia and New Zealand, and other stakeholders.

8. The delegation visited a UN-Women-supported marketplace in Port Vila, exclusively for women vendors, and met with some women vendors over lunch. Through the Markets for Change project, the marketplace had been fully renovated in a gender-responsive manner to better serve the women vendors. This included, for example, renovating sanitary facilities and moving them to a safer place to minimize the risks of gender-based violence among the women vendors. Many women reported significant improvements to their income and independence after being provided with the opportunity to sell their products at the marketplace. The Markets for Change project has resulted in real change in women's livelihoods, mobilizing and empowering the women vendors since its inception.

9. The programme included a day-long field visit to Emua market, a UN-Women-supported marketplace through the Markets for Change project to advance women's economic empowerment, and the island of Pélé, which offered the delegation an opportunity to learn about the acute effects of climate change on the island.

10. In Emua market in Éfaté, the delegation interacted with local vendors and was received by the village chief, with a tour of Emua village given, as well as entertainment and refreshments at a local meeting house. Through the UN-Women Markets for Change project, women in this rural village can support their families through their businesses, selling products such as handmade traditional garments and decorative items, among others. The market is strategically situated near a ring road, ensuring a reliable flow of customers.

11. On the island of Pélé, the members of the delegation were met by the chief of the island and given a tour of a local burial site, which had been relocated due to accelerating erosion and rising sea levels. Visible changes have occurred in the last few decades, such as several burial sites becoming submerged underwater, and groundwater supplies being ruined by rising sea levels mixing with freshwater sources. The visit showed the acute impacts of the global climate crisis, especially on developing small island nations, and the challenges faced by the populations and governments of these island nations.

III. Gender equality in New Zealand and Vanuatu: current situation and key challenges

New Zealand

12. New Zealand is considered one of the most gender equal countries in the world and was the first country to allow women to vote in 1893. Women are generally able to continue their careers after starting families, with national

policies guaranteeing a work-life balance. The New Zealand Parliament has a high number of women representatives and for several years the country had the youngest woman Prime Minister in the world, Jacinda Ardern.

13. However, challenges remain, including gender-based violence, especially online gender-based violence, and gender pay gaps. Gender inequalities persist among the wider population and are a particular challenge within Māori communities. Compared with the wider population, Māori and other native Pacific islander communities continue to have high rates of gender-based violence. These high rates are linked to other social issues stemming from past colonialism, faced by Indigenous communities worldwide, such as unemployment, alcoholism and drug use. The Government of New Zealand has made efforts to issue reparations for the country's colonial history, including returning sacred lands to tribes, and to better include and revive Māori people, culture and language in society at the national level. However, many social challenges linked to the loss of land, culture and identity remain in Māori communities to this day. Empowering Māori women to participate in public affairs and improving their representation in politics, as well as addressing issues of toxic masculinity and engaging Māori men and boys in the work for gender equality are important ways to improve the situation within Māori communities.

14. Similar challenges remain among Pacific islander migrant communities in New Zealand. Many face social issues such as homelessness, unemployment and substance abuse, which can exacerbate existing gender equality challenges, including gender-based violence. Providing safe houses for migrant women and girls is an important way to address these issues, in addition to other public policies.

Vanuatu

15. Vanuatu is a low-income small island developing State that continues to grapple with persisting inequalities, including traditional inequalities between genders, which are at risk of being exacerbated by the effects of climate change on the islands' environment and livelihoods. The population is dispersed across many small, often remote islands, which poses additional challenges for reaching people and implementing public policies focused on the advancement of women and gender equality. People living on the country's remote islands often adhere to ancient customs and traditions, which impact the way the role of women and girls is viewed. Land rights are often defined by tribal customary law, but many Indigenous tribes recognize women's land rights. Although male chiefs lead many traditional island tribes, some islands observe matrilineal chiefdom. Furthermore, many traditional ceremonies celebrate women's value to the community or show respect to the mother's family.

16. One of the areas in which Vanuatu has made great strides in recent years is women's economic empowerment, with UN-Women's support having played an important role. Women are active vendors and sell their products at marketplaces, some of which have been renovated through the UN-Women Markets for Change project to make them more gender-responsive. In rural areas, family farming and farming cooperatives have been set up to promote women's leadership in agriculture. Farming and agriculture policies include school feeding and national health programmes that promote a healthy diet. However, as producers of food crops, women are still not at the centre of the

national economy, and their access to land and large-scale crop growing is limited.

17. Like everywhere in the world, the persisting high rate of gender-based violence is a major remaining gender equality challenge in Vanuatu. Gender-based violence can be extremely difficult to address in small remote island village communities, where cultural norms are strong and there are no available safe houses for survivors. However, during the delegation's visit, the Government's efforts and commitment to eradicating gender-based violence were clear. With the support of UN-Women, a new national policy has been designed that includes projects focused on the economic empowerment of women and their broader political participation in local councils, with a view to incorporating and properly addressing women's needs throughout the country.

18. Another major challenge is the impact of climate change, which threatens the entire existence of small island developing States such as Vanuatu. Recently, Vanuatu was hit by two category 5 cyclones within a week. Women and girls are often disproportionately affected by the effects of climate change, with the traditional division of labour – which for women includes collecting water and looking after the family – rendering them vulnerable to climate risks. Food systems are often severely affected by climate disasters, which can directly impact women vendors by destroying their harvest and consequently their income. In Vanuatu, disaster risk reduction and community responses to crises are often carried out via area councils that are aligned based on cultural groups. This work should place greater focus on building women's resilience to climate disasters.

19. Women's representation in politics and the workforce are other areas where gender inequalities persist. Although numbers have improved in recent years, women's employment and inclusion in decision-making still lag behind that of men. Social provisions for an enabling environment, such as affordable and available childcare, paid parental leave and equal pay are needed to improve the situation in a sustainable manner. Policy measures are also necessary to encourage political parties to include more women on their lists; a draft bill was recently introduced in Parliament to this end, which included increasing women's representation in area councils.

20. Many women and men leave Vanuatu for seasonal work in Australia and New Zealand. Although this can be a great source of income, there are great risks of human trafficking, especially for women. Data collection on seasonal work is lacking, but an estimated 20 per cent of seasonal workers are women. In addition to being at a higher risk of human trafficking than men, many women migrant workers have had to resort to prostitution as a coping strategy. The Government is planning to address the issue through legislation and in cooperation with receiving countries in the near future. Vanuatu is already implementing some programmes specifically targeted towards women migrant workers.

IV. UN-Women's presence and focus areas in New Zealand and Vanuatu

21. UN-Women does not have an official presence in New Zealand. Rather, the National Committee, UN-Women Aotearoa New Zealand, works to create

awareness of UN-Women's work and mandate in New Zealand and the Pacific region, and fundraises on behalf of UN-Women. UN-Women Aotearoa New Zealand also works in cooperation with other local and national NGOs, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Focus areas include the elimination of gender-based violence, gender equality in politics and equal pay.

22. In Vanuatu, the UN-Women Country Office is part of a country team of United Nations organizations. The delegation met representatives from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) and the World Bank. The delegation also met with representatives of other United Nations organizations present in Vanuatu, and was briefed by United Nations Resident Coordinators overseeing United Nations cooperation in the wider Pacific region (Fiji, Samoa and the Federated States of Micronesia). UN-Women works actively with other United Nations organizations on cross-cutting thematic issues.

23. UN-Women's country team works in close cooperation with the Multi-Country Office in Fiji, as well as the Asia and the Pacific Regional Office. The Multi-Country Office is responsible for coordinating UN-Women's work in Pacific small island developing States, while the Asia and the Pacific Regional Office coordinates UN-Women's work in the wider Asia-Pacific region.

24. As the lead agency for Sustainable Development Goal 5, UN-Women provides necessary advisory and technical support to the Government of Vanuatu to achieve its targets. UN-Women's focus areas in Vanuatu include empowering women, mitigating climate change and building resilience, eliminating gender-based violence, changing gender-discriminatory laws and promoting women's political representation. UN-Women's advisory support and programmatic actions in Vanuatu are guided by a Strategic Note developed under UN-Women's Strategic Plan 2022–2025.

V. UN-Women's cooperation and partnership with the Governments of New Zealand and Vanuatu

25. In New Zealand, the delegation was met by officials in the Auckland branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The members of the delegation learned about New Zealand's development cooperation priorities and partnerships, as well as its cooperation with UN-Women. Many United Nations projects in the Pacific region, including those implemented by UN-Women, are funded by New Zealand. Gender equality is one of New Zealand's development priorities in the region, in addition to climate change mitigation and Indigenous peoples' rights.

26. The delegation also met with New Zealand and Australian government representatives in Vanuatu and learned more about UN-Women's multi-country programmes, as well as the Government of New Zealand's role in bringing together donors to channel more funding to the region. The partnership with the UN-Women Country Office in Vanuatu received special recognition from the New Zealand representative. In addition to United Nations organizations, the Government of New Zealand invests heavily in civil society work for gender

equality. The importance of partner-led cooperation and coordination between donors was stressed, as was consulting government development partners on their priorities and adaptation models. Many donors arrive in the region with existing governance models, which are not always suited to the region's specific context. UN-Women should continue ensuring that national and local interests are at the forefront when channelling resources through its programmes.

27. In Vanuatu, the delegation was scheduled to meet with several government ministers, but due to political changes in the country at the time of the visit, senior government officials covered most meetings instead. In addition to the Minister of Climate Change, the delegation met with high-level officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Ministry of Justice and Community Services, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity.

28. The meetings with the government representatives provided an excellent opportunity for the delegation to learn about the context and challenges of Vanuatu and the wider Pacific region, as well as the Government of Vanuatu's cooperation with the United Nations, and with UN-Women in particular. UN-Women's representatives from the Multi-Country Office in Fiji and the Asia and the Pacific Regional Office commended the Government of Vanuatu on its commitment to UN-Women's mandate and their successful cooperation in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The UN-Women Markets for Change project, two examples of which the delegation had the pleasure to visit, was mentioned as a particular success story. UN-Women's support to projects such as Markets for Change has helped strengthen local women's networks, which helps all Vanuatu's ministries promote their gender equality objectives.

29. The government representatives thanked UN-Women for their central role in the progress that Vanuatu has made in gender equality and women's and girl's rights in past decades. UN-Women's technical support in developing policies, such as gender-responsive budgeting, was deemed valuable. According to the Government, UN-Women and its mandate are visible and known in Vanuatu. The country's particular challenges were discussed, with many government representatives stressing the need to support local governments and grass-roots organizations. Many women and girls live in traditional communities on Vanuatu's remote islands, and while it is a challenge to reach them, the work is no less important than that carried out in cities and the country's main islands. The United Nations should consult the Government of Vanuatu about programmes and projects, in order to best serve local communities. Most planning and budgeting in the next years will be carried out at the local or provincial levels, with decentralization aiming to increase participation and take into account traditional governance systems.

30. Addressing human trafficking and other risks faced by seasonal workers was raised as a possible area for cooperation between the Government and UN-Women going forward. Based on lessons learned from the two recent cyclones that hit the country, cooperation and the coordination of responses during disasters should be improved. The role of government ministries in providing guidance to United Nations organizations helps ensure that responses are adequate and efficient. Many government programmes and funds are already in place to support women's resilience during disasters, including women farmers. UN-Women aims to expand the Markets for Change project, which could

include supporting women farmers to grow their businesses, expanding their networks and developing their capacities for new income avenues, such as distribution. Overall, the Government's efforts to promote gender equality and lead programmes are holistic but lack resources and data. While these issues cannot be fully remedied easily, UN-Women's added value to supporting the Government's efforts is clear.

VI. UN-Women's cooperation and partnership with civil society and other partners

31. In New Zealand, the delegation met with local NGOs and Māori and Pacific islander women activists. NGO representatives commended New Zealand's focus and commitment to gender equality, stressing the importance of understanding the cultural variety in the Pacific region and empowering Indigenous populations. Gender-based violence is the main obstacle to Māori and Pacific islander women's leadership and needs to be addressed.

32. In Vanuatu, local civil society plays a crucial role in supporting UN-Women's efforts to achieve gender equality. In many remote island communities, CSOs and other institutions, such as churches, are the only way to reach populations. UN-Women plays a convening role between different actors, mobilizing civil society, and leads on multi-level service delivery protocols.

33. In terms of gender-based violence, great progress has been made through partnerships between the Government of Vanuatu, civil society and UN-Women to increase access to justice, the number of women first responders, gender sensitization in Courts and among legal staff, and protection and prevention programmes. A large part of the work to eliminate gender-based violence is carried out in partnership with UNFPA and through joint programming.

34. During the visit, the delegation had the pleasure of meeting with local CSOs, all of which commended UN-Women for its crucial support to their agendas, especially for work related to climate change and women's and girls' resilience and inclusion. UN-Women also supports projects on menstrual health and hygiene, women's leadership and economic empowerment in Vanuatu. As part of these meetings, the delegation visited the Christian Council and the Vanuatu Women's Centre, which run programmes to eliminate gender-based violence. Churches have an unparalleled ability to reach remote populations and encourage behaviour change in Vanuatu, due to their prevalence and the country's geographical and cultural context.

VII. Key findings and recommendations

35. The delegation found the field visit very enlightening and useful, with UN-Women's work and the impact it has on the lives of women and girls, including those in the most remote areas, demonstrated in a very tangible manner. In the challenging context of Vanuatu, despite the climate crisis and a small population spread across a vast area, UN-Women still manages to make a difference through projects such as Markets for Change. In addition, its cooperation with the Government, including its support for the design and implementation of public

policies, and with civil society has created a strong basis for achieving a sustainable change for gender equality. UN-Women makes good use of existing civil society networks, such as churches, which are close to communities and have a wide geographical reach.

36. However, the country is facing other significant challenges, such as climate change, which will have consequences for Vanuatu in the future. UN-Women should strengthen its capacity to support women and girls as active agents in climate change mitigation, as well as their resilience in times of crisis. Gender-responsive approaches to climate change are essential, and will only become more crucial as the climate crisis worsens. UN-Women should work closely with other United Nations organizations and international actors to ensure all climate change response measures are gender-responsive. Joint programming is encouraged and particularly essential in the Pacific region, where distances are great, many islands are not easily accessible and not all United Nations organizations have a presence in all locations.

37. In New Zealand, the delegation found learning about development cooperation in the Pacific region very valuable, as well as becoming familiar with the activities of National Committees, and the role they play in fundraising and awareness-raising for UN-Women. National Committees are important actors in raising UN-Women's profile in donor countries, and in addition to direct fundraising, their work helps make UN-Women's impact better known to taxpayers.

38. National Committees are set up differently in different countries, and although they use UN-Women's branding, they function as independent NGOs. National Committees have some cooperation with each other, as in the case of Australian and New Zealand National Committees, but there is no joint strategy guiding the functions of National Committees in different countries, with each working largely independently under their individual executive leadership. Results in terms of fundraising, operations and impact vary. Since the National Committees carry UN-Women's branding and are often identified as UN-Women by people in their respective countries, it would be useful for UN-Women to develop a common strategy and guidelines for National Committees at the headquarters level, providing them with general guidance about the brand and outlining joint impact goals. National Committees should be encouraged to assess their accountability provisions and analyse their strategies to align activities with UN-Women's overall vision.

39. National Committees can play an important role in fundraising for United Nations organizations. Their value in terms of public relations and communications for United Nations organizations' mandates and impacts is crucial in countries where such organizations do not have their own offices, and where their work might not otherwise be known. This is even more crucial for small United Nations organizations with newer mandates, such as UN-Women. UN-Women could therefore greatly benefit from investing more resources in setting up National Committees in new countries, as well creating joint strategies and impact and efficacy plans for existing National Committees.

VIII. Conclusion

40. The field visit to New Zealand and Vanuatu demonstrated the unique and effective triple mandate of UN-Women, delivering on normative commitments, operational responses at the country level and the coordination of the United Nations system on gender equality. The delegation witnessed first-hand how UN-Women's wide-ranging collaboration with a broad spectrum of stakeholders in Vanuatu helps the country advance its gender equality commitments. The delegation was pleased to observe the positive collaboration between UN-Women, other United Nations organizations, the Government of Vanuatu and other local stakeholders, including civil society.

41. The insights and understanding of the delegation gathered through this field visit will hopefully allow UN-Women to refine its engagements in Vanuatu and the wider Pacific region at the country, multi-country and regional levels. The acute challenges of climate change in the context of Pacific island States pose additional challenges, which need to be integrated and addressed in the work for gender equality, and vice versa. Building women's and girls' resilience and agency in efforts to tackle climate change is key for a sustainable future. The Executive Board would like to see its observations and recommendations used as a reference for future discussions of the delegation.

42. The field visit provided examples and experiences to better understand the value of UN-Women's work on the ground. UN-Women's normative and coordination functions are vital, and the projects and programmes developed in the field show how the Entity's specific knowledge contributes to more effective and impactful actions that deliver actual results in terms of women's advancement.

43. The delegation is confident that the meaningful cooperation between Vanuatu and UN-Women will continue at both normative and operational levels in Vanuatu, and will help strengthen the capacity of the Government of Vanuatu to fulfil its international and domestic commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, while helping the country reach its national aspiration of leaving no one behind.