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# COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE RURAL SECTOR

## Palau



**COUNTRY  
GENDER  
ASSESSMENT  
SERIES**

**ASIA AND  
THE PACIFIC**



# **COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE RURAL SECTOR**

**Palau**

**COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT SERIES**

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
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# Foreword



On behalf of the Ministry of State, it is a pleasure to introduce this important report entitled “Country Gender Assessment of the Agriculture and Rural Sector (CGA-ARS) in Palau”. The CGA-ARS addresses key focus needs for gender, value chains and climate resilient agriculture. This CGA-ARS is a requirement by the corporate Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Country Program Framework guidelines and mandated by FAO Policy on Gender Equality. This CGA-ARS has the objective of revealing gender disparities in access to critical agriculture and rural resources, knowledge, opportunities, and markets.

The objectives of the CGA-ARS are:

- » Inform FAO country level planning and program in line with national development priorities, FAO’s mandate and strategic framework;
- » Facilitate FAO’s contribution to the United Nations Country Team Report with up-to-date and objective information on the situation of rural women in the country; and
- » Facilitate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) monitoring and reporting, and the preparation of the Common Country Assessment for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) preparation.

The assessment will inform future programs, address the specific conditions within the Government, and provide a baseline for decision making. This CGA-ARS was developed in coordination with Palau government through the Division of Gender within the Ministry of State through a consultative workshop with the High-Level Committee for Gender Mainstreaming, a one-on-one consultation, phone interviews and internet. The High-Level Committee for Gender Mainstreaming will continue ongoing efforts to support priority actions identified in the Country Gender Assessment of Palau.

With gratitude,

**Gustav. N. Aitaro**  
**Minister of State**



# Preface

The world is rapidly changing with the challenges of non-communicable diseases (NDCs), climate change, pandemics, and global unrest. The local practices of agriculture have a key role in maintaining food security in a healthy environment. Local resources management practices sustain ecosystems in small island countries like Palau with limited terrestrial and marine resources. Local foods with a more active lifestyle lead to healthy communities.

Palauan women have always played a strong role in local food production through their traditional gardens. Taro, the main food starch and fiber, is a source of pride and prestige for Palauan women. Food security can be enhanced by increased production of products from the agriforests and traditional gardens. Taro, tapioca, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, squash, coconuts, papaya, banana, pineapple, and soursop are a few of the agricultural products in Palau. Value chains that utilize by-products of plants and animals can provide added revenues. Women prepare a variety of taro and tapioca local dishes including soups, chips, and flour. Fruits are used for jams and desserts. Coconut has dozens of uses including oil for cooking and health care.

Capacity building, best practices, technology transfer, sustainable financial mechanisms, and effective coordination and communication are ongoing needs by women and men in order to effectively develop sustainable livelihoods. This assessment provides a background to build upon to provide the support women and men need to develop value chains in agriculture. More work research needs to be undertaken to support women and men in Palau.

The intent of this assessment is to focus on gender, value chains and climate resilience agriculture. A comprehensive approach to the wellbeing of the community is needed in order to build sustainable value chains and climate resilient agriculture. We hope this assessment will serve many constituencies, including those working in science, culture, conservation, tourism, resource management, health, and education. We are grateful to those individuals who shared the knowledge for this project.

**Eunice Akiwo**  
**Director**  
**Division of Gender**  
**Bureau of Domestic Affairs, Ministry of State**

# Acknowledgements



This Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector (CGA-ARS) in Palau was commissioned by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) under the Flexible Multi-Partner Mechanism (FMM) subprogramme, entitled Empowering women in food systems and strengthening the local capacities and resilience of SIDS in the agri-food sector (FMM/GLO/145/MUL), and implemented under Programme 2, Resilience and sustainable food systems. The purpose of the subprogramme, which this CGA-ARS aims to inform, is to enhance rural women's participation and benefit from value chains by promoting an enabling policy and institutional environment and by increasing women's access to and control over productive resources and services.

This programme aims to support the review and formulation of gender-responsive sectoral policies and strategies and to accelerate the implementation of the FAO Policy on Gender Equality and the Asia-Pacific Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2022–2025.

The CGA-ARS was developed by Ann Kitalong and produced by the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Committee, under the supervision of the Gender Division of the Ministry of State's Bureau of Domestic Affairs. Overall supervision was provided through FAO's Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division (ESP), by Xiangjun Yao, FAO Subregional Coordinator for the Pacific Islands; Alejandra Safa Barraza, Gender and Development Expert; and Léa Berthelin, Gender Specialist; and by Fiasili Lam, Policy Officer and Head of Programmes for the FAO Subregional Office in the Pacific Islands. Kae Mihara, Regional Gender Officer for the Pacific; and Nozomi Ide, Economist at FAO ESP; also reviewed and provided comments on the report.

The CGA-ARS team in Palau would like to thank all those who gave their time to be interviewed, shared reports and other useful documents and provided vital information and perspectives regarding the issues explored in this assessment, namely private sector businesses, donors, development partners, and departments and agencies of the Government of Palau. The team would particularly like to express its gratitude to respondents who participated in focus group discussions conducted as part of the fieldwork for their warm welcome and valuable information. The team also wishes to acknowledge the support provided by the staff of the Ministry of State; the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment; and the Ministry of Health and Human Services.

## **Multi-Country Programming Framework for the Pacific Islands 2018–2022**

The Multi-Country Programming Framework (CPF) for the Pacific Islands guides FAO partnerships and supports 14 Pacific Island countries (PICs), including Palau, to implement innovative international best practices and global standards, engaging national and regional expertise, from 2018 to 2022. The PICs national and regional priorities are to build social and ecological resilience to the impacts of climate change, strengthen food security and nutrition and address the noncommunicable disease (NCD) crisis. As women are largely responsible for food production, marketing and preparation, the framework targets women farmers and vendors to ensure they gain access to technologies and inputs that can increase the efficiency of local food systems and improve nutrition. Interventions aim to ensure that small-scale food vendors are able to provide safe and nutritious food while protecting and strengthening their enterprise opportunities. Support

will be provided to improve business skills, plans and models, and generate opportunities for women in aquaculture enterprises.

FAO aims to play a catalytic role in linking agriculture and health, strengthening interagency linkages and developing partnerships to foster a sustainable increase in production, trade and marketing of domestic agricultural products, as well as increasing healthy consumption of diverse, safe and nutritious foods.

FAO assistance focuses on three areas of intervention, with the following outputs: (i) evidence-based recommendations developed and promoted to incentivize the production and consumption of safe and healthy foods; (ii) sustainable, climate-smart practices promoted to help build resilient agricultural, fishery and forestry production systems; and (iii) food control and business practices identified and promoted to facilitate efficient agrifood value chains that provide safe, nutritious and affordable food.

# Acronyms and abbreviations |

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>AGIP</b>	Advancing Gender Justice in the Pacific
<b>ARD</b>	agriculture and rural development
<b>BADG</b>	Bureau of Ageing, Disability and Gender
<b>BANGO</b>	Belau Association of NGOs
<b>BBP</b>	Bureau of Budget and Planning
<b>BNPL</b>	Basic Needs Poverty Line
<b>BOF</b>	Bureau of Fisheries
<b>BWC</b>	Belau Wellness Center Inc.
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>CGA-ARS</b>	Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector
<b>CHC</b>	Community health centres
<b>CROSS</b>	Coronavirus Relief One Stop Shop
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization
<b>CSW</b>	Commission on the Status of Women
<b>C-WEB</b>	Center for Women's Empowerment Belau
<b>DANN</b>	Dilisor Agriculture Association of Ngarchelong
<b>EDCR</b>	Enhancing Disaster and Climate Resilience
<b>EEZ</b>	exclusive economic zone
<b>EVAW</b>	Ending Violence Against Women
<b>ESP</b>	Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division of FAO
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>FY</b>	fiscal year
<b>FWF</b>	Palau Women's Fund
<b>GDI</b>	Gender Development Index
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product
<b>GEF</b>	Global Environment Facility
<b>GHSI</b>	Global Health Security Index
<b>GII</b>	Gender Inequality Index
<b>GLD</b>	global land degradation
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index
<b>HIES</b>	Household Incomes and Expenditures Survey
<b>IBM</b>	incidence-based mortality
<b>ICDF</b>	International Cooperation and Development Fund (Taiwan)ICDF
<b>IFRC</b>	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>KAP</b>	Knowledge attitudes and practices
<b>LRD</b>	Land Resources Division
<b>MAFE</b>	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment
<b>MCCA</b>	Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs
<b>MHRCTD</b>	Ministry of Human Resources, Culture, Tourism and Development
<b>MOS</b>	Ministry of State
<b>MOJ</b>	Ministry of Justice
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of understanding
<b>MHHS</b>	Ministry of Health and Human Services
<b>MSMEs</b>	Micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises

<b>NHRI</b>	National Human Rights Institution
<b>NASA</b>	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
<b>NDBP</b>	National Development Bank of Palau
<b>NDIP</b>	National Disability Inclusive Policy
<b>NDRMF</b>	National Disaster Risk Management Framework
<b>NEC</b>	National Emergency Committee
<b>NEMO</b>	National Emergency Management Office
<b>NEPC</b>	National Environment Protection Council
<b>OAP</b>	Omekesang Association of Palau
<b>OPS</b>	Office of Planning and Statistics
<b>PAIR</b>	Pacific Academic Institute of Research
<b>PALARIS</b>	Palau Automated Land and Resource Information System
<b>PCC-CRE</b>	Palau Community College Cooperative Research and Extension
<b>PCCP</b>	Palau Climate Change Policy
<b>PCS</b>	Palau Conservation Society
<b>PDRMF</b>	Palau Disaster Risk Management Framework
<b>PGMP</b>	Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy
<b>PFMC</b>	Palau Gender Mainstreaming Committee
<b>PIC</b>	Pacific Island country
<b>PLA</b>	Palau Livestock Association
<b>PLGED</b>	Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration
<b>PNMS</b>	Palau National Marine Sanctuary
<b>PPA</b>	Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights
<b>PRCS</b>	Palau Red Cross Society
<b>RWE</b>	rural women’s empowerment
<b>SAMOA</b>	Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action
<b>SBDC</b>	Small Business Development Center
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SGP</b>	Small Grants Programme
<b>SIDS</b>	Small Island Developing States
<b>SIUL</b>	The Institute for Sustainable Living
<b>SKO</b>	Semesemel a Klengelakel
<b>SPC</b>	the Pacific Community
<b>SOE</b>	State of the Environment
<b>TNC</b>	The Nature Conservancy
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNSDCF</b>	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
<b>USD</b>	United States dollar
<b>USP</b>	University of the South Pacific
<b>WEE</b>	Women’s Economic Empowerment
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

# Executive summary



Palau is a diverse nation with different ethnic groups, each with its own set of cultural and social norms. According to the 2015 Census on Population, Housing and Agriculture, the total population of the country is 18 187–9 739 males (53.5 percent) and 8 448 females (46.6 percent), with a sex ratio of 1.15 and a growth rate of 3.6 percent (Office of Planning and Statistics, 2016).

An estimated 20 percent of the population lives in rural areas (51.9 percent males and 48.1 percent females).

The rural population decreased from 43 percent in 1960 to 19 percent in 2020, a drop of 24 percent over a 60-year period.

Agriculture and forestry contributed 1.6 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016, compared to 1.7 percent in 2020. In terms of employment in the fisheries, agriculture and forestry sectors, between 2015 and 2020, the number of men formally employed in these sectors dropped 57 percent (from 646 to 276), compared to a 51 percent increase in the number of women employed in these sectors (from 88 to 133). Comparing urban and rural employment in these sectors, between 2000 and 2015, male employment decreased 54 percent in urban areas and increased 190 percent in rural areas, while female employment increased 30 percent in urban areas and 71 percent in rural areas. Female employment in agriculture as a percentage of overall female employment was greater in rural areas (41 percent) than urban areas (23 percent).

People in rural Palau have limited employment opportunities. According to the 2015 census, 13 percent of the rural population worked in agriculture. As a percentage of the rural workforce (employees 16 years old and older), 84 percent of the rural male workforce work in agriculture, forestry and fisheries; compared to 16 percent of the rural female workforce. There are more rural men with market-oriented skills working in these sectors (107 men in agriculture and a total of 7 men in fishing and forestry) than rural women with such skills (7 women in agriculture and 1 woman in fishing).

While agriculture is the primary industry of employment for rural men, a large share of rural women (59 percent) work as own-account workers<sup>1</sup> and as contributing family workers on family farms. In addition, an estimated 6.3 percent of rural women are engaged in wholesale and retail trade, compared to 5.6 percent of rural men.

Traditional gender roles determine the division of labour and responsibilities between women and men in Palau. Palau has a matrilineal system and women play an important role in Palauan culture as key decision-makers regarding cultural leadership and resource allocation. Women determine the succession of chiefs in their clans (the chiefs being the public voice for the clan in community or village councils). However, men are usually the public voice of the family in community or village councils. A significant aspect of community decision-making is that, in accordance with traditional social norms, the well-being of the community takes precedence over the rights of individuals.

In terms of production activities, women are responsible for taro and tapioca production, cultivating it themselves or supervising this time-intensive work, including planting, maintenance, pest control, harvesting, processing and marketing. Men handle the more physically strenuous work of clearing abandoned gardens and land for planting, burning green waste, maintaining large root crops, harvesting large taro (brak) and tilling the land. In the fisheries sector, men usually fish from boats in deeper water, using large nets to catch larger species, while women harvest shellfish or invertebrates and fish with handlines from the shore or by wading into shallow waters. Women also process and cook fish and shellfish for sale in small markets.

Within the home, women are responsible for early childrearing, cooking and cleaning. Both men and women instruct boys and girls as they grow with regard to their societal roles and train them in the specific skills and knowledge needed to fulfill those roles.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the World Bank (2022), own-account workers are workers who, working on their own or with one or more partners, hold the types of jobs defined as “self-employment jobs” and have not engaged employees to work for them on a continuous basis.

Land and marine tenure arrangements are complex and support customary ownership of land by Indigenous clans. Other tenure arrangements include leases of private, clan-owned or public lands. Traditional chiefs, under the direction of their female counterparts, are responsible for the transfer of clan lands to clan members and to decisions about lease agreements. However, women are responsible for the transfer of use or ownership of taro gardens.

## Summary of findings and recommendations

The policy environment in ministries is supportive of gender mainstreaming, with clear paths to link gender-equality policies to programmes. Ministry staff interviewed during the assessment were receptive to building greater capacity in gender equality and rural women's empowerment and to integrating gender-responsive approaches in their work. Staff indicated that technical capacity needs to be further developed in order to undertake gender analysis in their respective ministries.

In terms of data, there are gaps in sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis, including cultural statistics, related to agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Funding is available to support gender mainstreaming activities in ministries, but analytical, planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms must be strengthened to better track the effectiveness of such efforts.

This assessment identified three main challenges to gender equality and rural women's empowerment in Palau: (1) The contributions of women to household and rural economies must be acknowledged and reflected in policies, strategies, plans and programmes. (2) Gender inequalities affect the capacity of women in Palau to develop their potential. (3) Recognition of gender equality as a driver to sustainable development is beginning to be mainstreamed in public policies, strategies, plans and programme. However more work is needed for effective mainstreaming in all ministries and sectors.

The assessment identifies actions at the governmental level that are key to the systematic integration of a gender perspective in public policies, strategic plans and legislation. These include:

- » establishing an intragovernmental mechanism to coordinate gender equality and the empowerment of rural women across the governmental system;
- » establishing a structure of gender focal points in all agriculture-related line ministries and institutions;
- » improving the collection, production and analysis of age- and sex-disaggregated data on agriculture and rural development;
- » mandating that all relevant ministries strengthen their capacity to monitor and report on the impact of their policies, plans, programmes and services in a gender-sensitive manner;
- » implementing a comprehensive monitoring framework on gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture and rural development, covering key economic, social and political aspects.

The recommendations proposed for community-based action include the following:

- » focus on agricultural programs within communities that are more equitable, practical and beneficial for women, men, girls and boys;
- » develop infrastructure to reduce women's workloads and facilitate their ability to engage in the cash economy to enhance their economic opportunities and contribute to improved family welfare;
- » promote the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) such as radio, short message service (SMS) and social media to allow women to share information on weather, prices, economic opportunities and savings and banking in order to empower them to make more informed decisions about their activities;
- » build the gender-analysis capacity of key stakeholders, such as civil society organizations (CSOs), producer organizations and local governments working in rural sectors, on climate change, disaster management and sustainable development, in order to support the engagement of women in community-based decision-making and other activities;
- » implement gender-transformative approaches to bring women's voices to larger audiences;
- » share lessons learned about the benefits of engaging women and men in work in the rural sectors.

The country gender assessment, including these major findings and recommendations, has been validated by relevant ministries and government institutions<sup>2</sup> of Palau during a dedicated workshop on gender and social inclusion, held in July 2022.

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<sup>2</sup> Participating ministries and entities included the Ministry of State (MOS); the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Environment (MAFE); the Domestic Affairs and Gender Division of the MOS; the Palau High Level Committee for Gender Mainstreaming and the Permanent Representative of Palau to the United Nations.





REVIVING AND REVITALISING  
TRADITIONAL FOODS  
OF BUNGELKELAU



**BUNGELKELAU PRESENTS**



# SLOW FOOD DAY MARKET

**ERNGUUL PARK  
DECEMBER 1ST, 2021  
9AM-1PM**

Shop for the best BRAK (yellow taro) and  
NGIMES (trepang intestine) in Palau  
from local farmers/sellers





# I. Introduction



FAO recognizes that gender equality is both a human right and an absolute necessity for achieving the Organization's mandate to eradicate hunger and poverty worldwide. As established in the FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030, the Organization adopted gender mainstreaming and targeted interventions as a twin-tracked strategy for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the agriculture and rural sectors (FAO, 2020). The minimum standards for gender mainstreaming set forth in the policy include a requirement to undertake a country gender assessment to provide national and international partners with an updated profile on gender and agriculture and to inform country planning. The Palau Country Gender Assessment is aligned with the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031, priority area Better Life 1 – Gender equality and rural women's empowerment, and with Regional priority 4: Building sustainable and resilient agrifood systems in the Pacific SIDS.

The objectives of this assessment are to: (1) inform FAO country-level planning and programming in line with development priorities in Palau and FAO's mandate and strategic framework; (2) facilitate FAO's contribution to the Palau UN (United Nations) Country Team Report with up-to-date and objective information on the situation of rural women in Palau; (3) facilitate monitoring and reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the preparation of the Palau Common Assessment for United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF); (4) contribute towards the formulation of the Palau Country Programme, developed jointly by FAO and the Government of Palau and set forth in the Country Programming Framework.

The assessment also supports gender analysis within the identification and formulation stages of technical assistance projects. FAO's Guide to mainstreaming gender in FAO's project cycle (2017) states that a gender analysis is essential for the preparation of a concept note for programmes and projects, and FAO recommends that a gender assessment be completed prior to any project formulation.

## 1.1 Background and rationale

Palau is a Pacific Island state made up of six island groups and over 586 islands, eight of which are permanently inhabited. The country covers an area of 415 km<sup>2</sup> of land and 616 028 km<sup>2</sup> of exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The population of the country is 18 187, including 9 739 men (53.5 percent) and 8 448 women (46.6 percent), with a sex ratio of 1.15 and a growth rate of 3.6 percent (Countrymeters, 2022). Twenty percent of the total population lives in rural areas (51.9 percent males and 48.1 percent females). From 1960 to 2020, the rural population decreased from 43 percent to 19 percent, a drop of 24 percent over a 60-year period (The World Bank, 2022). In 2015, an estimated 19.4 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line (Office of Planning and Statistics, 2015).

According to the 2020 Statistical Yearbook (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2021), agriculture and forestry contributed 1.6 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016, compared to 1.7 percent in 2020, while the combined contribution of both sectors dropped from USD 4.6 million in 2016 to USD 4.3 million in 2020. The contribution of agriculture and forestry to annual growth in GDP also dropped from 0.1 percent in 2016 to -0.1 percent in 2020. The percent growth in the constant price in agriculture and forestry dropped from 2.7 percent in 2016 to -2.2 percent in 2020.

In terms of employment in fisheries, agriculture and forestry, between 2000 and 2015, the number of men formally employed in these sectors dropped 57 percent (from 646 to 276), compared to a 51 percent increase in the number of women employed in these sectors (from 88 in 2015 to 133 in 2020). The decrease in men's employment was greater in urban areas (67 percent) than in rural areas (21 percent), and the increase in women's employment was greater in rural areas (41 percent) than in urban areas (23 percent). Both men and women are generally engaged in fisheries, agriculture and forestry seasonally and informally as contributing family workers.

According to the 2015 Census on Population, Housing and Agriculture, agriculture, forestry and fisheries employ 84 percent of the rural male workforce (individuals 16 years and older) and 16 percent of the rural female workforce. Agriculture alone employs 13 percent of the rural population. More rural men in these sectors possess market-oriented skills (107 men in agriculture and 7 men in total in fishing and forestry) than rural women (7 women in agriculture and 1 woman in fishing) (Office of Planning and Statistics, 2016).

Palau, like other Pacific Island countries, is highly impacted by climate change and climate-related disasters. In recent years, tropical storms, typhoons and floods have affected rural livelihoods on multiple levels, including loss of crops and depletion of natural resources essential to sustain the rural economy. In 2012, losses totalled USD 10 million as a result of Super Typhoon Bopha; in 2013, Super Typhoon Haiyan caused losses of USD 9.7 million; and in 2021, Typhoon Surigae caused USD 4.8 million in losses. These losses were equivalent to 4 percent of the combined GDP of 2012 and 2013 and 2 percent of GDP in 2021 (National Emergency Committee 2013a, 2013b). The rural sector, including agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, was among the most affected, with total losses and damages amounting to USD 120 000 resulting from Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 (National Emergency Committee, 2013b).

An important aspect to consider related to the agriculture sector and the role of women in production and in the family, is the prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Palau. Such diseases are the main causes of death in Palau, linked to high consumption of imported processed food. Prevalence of obesity is also high. According to a report from the Palau Hybrid Survey (2017) reported that 72.5 percent of the population is overweight or obese. More women (74.5 percent) are overweight or obese than men (70.3 percent).

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are critical to achieving sustainable development at all levels, especially in rural areas with limited public services and infrastructure, where women, girls, men and boys are more vulnerable to poverty. Food security, rural development and the environment are priority areas of the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy (PGMP) (Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs, 2018).

## 1.2 Scope and methodology

The CGA-ARS was implemented primarily through desk research and discussions with the Bureau of Domestic Affairs' Gender Mainstreaming Working Committee (GMWC) and with other key stakeholders. The analysis framework used in this assessment has two components: a situational analysis and an enabling environment analysis. The situational analysis of gender issues in the rural sector is based on desk research, supplemented by site visits and consultations with government ministries and CSOs. This analysis includes qualitative examination of women's and men's access to and control of resources, including economic and political resources, as well as time and knowledge. Family and community decision-making and leadership are considered components of political influence at the family and community level. The qualitative information gathered through this analysis is supported with available quantitative data.

The analysis of the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming draws from the methodology developed by the Pacific Community (SPC) for taking stock of government capacities for mainstreaming gender equality and rural women's empowerment (RWE) across policies, strategies, plans and programmes. The methodology is consistent with FAO's approach, as stated in its Policy on Gender Equality. The factors considered in this assessment include: (1) legal and policy frameworks that uphold and promote gender equality; (2) demonstrated government commitment; (3) clear accountability mechanisms; (4) strong technical capacity; and (5) adequate resources.

The four main data collection methods used in this assessment to inform the analysis were:

1. Desk review of literature to assess issues relevant to gender equality and the empowerment of rural women across sectors relevant to ARS. This includes analysis of policies, strategies, plans and programmes, and other information generated by the government, FAO, other development partners and CSOs.
2. Focus group discussions with women (four women per group) and men (also four men per group) in communities selected in consultation with the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Working Committee. This report presents information gathered through the focus group discussions to illustrate aspects of gender roles and gender issues in agriculture and the rural economy, without generalizing the experiences of the individual communities to the entire country.
3. A stocktake of the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming, conducted with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Environment (MAFE)

and the Gender Division of the Ministry of State (MOS). This involved analysing the policies and strategies of the respective ministries and conducting interviews with senior governmental officials.

4. Consultations with representatives of two CSOs that collaborate with rural women and promote sustainable resource management. In addition, separate interviews and meetings were held with key stakeholders (see annex Table A1). These consultations were conducted to build knowledge and understanding of ongoing initiatives of the Government of Palau and to document good practices from the CSOs and development partners.

### 1.3 FAO in Palau

Cooperation between Palau and FAO has been ongoing since the country joined the Organization in 1999. Over the past 23 years, FAO assistance has focused on building the evidence base and capacities for policymaking, protecting and enhancing natural resources, and building resilience to natural disasters. Important current FAO initiatives support the country's tourism sector, the most significant economic driver, representing 31 percent of its total GDP. The sector is severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and by climate change, which is a significant threat to Palau's population and environment. The country is evolving towards carbon-neutral tourism, through the Palau Carbon Neutral Master Plan and other national policies, such as the Responsible Tourism Policy Framework 2017–2021, and FAO and key partners are supporting this effort. For instance, the Sustainable Tourism Value Chain programme, implemented by FAO, together with Mountain Partnerships, Slow Food, Sustainable Travel International and local authorities, aims to improve the livelihoods and resilience of communities and ecosystems, making Palau the first carbon-free destination, while enhancing women's productive initiatives in the sector. The FAO subprogramme, Empowering women in food systems and strengthening the local capacities and resilience of SIDS in the agri-food sector, under Programme 2 (Resilience and sustainable food systems) of the FAO Flexible Multi-Partner Mechanism (FMM) is a gender-focused intervention in Palau.

### 1.4 Organization of the report

This report contains four chapters. Chapter 1 provides the introduction, background, methodology and rationale of the assessment. Chapter 2 provides

contextual information on the social and economic situation surrounding agriculture and rural development (ARD) as well as human development, including demographic and population dynamics, health, education, employment, infrastructure, sanitation and gender equality. Information in this chapter draws from a variety of sources, including the Ministry of Finance, the Bureau of Budget and Planning, the Office of Planning and Statistics (which produced the 2005 and 2015 Censuses of Population and Housing); the 2006 and 2014 Household Incomes and Expenditures Survey (HIES); and the Annual Statistical yearbooks. Chapter 2 also examines gender inequalities in agriculture and the rural sector, assessing the division of labour, land tenure, food security and nutrition, as well as rural finance, infrastructure and cooperatives. Chapter 3 focuses on gender equality policy and legislation at the international, regional and national levels; provides a stocktake of the capacity of the government to mainstream gender equality; and analyses the enabling environment for doing so. The information provided in the chapter is based on the analysis of key policies and strategies made available during a consultative exercise involving multiple government ministries. Consultations were conducted with central and line ministries, including ministries of agriculture, fisheries, forestry and women. Finally, Chapter 4 summarizes the findings of the assessment and proposes recommendations to support gender equality and the empowerment of rural women in agriculture and the wider rural economy. It also sets forth the limitations of the analysis.

Data collection for the production of the Palau CGA was constrained by the difficulties associated with holding in-person and virtual interviews with a wide range of government and non-governmental stakeholders and women (some without internet access) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to documentation on rural sector programmes and projects implemented by the government was also hindered in the context of the pandemic. A further constraint was the lack or inaccessibility of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics. (Although data was collected through field visits, because of the diversity of Palau's rural contexts, this data is not representative of all rural situations.) Finally, cultural statistics that address the added value of agricultural products to local customary exchanges, such as the first births, funerals and the bestowing of traditional titles, requires further data collection and analysis, as the value of these exchanges to family security and reciprocity are critical to Palau society (E. Akiwo and G. Aitaro, personal communication, 2022).







# II. Country context



Palau consists of six island groups with over 586 volcanic and mountainous islands – 4 deeply weathered high volcanic islands and 582 low and raised limestone islands. The country extends 250 km from north to southwest and has a total land area of 415 km<sup>2</sup>. The climate is tropical and humid, with a mean temperature of 27°C and average humidity of 82 percent. Average annual rainfall is 380 cm. The months of July to October are considered the wet season, and the typhoon season usually extends from July to December. According to the 2015 census (Office of Planning and Statistics, 2016), two-thirds of the population (11 665 out of a total population of 17 501) reside in Koror municipality (including Ngerkebesang and Malakal Islands). Babeldaob Island is the second largest island in Micronesia, covering 80 percent of country's total land area. The country is divided into sixteen states.

Palau became an independent state in 1994 after colonial administration under Germany (1899 to 1914), Japan (1914 to 1944) and the United States of America (1944 to 1994). Before becoming independent, Palau experienced political instability, with the assassination of its first president in 1985 and eight plebiscites between 1983 and 1993. Democratic elections of a president, senate and house of delegates, guided by the Council of Chiefs, has brought stability and peace.

## 2.1 Gender equality and women's empowerment

Palau is a diverse country with different sectors of the population having their own social, ethnic, linguistic, geographic and economic characteristics. This makes it difficult to generalize with regard to gender equality in the country and the status of women relative to men. While existing data from the 2014 Household Incomes and Expenditures Survey (HIES) and the 2015 census highlight differences in men and women's economic participation in paid work, subsistence production and household labour, this provides an incomplete picture of the status of gender equality in Palau. An additional barrier to understanding gender relations is the limited

availability of sex-disaggregated data at the household and community levels. The lack of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics constrains the understanding of power dynamics at the household level (although data on violence against women is available) (Ministry of Health, 2014).

## 2.2 Land tenure

The 2015 Agricultural Census (BPS, 2016) indicates that the majority of agroforests and farms are on private land (85 percent, or 202 agroforests and farms), while 12 percent of farms are on leased land (12 percent) and 1 percent of farms are on clan land. An estimated 17 850 ha of surveyed land is privately owned, and 2 200 ha of surveyed land is public land. In terms of forestland, according to Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) of the U.S. Forest Service, conducted in 2014, 91 percent of Palau's forestland is public and 9 percent is. However, it should be noted that the majority of Palau's land is not surveyed and ownership has not been determined and the FIA estimate of public land does not take this into consideration (Palau. Division of Forest, Land, and Water Management. 2021.).

In Babeldaob, Palau's largest island with 50 percent of the country's agricultural land, the majority of the land is designated as rural public land, ranging from 50 percent in Ngiwal to 94 percent in Ngeremlengui. In 2010, approximately 29 percent of the land was owned by individuals, partners, corporations and traditional clans. In the rural states of Kayangel, Angaur, Peleliu and Ngarchelong, private landowners are the key stakeholders in terms of land tenure. At the national level, most land ownership (71 percent) has not been determined (including 17 654 ha of forest which has not been surveyed) and is under the authority of each state public land authority. As such, the state-level public land authorities play a critical role in land use.

Land and marine tenure arrangements in Palau, covering public, private and clan-owned property, are complex and support customary ownership by Indigenous clan groups. Land is managed through

three systems, depending on its classification: (1) public land leased by the state, (2) private land that has been purchased from or given by a clan, and (3) clan land that is under the trust of clan chiefs for the benefit of clan members. In terms of formal law and policy, land management is guided by different pieces of legislation.

Rural land is governed through a complex system of clan decision-making practices and formal law and policy. At the clan level, land ownership is governed by clan chiefs who are appointed by the women of the clan, generally according to matrilineal lineage. Clan elders function as trustees of the land. Decisions on land exchanges are traditionally made by the members of the clan through consensus. Clan members can use a plot of land within a larger parcel owned by the clan, or they can use the land to farm by a written or verbal agreement. When there are disagreements on land exchange, the decision often rests with the land court, and is made by means of a trial or through mediation (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Environment, 2021). Land in Palau can also be privately owned through direct purchase, inheritance or by having received land from a clan or an individual as payment for goods or services. Other tenure arrangements include leases of public and private land (up to 99 years). State lease agreements (public land leased to private individuals or families) often include the condition that the land be put to use within a certain period of time to either build or farm. If not, the lease will be cancelled, and the land will be returned to the state. In some states, leaseholders can sublease land to a second party.

In rural settings, women and men still maintain quite strict gender roles and division of labour, impacting women's access to and use of land. Taro gardens are usually managed by women and transferred to female relatives. Women who want to use clan land to undertake agricultural or inland fish farming rely on their clan chiefs to grant them access to and use of the land. In addition, traditional structures and social norms constrain women's participation in community and clan meetings where larger land-use issues are discussed. Adding complexity to these dynamics, traditional clan decision-making is oriented toward serving the needs of the community over those of individuals. This can negatively influence receptivity to issues of individual rights, including women's rights to participate as equals in decision-making. In the case of both women and men, it is important to note that land that is farmed, whether it be clan-owned or leased private or public land, is not necessarily owned by the

individual farming it and may have to be returned to an owner or clan once it is no longer in active use.

### 2.2.1 Competing demands for land

Land is a scarce commodity in Palau and land suitable for agriculture and development is even scarcer. Only 14 percent of Palau's land is considered optimal for agriculture (USDA, 1983) and competition is intense for the use of this land for tourism, housing and commercial development. Under the Palau Constitution, only citizens can own land, but non-citizens can lease land for up to 99 years. During the recent tourism boom, demand for land on the part of non-citizen investors increased. Since much of the land is controlled by clans rather than individuals, in some instances, clan chiefs have chosen to lease land, displacing the Palauans who lived there. Furthermore, land pressures due to climate-induced sea-level rise are increasing, also leaving some without land and homes. To address the problem of displaced persons, Palau negotiated a low-interest loan from development partners to expand the supply of affordable housing, with priority for displaced persons.

## 2.3 Demography and population dynamics

The total land area of Palau is 416 km<sup>2</sup>, with a mean population density of 42.5 people per km<sup>2</sup>. According to the 2015 census, the population of Palau is 17 661 (see Table 1). Children under 15 years of age represent 21.6 percent of the population. Youth and adults (persons aged 15 to 64) constitute 72 percent of the population, and persons over 64 represent 6.5 percent of the population. Life expectancy is 68.8 years for men and 75.1 years for women (Countrymeters, 2022).

Seventy-four percent of the population (12 721 people) lives in the urban areas of Koror and Airai States, and 26.3 percent (4 482 people, 52.5 percent men and 47.5 percent women) lives in 14 rural areas (in states other than Koror and Airai). Between 1986 and 2015, the rural population decreased from 31.9 to 21.3 percent, while the urban population increased from 68.1 to 78.7 percent, a difference of 10.6 points in both cases. The rural population decline was due to rural to urban migration over the last 30 years (with the highest rates occurring between 2012 and 2015), to urban expansion (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2021) and to international migration. In 2013, there were a total of 5 590 international migrants, comprising 3 391 men and 2 199 women. The top destinations of migrants were Guam, Micronesia (Federated States



of), Northern Mariana Islands, the United States and Viet Nam. There are also incoming migrants, primarily from China, Guam, Micronesia (Federated States of), the Philippines and the United States (UNICEF, n.d.).

From 1986 to 2015, the mean annual population growth rate in Palau was 1.4 percent, ranging from 2.3 percent in 1986 to -0.41 in 2012 (see Table 1).

The highest population growth rates between 2012 and 2015 occurred in the rural states of Ngiwal (26 percent), Aimeliik (18 percent), Ngchesar (14 percent), Ngardmau (11 percent) and Ngeremlengui (10 percent) (Office of Planning and Statistics, 2016), (see Table 2).

**Table 1. Population growth between 1986 and 2015 in urban and rural areas**

Census year	Population	Annual growth rate (%)	Urban population (Koror and Airai)		Rural population Other states	
			Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1986	13 873	2.3	9 442	68.1	4 431	31.9
1990	15 122	2.2	10 501	69.4	4 621	30.6
1995	17 225	2.6	12 299	71.4	4 926	28.6
2000	19 129	2.1	13 303	69.5	5 826	30.5
2005	19 907	0.8	15 399	77.4	4 508	22.6
2012	17 501	0.41	14 202	81.1	3 299	18.9
2015	17 661	0.03	13 899	78.7	3 762	21.3
<b>Mean</b>	<b>17 418</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>12 721</b>	<b>73.7</b>	<b>4 482</b>	<b>26.3</b>
<b>STD</b>	<b>1 699</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>2 119</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>811</b>	<b>5.3</b>

Source: Office of Planning and Statistics. 2006. *2005 Census of Population and Housing*. Koror; Office of Planning and Statistics. 2016. *2015 Population and Housing Census for Palau*. Koror.

**Table 2. Population growth for each state in Palau from 1980 to 2015**

State	Total area (km <sup>2</sup> ) (2005)	Population (2005)	Population per km <sup>2</sup> (2005)	Percent of total population (2005)	25-year population growth, 1980-2005 (%)	Total Area (2015) (km <sup>2</sup> )	Population (2015)	Population per km <sup>2</sup> (2015)	Percent of total population (2015)	10-yr (2005-2015) population growth (%)
<b>Total:</b>	491	19 905				416	17 661			
<b>Aimeliik</b>	52	272	5.2	1.3	0	37	334	9	1.9	18
<b>Airai</b>	44	2 723	61.9	13.7	75	49*	2 455	50.1	13.9	-10
<b>Angaur</b>	8	320	40.0	1.6	24	8	119	14.9	0.7	-63
<b>Hatohobei</b>	3	44	14.7	0.2	-40	0.7	25	25.0	0.1	-43
<b>Kayangel</b>	3	188	62.7	0.9	34	1.7	54	31.7	0.3	-71
<b>Koror</b>	18	12 676	704.2	63.7	40	58*	11 754	202 (653, excluding Rock Islands)	66.6	-7
<b>Melekeok</b>	28	391	14.0	1.9	-9	25	277	11.1	1.5	-29
<b>Ngaraard</b>	36	581	16.1	2.9	21	29	413	14.2	2.3	-29

State	Total area (km <sup>2</sup> ) (2005)	Population (2005)	Population per km <sup>2</sup> (2005)	Percent of total population (2005)	25-year population growth, 1980-2005 (%)	Total Area (2015) (km <sup>2</sup> )	Population (2015)	Population per km <sup>2</sup> (2015)	Percent of total population (2015)	10-yr (2005 -2015) population growth (%)
Ngarchelong	10	488	48.8	2.4	-32	8	316	39.5	1.8	-35
Ngardmau	47	166	3.5	0.8	3	30	185	6.2	1.0	11
Ngeremlengui	65	317	4.9	1.6	-13	61	350	5.7	2.0	10
Ngatpang	47	464	9.9	2.3	64	35	282	8.1	1.6	-39
Ngchesar	41	254	6.2	1.3	-43	38	291	7.7	1.6	14
Ngiwal	26	223	8.6	1.1	-20	16	282	17.6	1.6	26
Peleliu	13	702	54.0	3.5	13	17	484	28.5	2.7	-31
Sonsorol	3	100	33.3	0.5	21	3	40	13.3	0.2	-60
Rock Islands	47						0			

\* Note: In the 2005 census, the Rock Islands were reported separately from the total area of the states of Koror and Airai, while in the 2015 census the Rock Islands were included in the states.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Republic of Palau. 2005 Census Monograph. Koror; Office of Planning and Statistics. 2001. 2000 Census of Population and Housing. Koror; Office of Planning and Statistics. 2006. 2005 Census of Population and Housing. Koror; and Office of Planning and Statistics. 2020. 2019 Statistical Yearbook. Koror.

## 2.4 National social and economic situation

Palau's economy is driven primarily by the services sector, which contributes 80 percent of the country's GDP (World Bank, 2020). Tourism is the most important activity within the sector, employing 20 percent of the workforce. Annual tourism receipts reached the equivalent of 36.5 to 53.4 percent of annual GDP between fiscal years (FY) 2010 and 2019. From fiscal year 2015 to fiscal year 2019, the number of tourists per year declined from nearly 170 000 (with a tourist-to-resident ratio of 9.5:1, among the highest in the world), to less than 90 000 tourists, contributing just 20 percent of GDP in 2019 (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2020). The other main sectors of Palau's economy are trade, subsistence agriculture and fishing. With an emigrant population of 5 600 (26.7 percent of the total population), mostly in Micronesia (Federated States of), Northern Mariana Islands and the United States, remittances are also an important contributor to the economy, reaching USD 2.17 million in 2019 (World Bank, 2019). Palau depends substantially upon external financial assistance from the Compact of Free Association with the United States (totalling USD 700 million in the past 15 years).

In 2019, Palau exported USD 7 million in goods and imported USD 169 million, resulting in a negative trade balance of USD 162 million, reflecting Palau's high dependency on imports of goods and services

(65 percent of the GDP in 2019) (Lloyds Bank Trade, 2022). From 2016 to 2020, Palau's GDP at purchase prices dropped from USD 289.5 million to USD 247.5 million. The Doing Business Report 2020 ranked Palau 145th out of 190 countries in the overall ease of doing business ranking (Doing Business, n.d.).

As to the rural sectors of the economy, the agriculture and forestry sectors combined contributed 1.6 percent of GDP in 2016 (USD 4.6 million in purchase prices), compared to 1.7 percent in 2020 (USD 4.3 million in purchase prices). The growth of constant prices in agriculture and forestry dropped from 2.7 percent in 2016 to -2.2 percent in 2020. From 2000 to 2019, the GDP rose from USD 146 million to USD 268 million (increasing USD 6 million per year) (Asian Development Bank, 2019), with agriculture and forestry contributing 0.1 percent in 2016, dropping to -0.1 percent in 2020.

With regard to employment, between 2005 and 2015, male employment overall increased 15 percent in urban areas and decreased 23 percent in rural areas, while female employment increased 15 percent in urban areas and decreased 17 percent in rural areas (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2021). In the fisheries, agriculture and forestry sectors combined, between 2000 and 2015, the number of men employed in the sectors dropped 57 percent (from 646 to 276), compared to an increase of 33 percent in the number of women employed in the sectors (from 88 to 133).

Palau's economy has the following seven development constraints: (1) a scattered and sparsely populated island geography; (2) a small domestic market with little potential for economies of scale and scarce business opportunities; (3) limited natural resources; (4) high dependence on imports and vulnerability to external economic shocks; (5) high cost of global supplies due to high international transportation costs; (6) low capacity for major investment; and (7) a small, underdeveloped private sector.

#### 2.4.1 Labour force participation and employment

Two-thirds (64.4 percent) of the population of Palau participates in the labour force. More women (54 percent) are outside the labour force than men (36 percent). The gender wage gap is small (1 percent), but the average gap obscures occupation-specific gaps, ranging from 36 percent (skilled agriculture, forestry and fisheries workers) to 23 percent (clerical) (BPS, 2016; and MCCA, 2018). In 2015, the working-age population comprised 10 693 people: 5 810 men (57 percent) and 4 706 women (43 percent). This represents approximately 77 percent of the population aged 16 and above. The labour force participation rate in urban areas (80 percent) is much higher than in rural areas (20 percent), with little difference between men and women within each area (BBP, 2021) (see Table 3).

The 2006 Household Income and Expenditures Survey (HIES) estimated the Basic Needs Poverty Line (BNPL) for Palau to be USD 244.67 per household per week. An estimated 24.9 percent of the nation

was living at or below the BNPL, with slightly more rural-dwellers living in poverty than urban-dwellers. The 2014 HIES showed a 5 percent decrease in the population living below the BNL, at 19.4 percent. Subsistence living, defined as producing goods for one's own family (for example growing or gathering food, fishing, cutting coconut for home use, raising livestock and making handicrafts) is still common in Palau, especially in the rural areas, and is not counted as employment. The 2014 HIES survey (12-month study) indicated that real household income had increased by 0.1 percent per year. The highest proportions of poor households were in Kayangel, Angaur and West Babeldaob. The relative remoteness of Kayangel and Angaur from Koror is a major factor in their economic disadvantage. In West Babeldaob there is more movement to and from Koror, with many families living in the urban centre during the week and returning to their villages on the weekends. According to the 2014 HIES report, there is anecdotal evidence that working couples leave their children in West Babeldaob villages with their grandparents, and that unrecorded gifts of food and other essentials mitigate the low expenditure recorded by these households in the survey (United States Department of Health and Human services, 2022).

#### 2.4.2 COVID-19 pandemic impact and response

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on Palau's tourism-dependent economy. An extended border closure began in March 2020 and brought tourism to a standstill, resulting in the loss of over 3 200 jobs,

**Table 3. Working age population, employed and unemployed**

Indicators	1995	2002	2005	2015
Persons 16+ years	12 114	14 241	14 755	13 823
In labour force	8 368	9 607	10 203	10 693
Employed	7 759	9 383	9 777	10 516
Employed, male	4 718	5 827	5 982	5 810
Employed, female	3 041	3 556	3 795	4706
Employed, private	5 098	6 338	6 389	5 138
Employed, public	2 661	2 745	3 388	3 247
Unemployed	588	224	426	177
Unemployed, male	321	121	232	105
Unemployed, female	267	103	194	72
Unemployment rate	7.0%	2.3%	4.2%	1.7%

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Office of Planning and Statistics. 2004. *1995 Census of the Republic of Palau*. Koror; Office of Planning and Statistics. 2004. *Republic of Palau 2000 Census*. Koror; Office of Planning and Statistics. 2006. *2005 Census of Population and Housing*. Koror; Office of Planning and Statistics. 2016. *2015 Population and Housing Census for Palau*. Koror.

30 percent of formal employment. An estimated 1 200 of the lost jobs were held by women. Real per capita household incomes are projected to fall by 22.6 percent as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which could increase basic needs poverty rates from 19.4 percent (2014) to 27.9 percent in fiscal year 2021.

The initial impact of the pandemic on the tourism sector was swift and severe. During the first four months of fiscal year 2019 (from October 2019 through January 2020), visitor arrivals totalled 46.4 percent of the year full-year arrivals. In April 2020, Palau made the difficult decision to impose strict public health emergency measures and full border closure, leading to a socioeconomic crisis. Visitor arrivals dropped from 89,729 in FY2019 to 3,412 in FY2021. Even before the pandemic, Palau was vulnerable to external economic and financial shocks and to natural disasters, impacting growth and livelihoods. Palau relies on global external trade, tourism, remittances and foreign aid for domestic economic growth. The country has limited economic resources and lacks financial, technical and technological capacity to effectively adapt and manage large-scale disasters, including pandemics. In 2019, the Global Health Security Index (GHSI) ranked Palau 178<sup>th</sup> out of 195 countries as poorly prepared for a pandemic.

The socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic differ for men and women in Palau. For instance, in rural communities, women are expected to provide funds and food for traditional community events. Under the current economic hardships, this puts pressure on the women and their spouses, leading to stress and tension in the home. Furthermore, restricted movement and confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic is particularly stressful for women, who are the main caregivers and managers of the household. Closure of schools requires that parents and guardians home-school their children, a task that falls to the women. Mothers must sometimes take time off from work to care for their children and instruct them. Teachers, on the other hand, many of whom are women, work longer hours to help parents who have limited access to or knowledge of the internet. Among female-headed households, loss of income related to the impacts of the pandemic creates more stress on limited resources and increases reliance on local, less-expensive food sources that are more labour-intensive and less accessible if you do not have a farm or garden or a relative who can fish. For all family members – men, women and children – the fear of the COVID-19 pandemic causes added psychological stress.

To offset the socioeconomic crisis arising from the pandemic and border closures, the Government of Palau responded with economic stimulus and relief packages, which included: (1) national funds for worker and business relief (Coronavirus One Stop Shop Relief Act) for all residents, providing unemployment relief and temporary job placements; and (2) relief packages for the unemployed funded by the United States CARES Act for citizens of Freely Associated States. Both programmes were extended for an additional three months by the President and the Ministry of Finance. Since then, additional financing packages for disaster relief have been arranged with Asian Development Bank (ADB) funds.

The 2021 International Labour Organization (ILO) Tripartite Rapid Assessment on the Impact of COVID-19 on Employment and Businesses in Palau studied the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on businesses, workers and household incomes. The assessment applied an approved sampling process and methodology, field surveys and focus group discussions, conducted in collaboration with national tripartite partners – government, employers and workers. The assessment surveyed the general population (402 households), the population re-employed through relief programmes (230) and tourism-sector businesses (50+ respondents). The survey was administered during September and October 2020. Target groups included those from the outlying states of Kayangel, Angaur, Peleliu, Hatohobei and Sonsorol (Kitalong, 2020).

According to the rapid assessment, nearly 40 percent of businesses in the country closed temporarily, 3 percent closed permanently, 43 percent were partially operational and 14 percent remained open. Some businesses (24 percent) were able to survive up to one year, while most businesses (70 percent) were predicted to close if no relief measures were provided by December 2020 to January 2021.<sup>1</sup> However, government support was provided, and businesses remained operational. Over half (55 percent) the businesses throughout the country applied for government support, and 75 percent of these were provided with a stimulus package. An additional 9 percent of businesses are still planning to apply for support and 10 percent were unaware of the programmes. No private-sector businesses were opting to diversify – all planned to continue their present line of activity. No specific government programmes for re-skilling or upgrading skills were in place to support business, although some

1 Coronavirus One Stop Shop Act (CROSS) provided USD 20 million for unemployment and temporary jobs through fiscal year 2021.

businesses implemented internal staff training (such as scuba diving certification). It was also found that most businesses had no business-continuity plans. Finally, the assessment showed that 90 percent of the businesses were comfortable with re-opening their businesses with COVID-19 pandemic safety protocols in place and with the implementation of business continuity training.

The assessment also showed that more full-time employees (23 percent of surveyed employees) lost their jobs, compared to those working part-time (13 percent of surveyed employees). Half the respondents indicated no change in their income, while nearly a third indicated a decrease in income. Many unemployed people were given jobs through re-employment programmes (although there was no review process to determine the effectiveness the re-employment programme). Over half (67 percent) the respondents from re-employment programmes received income primarily from their salaries and required financial support. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents (74 percent) stated that food was their major household expense. Fifteen percent of the respondents received financial assistance, including workers who were laid-off and those with reduced hours, who received unemployment relief funds.

Sixty-two percent of the households surveyed had incomes of less than USD 1 000 per month, compared to 46 percent of households under the re-employment programme. An estimated 67 percent of households under the re-employment programme were dependent upon their salary as the main source of income. Seventy percent of the households indicated that their incomes were not affected by the emergency, while 47 percent of households in the re-employment programme indicated their income was affected. Seventy-four percent of households indicated food was their main expense. The households surveyed received more income (on average USD 5 072.47), compared to households in the re-employment programme (average USD 1 850.22). Half the households were not prepared for the pandemic, and less than 15 percent were fully prepared. Half the households surveyed indicated their happiness had not changed, compared to 33 percent of the households in the re-employment programme. Between 40 and 43 percent of households indicated no change in their social and religious gatherings during the pandemic period, while less than a third of the households indicated that there was a slight change.

Recommendations based upon the findings of this assessment were the following: (1) Stimulate the economy and employment activities through the Palau National Marine Sanctuary (PNMS), niche tourism and innovative food security policies. (2) Support businesses, including micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and informal businesses, with incubator initiatives, youth entrepreneurship, innovative financial packages, tax relief and e-commerce readiness training. (3) Protect employees in the workplace with an employee preparedness strategy, targeted support, reskilling and skills upgrading, and capacity building of tripartite partners. (4) Prepare Palau youth for the future of work by addressing emerging skill gaps and providing apprenticeship and volunteer programmes. (5) Help households with stimulus packages, physical and psychosocial counselling support and short-term socioeconomic support programmes, especially for female-headed households. These programmes should be designed to meet the basic needs of mothers and children in terms of access to education, health services and healthy foods, as well as providing them with the skills and resources needed to establish kitchen gardens at homes and schools.

In addition to the impacts of the pandemic on the population at large, persons with pre-existing vulnerabilities are being disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. These groups include the elderly, persons with disabilities, the poor, small-scale agricultural producers, and victims of domestic and gender-based violence. The ADB's project, COVID-19 Response for Affected Poor and Vulnerable Groups, implemented in Fiji, Palau and Vanuatu, aims to address the needs of poor and vulnerable groups affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It will take a comprehensive approach to address the complex and varying levels of vulnerabilities affecting these marginalized populations. The project's objective is to improve the capability of vulnerable groups to withstand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by providing immediate assistance to these groups while positioning them to achieve higher levels of economic and social well-being post-COVID-19 pandemic. The project will: (1) respond to the immediate physical, mental, social and environmental needs of home-bound older people and persons with disabilities; (2) boost local food security and help smallholder agricultural producers generate income; and (3) help address family and gender-based violence.

In terms of the health impact of the pandemic, Palau was COVID-19 pandemic free until January 2022. As of Friday, 20 May 2022, the cumulative number of cases in



the country was 4 967 (22 percent of the population), with 4 240 recovered, no hospitalizations and 6 deaths (Palau Health, 2022).

### 2.4.3 Poverty and social protection

According to a Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) conducted in 2014, an estimated 1 779 residents of Palau had incomes just above the poverty line and were vulnerable to falling into poverty from economic shocks. Among the population below the poverty line, the survey found that 0.2 percent were extremely poor (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2017). Comparing the findings of the 2006 HIES to those of the 2014 HIES, poverty rates fell by 5 points, from 24.9 to 19.4 percent. Palau is on track to reach the SDG target of halving poverty rates by 2030, although it is not on track to reach the national target of zero poverty.

The Gini coefficient is a measure of income distribution across a country; “1” denotes absolute inequality, while “0” denotes absolute equality. Palau’s Gini coefficient was 0.38 in 2006, compared to 0.36 in 2014 (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2017). Among urban households, the Gini coefficient was 0.37 in 2006, compared to 0.47 in 2014, indicating a widening of urban inequality. In rural households, on the other hand, the Gini coefficient dropped from 0.40 in 2004 to 0.36 in 2014, indicating a narrowing of rural inequality (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2017). There was a significant expenditure gap between low- and high-expenditure households. In 2014, low-expenditure households (the lowest 30 percent) controlled 4 percent of household income, compared to high-expenditure households (highest 30 percent), who controlled 56 percent of household income.

The 2014 HIES showed that the poorest households (50 percent of households) accounted for 15 percent of total household income. Twice as many women-headed households (18 percent) had incomes of less than USD 5 000 per year, compared to households headed by men (9 percent). The average monthly per capita income for Palauan households headed by women was USD 660, compared to USD 800 for households headed by men, indicating a gender gap of 18 percent. In terms of poverty among foreign households, poverty rates were higher for households headed by citizens of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands (34.2 percent) than households headed by Palauans (21.1 percent) and Filipinos (12.7 percent), and the gender gap among non-Palauan households was 22 percent (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2017). Income generated from agriculture, fishing, livestock,

handicrafts and home production was higher in rural households (5 percent) than in urban households (1 percent). Urban household incomes were 23 percent higher than rural household incomes. Rural households have higher percentage of subsistence income (5 percent) than urban households (1 percent). This disparity in poverty levels along urban-rural lines will deepen and worsen if living standards, services, infrastructure and household incomes in rural areas are not improved. Employment in the formal economic sector and higher levels of education are factors that protect against poverty, especially for women and rural households (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2017). Improving these factors is key to increasing the resilience of the most vulnerable sectors and to Palau achieving the targets of Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2 and 8.

According to the “Pathways to 2030-First National Review on the SDGs” by the Republic of Palau in 2019, **social protection** refers to policies and programmes designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by creating efficient labour markets, diminishing exposure to economic risks, enhancing resilience, and providing protection against unemployment, sickness and disability, and support for the elderly. The cultural tradition of “sharing and caring” is an integral part of social protection in Palau. To supplement the tradition of “sharing and caring,” the Palau government provides direct assistance to senior citizens and persons with disabilities and support to low-income households through subsidized public services.

Overall, the non-poor are the main beneficiaries of social protection because they are the main contributors to social insurance programmes. The poor are less likely to be employed in the formal sector and, thus, to contribute to social insurance programmes. Likewise, women’s participation in the formal sector of the labour force is much lower than that of men. Thus, women contribute less to these programmes and benefit less from them (Asian Development Bank, 2016b). Furthermore, the increasing occurrences of natural disasters, such as typhoons and floods, add to the multiple risks experienced by already vulnerable rural populations.

For **senior citizens**, a government social security system pays retirement income to residents over 60 years of age who have worked in Palau (or whose deceased spouse worked in Palau), whether in the public or private sector. Those who have worked in the public sector are eligible for a pension under the Civil Service Pension Plan. In 2015, 75 percent of senior

citizens received a pension or social security. Other social protection benefits for senior citizens include services at community-based senior centres and home-based health care for the homebound. Senior citizens receive a 75 percent subsidy for health care costs in the government system, and for those who do not work, the government pays their Health Care Fund premium with funds derived from tobacco taxes. In spite of these protection schemes, 17 percent of senior citizens lived below the national poverty line (a rate lower than that of the population at large), and 7 percent reported zero income, indicating that some were still left behind.

The government provides some support for **persons with disabilities**. Those with severe disabilities are eligible to receive social security. Persons with severe disabilities who are homebound are eligible for a government stipend of USD 100 per month. Persons who are confined to a wheelchair or who are blind are eligible for a stipend of USD 70 per month (Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs, 2019). This is not a living wage but a small income stream to provide a measure of self-sufficiency. The 2017 Palau Disability Report, developed by the Office of Planning and Statistics with support from UNICEF and the Pacific Community, found that, despite equality under the law, there are significant disparities between persons with disabilities and the general population with respect to education, employment and poverty status.

In terms of **protection from unemployment**, Palau's unemployment rate is low, possibly artificially low, due to the high rates of emigration to the United States. The formal sector labour force is dominated by non-Palauans (Ministry of Finance, 2019), while public sector employment at administrative and supervisory levels is dominated by Palauans. Weak labour support services for Palauan workers were highlighted as contributing to both emigration and the country's dependence on foreign workers. Improved job placement services and labour laws that protect citizens from exploitive labour practices are needed to better support Palauan workers. A positive recent development with regard to unemployment protection is the Coronavirus One Stop Shop Act (CROSS), which includes an unemployment programme.

With regard to **protection against low income**, the national minimum wage (USD 3.50 per hour) is a form of social protection that disproportionately benefits low-wage earners. Other than the stipend for persons with disabilities, there are no direct monetary payments for those who are unemployed or earning a low income.

Those individuals, however, may be eligible for the Lifeline Electric, Water, and Sewer Subsidy, which includes covering the first 150 kilowatts of electric usage and the first 5 000 gallons of water used. As of January 2020, 118 households participated in this programme (Palau Public Utilities Corporation, 2020). Furthermore, a No-Income Assistance Programme provides support for utilities. Four households participated in this programme in 2017. Finally, health care charges in the government system are assessed based on a sliding fee schedule, providing an additional subsidy for low-income earners and their dependents (Republic of Palau, 2019).

#### 2.4.4 Education and literacy

According to estimates, 14 194 persons, 99.53 percent of the population 15-years-old and above, are able to read and write (only 68 adults are illiterate). The literacy rate for the adult male population is 99.5 percent (7 559 persons), with 38 adult men who are illiterate. The literacy rate for the adult female population is also 99.55 percent (6 635 persons), with 30 adult women who are illiterate. Youth literacy rates (those between the ages of 15 and 24) are 99.8 percent for both males and females (Countrymeters, 2022).

Universal access to primary, secondary and tertiary education is guaranteed. Palau has achieved its education goals in terms of enrolment and gender parity. The gross enrolment rate for primary years (6 to 13 years old) is 112 percent for males and 111 percent for females. By the end of grade six, 96 percent of students have achieved minimum competency levels in reading and numeracy. The gross enrolment rate in secondary education is 112 percent for males and 109 percent for females (Ministry of Education, 2016). Palau has achieved high literacy rates for youth (15 to 24 years old): 98.2 percent for males and 99.2 percent for females (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2015). Palauan women have higher levels of educational attainment than men: 46 percent of women have post high school education, compared to 37 percent of men (Office Planning and Statistics, 2016). However, Palauan women are underrepresented in science, technology and engineering (STEM) disciplines. Only 6 percent of females are educated in engineering or construction. In information and communications technologies, 47 percent are females and 53 percent are males. Women are overrepresented in business (71 percent). There is approximate gender parity in natural science, mathematics and statistics (48 percent women, compared to 52 percent men).



In the 2014/15 school year, there were 223 teachers in public primary and secondary schools, most of whom were female (77 percent). The level of teacher qualification is an important indicator of the quality of education. In 2015, 60 percent of primary school teachers possessed only a high school diploma, followed by 29 percent with an Associate in Arts (AA) or Associate in Science (AS) degree, and 9 percent with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree. Significantly more teachers possessed higher qualifications in secondary schools, with 50 percent recorded as having a BA or BSc degree in 2015.

In Palau there are no fees for school attendance at the primary and secondary levels. However, children are often expected to wear uniforms and provide their own supplies, which can place a financial burden on rural families who have subsistence lifestyles. In 2021, a school breakfast programme was initiated in the public elementary schools.

Rural schools in remote locations have difficulty attracting and retaining teachers and are often constrained by limited educational materials, poor infrastructure and limited telecommunications. Where students travel long distances to secondary school, girls can be at a disadvantage as their families may not allow them to travel alone or stay at boarding facilities. Students in remote areas perform below the level of those in urban centres. Health education is taught in the elementary schools and includes sexual and reproductive health, beginning as early as fourth grade. This is important especially in rural areas where there is limited access to health services and contraception. (Adolescent pregnancy has a heavier impact on girls than boys, with much more social stigma and judgement directed at girls who get pregnant than at the boys who impregnate them. There are no education policies requiring pregnant girls to withdraw from school; however, girls frequently stop their education and do not return to school once they have a child.)

#### 2.4.5 Basic infrastructure

According to the Ministry of Finance (2020), as of 2015, most households (91 percent) have access to a safe supply of water from either metered, communal or roof-tank sources, and 100 percent of households have access to electricity in both urban and rural areas. Most homes rely on grid electricity in Koror and Babeldaob, while the outer lying states have hybrid systems with generators and solar energy. All households have sanitation facilities – 95 percent have toilet facilities

using the public sewer system (52 percent) or septic tanks (43 percent), and 5 percent use other means (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2021). However, although the infrastructure is in place, the availability of water and electrical services varies greatly and water services do not necessarily meet sanitation standards. Services in urban and rural areas vary depending on the remoteness of communities, and while services may exist and be counted in census data, failure of supply is common in both urban and rural areas. Where services are poor or intermittent, the workload of rural women increases. Furthermore, although most homes have sanitation facilities, the lack of private and safe sanitation facilities in schools and markets prevents girls and women from fully exercising their rights to education and economic participation, particularly when they are menstruating.

In rural areas and in the outer islands, transportation infrastructure is limited. This not only constrains rural women from accessing health services, but also makes it more difficult for them to market surplus goods from their agricultural activities.

#### 2.4.6 Health

According to the “Pathways to 2030-First National Review on the SDGs” by the Republic of Palau in 2019, the “big five” non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Palau are cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, chronic obstructive lung diseases and mental health disorders. NCDs are at epidemic levels in Palau and account for 80 percent of all deaths, and for low life expectancy, especially among men (57.6 years old, compared to women’s life expectancy, at 74.5 years old) (Ministry of Health, 2014). In 2016, 72.5 percent of the population was overweight or obese, with higher rates among women (74.5 percent) than among men (70.3 percent) (Republic of Palau, 2019). Palau also has one of the world’s highest rates of schizophrenia and high rates of depression.

Between 2008 and 2013, the incidence-based mortality (IBM) rate<sup>2</sup> from cancer was higher for men (151.5 per 100 000 persons) than for women (107.7 per 100 000 persons). The IBM rates per 100 000 men for the top types of cancer were as follows: lung (35.6), liver (28), prostate (26.9) and oral cavity and pharynx (16.8). The IBM rates per 100 000 women for the top types of cancer were as follows: lung (19.4), liver (15.2), cervical (11.7), uterine (8.9), breast (5.8), and oral and pharynx (5.2). Recommendations to counter these high levels of cancer-related mortality include early screening,

<sup>2</sup> Incidence-based mortality (IBM) rates were obtained by dividing the number of deaths among incident cases (primary site diagnosis code) by the population. The values are given per 100,000 people.

vaccination, a healthy diet and daily activity (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2020). The Palauan population is also exposed to communicable diseases such as dengue fever, diarrheal illnesses and leptospirosis (a bacterial disease transmitted from animals to humans) (Ministry of Health, 2014).

In terms of health care facilities, according to Rural Health Information Hub (2022):

Palau's Division of Primary and Preventive Health has four Community Health Centres (CHCs), the Northern CHC in Ngarchelong, the Eastern CHC in Melekeok, the Western CHC in Ngaremlengui, and the Southern CHC in Peleliu, as well as four satellite dispensaries. According to the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office, Palau has a 180-bed hospital, the Belau National Hospital. As of 2013, Palau was served by 26 physicians and, as of 2010, there were 120 nurses and midwives.

Weaknesses in health care systems have a greater impact on women than men, and in Palau this is especially true for rural women, who have limited access to health care facilities. Division of labour, traditional gendered caregiving roles and the nature of reproduction mean that women need to seek health care for themselves and their children more frequently than men.

As of 2021, 80 percent of the population has access to health care and 20 percent must undertake lengthy and expensive automobile or boat trips to reach such

services (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). Geographic isolation and the relatively high cost of transportation are barriers to adequate health care. There is no public transportation in Palau and private taxi rates are high relative to the income level of those who use them.

Access to safe water and sanitation is also a factor in health. Even though 92 percent of the people in Koror have access to public water, often the water must be boiled to ensure complete safety from parasitic and bacterial contamination. Sanitation and hygiene conditions are below the standards of the United States, with only 71 percent of households having adequate sewage disposal and 81 percent lacking complete plumbing (32 percent utilize outdoor privies and 2 percent have no toilet facilities at all). Nearly three-fourths of the households (73.6 percent) have only cold water available for use and 6 percent have no piped water (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022).

As to recent changes in health-related factors, fertility rates in Palau have declined from 2.84 in 1990 to 2.4 in 2015 (The Global Economy, 2022.) Overall prevalence of contraception use increased from 17 percent in 2002 to 22 percent in 2010 (The World Bank, 2022).<sup>3</sup> A comparison between 2012 and 2016 shows that cigarette smoking and chewing betel nut with tobacco increased over the 4-year period (see Table 4), while overweight/obesity and hypertension decreased, although high cholesterol increased.

**Table 4. Comparison of the 2012 Palau STEPS results to the 2016 Palau Hybrid Survey of adults 25–64 years old**

Activity	2012	2016
<b>Tobacco use</b>		
Cigarette smoking	16.6%	20.6%
Chewing betel nut with tobacco	46.2%	54.2%
<b>Alcohol use</b>		
Binge drinking (5+ drinks per day)	29.3%	29.2%
<b>Chronic conditions</b>		
Overweight/obesity	77.6%	71.7%
Diabetes (self-reported on medication or $\geq 126$ mg/dL)	20.4%	21.1%
Hypertension (self-reported on medication or $\geq 140/90$ )	49.0%	30.1%
High cholesterol (self-reported on medication or $\geq 240$ mg/dL)	7.2%	11.0%

Source: Author's own elaboration based upon the 2012 Palau STEPS and 2016 Palau Hybrid Survey.

<sup>3</sup> Data disaggregated by urban or rural area are not available.

There was no change in diabetes prevalence. Note that some of these changes could be explained by shifting demographics (mostly due to immigration).

Priority actions for health improvement in Palau include the following: (1) reduce overweight and obesity; (2) improve diet/nutrition and increase physical activity; (3) address tobacco and betel nut use; (4) strengthen NCD screening programmes among adults; (5) provide appropriate cessation services for substance use, specifically tobacco and alcohol; (6) consider policy approaches to reduce certain risk factors; and (7) support chronic disease self-management programmes to help individuals with NCDs control their disease (Republic of Palau, 2015).

Women have an important role to play in improving the status of health and nutrition in Palau. Although food security responsibilities are shared between men and women (men usually fish and hunt, and are primarily responsible for supplying protein) women usually prepare most of the meals and are primarily responsible for nutrition and health. Depending on their level of awareness regarding nutrition and their horticultural knowledge, women's management of kitchen and subsistence food gardens can contribute to family well-being in significant ways, including fostering healthy eating habits in children and reducing the prevalence of non-communicable diseases.

#### **2.4.7 Violence against women**

Palau has made progress towards implementing the 2012 Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration in the areas of decision-making and the elimination of violence against women. In 2012, Palau passed the Family Protection Act (FPA), which criminalizes domestic violence, institutes a no-drop policy for domestic violence and stipulates that customary restitution for domestic violence cases does not eliminate related criminal charges. There are ongoing efforts within the Ministry of Justice and the Senate to establish a shelter and one-stop-shop to assist women who are victims of domestic violence and their children (U. Sengebau Senior, personal communication, 2020; R. Inabo, personal communication, 2022).

A 2013 study found that 23 percent of women experienced physical violence by a partner in their lifetime. Twenty-five percent of women 15 years and older had experienced physical violence with an intimate partner, while 15 percent of women 15 years and older had experienced violence by a non-intimate partner. Physical violence was highest among 15- to 29-year-old women, who were either slapped, or had something thrown at them (17 percent), or were

pushed or shoved (16 percent). Nearly 5 percent of ever-pregnant women had experienced physical violence during pregnancy, mainly by the father of the child. Sexual violence was experienced by 10 percent of women, who were either forced to engage in sexual intercourse (8 percent) or were afraid to refuse it (7 percent). Women with an elementary level education were more likely to report sexual violence (20 percent) than women with secondary (12 percent) and tertiary (8 percent) education. Emotional abuse, experienced by 23 percent of women, was higher among Christian women (Seventh Day Adventists – 32 percent, Evangelical Protestants – 26 percent, Roman Catholics – 21 percent), who were either scared or intimidated (15 percent), insulted (14 percent), or humiliated (12 percent). Economic abuse was experienced by 6 percent of women and was highest among 55- to 59-year-olds who had their earnings or savings taken away (4 percent) and were refused money for household expenses (3 percent) (Ministry of Health, 2014).

There is no significant difference between violence against women in rural vs urban areas. An estimated 25.3 percent of rural women experienced violence during their lifetime, compared to 25.2 percent of urban woman. Such high prevalence of violence against women undermines social cohesion and capacity in communities and families, inhibits and slows the achievement of development objectives, negatively impacts children, and reduces economic and social capital. Palauan society tends to use the informal justice system to settle family-related issues, including intrafamily violence against women, rather than the formal justice system. Under the informal justice system, victims are provided with monetary compensation and protection, while the formal justice system focuses on reconciliation rather than protection. Discussions are underway regarding how to ensure that the health system be more responsive to gender-based violence. This includes more relevant and sensitive data collection and more complete patient information systems, the development of service guidelines and protocols, the allocation and development of dedicated health staff, and enhanced advocacy and awareness-raising at the community level (Universal Periodic Review of Palau, 2016). The prevalence of violence against women and the attitude that it can be settled within a clan or family or using customary methods rather than legislation, which would criminalize such violence, are key indicators of gender inequality.

With regard to violence among youth, the 2013 Youth Risk Behaviour Survey, conducted in high schools, found that 17.9 percent of male and female students reported forced sexual intercourse (16 percent for

females, 20 percent for males), 29.4 percent of the students reported sexual violence (25 percent for females, 34 percent for males), and 26.3 percent reported physical violence in a dating relationship (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). These high rates of youth-to-youth violence suggest that intervention for vulnerable youth at an early age is critical to prevent youth violence now and family violence in the future. The Ministry of Education has an opportunity under the new school calendar to provide counselling programmes and youth camps during the school break periods (U. Sengebau Senior, personal communication, 2020).

## 2.5 Agriculture and rural development

Since the 1980s the contribution of agriculture to Palau's economy has steadily declined. The sector now contributes under 2 percent to Palau's GDP. Recent years (2016 to 2020) have also seen an overall decline in the economic indicators of the agriculture and forestry sectors. While contribution to GDP has remain almost stable, from 1.6 percent to 1.7 percent, the contribution of prices to GDP dropped from USD 4.6 million to USD 4.3 million, the percent growth in constant prices dropped from 2.7 percent to -2.2, and the contribution to annual growth in GDP dropped from 0.1 percent to -0.1. During the period of the 1980s to the present, food imports increased dramatically. From fiscal year 2013 to fiscal year 2017, food imports averaged USD 39 million per year, about 22 percent of total imports (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2018). Despite the meagre contribution of the agriculture sector to the country's

GDP, the sector remains a critical part of Palau's economy, as a high percentage of the rural population is involved in agriculture. Although their unpaid, in-kind and subsistence economic contributions are difficult to measure, such work contributes to poverty alleviation by providing economic, food and nutrition safety nets for rural families.

Different communities in the rural areas are associated with different settlement types and economic development patterns, and varying levels of government services. The locations where rural women and men live, through a combination of cultural factors and degree of remoteness, can foster or limit social, agricultural and economic opportunities. The rural economy encompasses subsistence and commercial activities and is resource-reliant. In order to generate income under these varying conditions, agricultural producers are diversifying into production of root crops, other vegetables and livestock. Land used for such activities is either communal land or is leased from the national government under 99-year agreements. Most village-run commercial activities are at the micro to small level and are linked to the use and sale of natural resources such as fish and forest products, production of cash crops, or retailing of food and household supplies such as kerosene, paper products and buckets. Tourism developments often have commercial relationships with traditional landowners in their vicinity and offer employment to residents of landowner communities and nearby settlements. Women and men use forests, savannas and agroecosystems for food security and to access natural medicines (see Box 1) (Singeo *et al.*, 2020).

### Box 1. Palau gender and natural resources

In 2020, the Ebiil Society, Stanford University and Oregon State University produced a Palau Gender and Natural Resources 2020 National Report. The team conducted 747 surveys with a random sample of 365 women and 382 men in Babeldaob, Koror and Peleliu. Respondents selected up to two resource categories that they were knowledgeable about or engaged in. Men selected fishing (296), agriculture (113), hunting (39), tourism (35), art and technology (23), invertebrate collection (10) and collecting medicinal herbs (7). Women selected agriculture (221), fishing (113), invertebrate collection (57), collecting medicinal herbs (47), tourism (22), art and technology (20) and hunting (4). Women were more likely to fish, farm, collect invertebrates and collect and prepare medicinal herbs, while men were more likely to fish, farm, hunt and work in tourism. Responses were fairly similar across age groups and regions. More respondents from Peleliu, Sonsorol and Hatohobei collected medicinal herbs (26 percent) than other regions of Palau (4 to 14 percent). Less outer island respondents (63 percent) identified agriculture as one of the most important resource-use activities, compared to other regions (ranging from 76 to 82 percent). Over 56 percent of respondents (421) used forests, savannas and agroecosystems for multiple purposes within the past year. This highlighted the importance of marine and terrestrial ecosystems, including forests, for food security and access to natural medicines.

Source: Singeo, A., Ferguson, C., Hafner, L., Endress, B., Peterson, M.B., Gabriel, R., Endress, R. et al. 2020. Palau Gender and Natural Resources 2020 National Report. Ebiil Society. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355210497\\_Palau\\_Gender\\_and\\_Natural\\_Resources\\_2020\\_National\\_Report](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355210497_Palau_Gender_and_Natural_Resources_2020_National_Report)

As to the role of women in agriculture and the rural sector, there are limited sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics related to the rural sector.<sup>4</sup> Most available information is derived from qualitative studies and clearly illustrates that men dominate traditional decision-making processes in rural areas.

### 2.5.1 Crop production and post-harvest

Most Palau households are not reliant on subsistence farming, with only 9 percent of households reporting this as their main livelihood resource (FAO and PAIR, 2017). Agricultural farms are located primarily in coastal areas where the soil is rich (Kitalong, unpublished data). Most farms are run by family labour. Palau's main crops supporting nutrition, import substitution and commercial opportunities are: (1) root crops such as taro, cassava and sweet potatoes; (2) tree fruits; (3) coconuts; (4) vegetables; and (5) medicinal plants. (It should be noted that government extension services are tailored to support farmers of these crops.) By land area, the primary crops are fruits (3.12 km<sup>2</sup>), followed by betel nut (2.15 km<sup>2</sup>), banana (2.01 km<sup>2</sup>), cassava (1.21 km<sup>2</sup>), taro (1.16 km<sup>2</sup>) and vegetables (1.15 km<sup>2</sup>). In addition to traditional crop production, civil society organizations (CSOs) are collaborating with rural communities to develop a selection of niche products for women producers, including spices and herbal medicines, honey and tea. Development partners and CSOs are also involving women in expanded value chains for produce and handicrafts with the aim of selling attractively packaged and certified brands to the tourism industry. End products include jams, sunscreen, honey and soaps.

The major constraint to increasing agricultural production in Palau is the lack of appropriate sustainable technologies

to improve the quality of soil for crop production. Palau's soils are highly weathered, acidic and clayey, and there is a limited amount of land area suitable for agricultural production without substantial inputs and soil amendments. The limited areas that are more suitable for agriculture, particularly because they are flat, must be improved nutritionally in order to increase production. Deforestation also reduces Palau's agricultural production, undermines its climate change mitigation efforts, reduces the availability of non-timber forest products, such as medicinal plants, and increases risks of flooding during increasingly common extreme weather events.

In 2015, in order to improve national food production and mitigate the country's dependency on imported foods, the government adopted the national policy Achieving Resilient Agriculture and Aquaculture. The overarching vision of the policy is "a resilient, sustainable, and food secure Palau" (Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change, 2015, p. 7) The policy's plan is to locally produce 50 percent of Palau's food requirements by 2020 and 80 percent by 2025.

An important effort supporting the improvement of agricultural production in the country is the Palau Organic Growers Association, which receives support through FAO to increase domestic agricultural production (see Box 2). Another important initiative in this regard is The Global Environment Fund (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP), through which a number of projects were implemented providing community-based training to improve production, increase climate resilience, restore traditional taro gardens and improve degraded land (see Box 3) (Small Grants Programme, n.d.).

### Box 2. Palau Organic Growers Association

The Bureau of Agriculture (BOA) requested that FAO provide technical assistance and other necessary support to strengthen the Palau Organic Growers Association (POGA) in order to increase domestic agricultural production through the adoption of new sustainable technologies and methods for soil improvement. The project will be implemented for a period of two years and will target farmers in Babeldaob. Assistance will be provided in the form of technical advice, infrastructure and institutional support. The institutional strengthening component will include training for POGA farmers and BOA extension staff in key aspects of soil biology; soil testing; fertility improvement strategies; demonstration trials and other sustainable organic production technologies and crop management. On-farm demonstrations will be conducted with selected men and women farmers to adapt technologies to local conditions, supporting the production of major crops. It is anticipated that, by the end of the project, up to 12 agricultural researchers and extension officers and more than 200 rural farmers, including men and women and their families, will be trained in sustainable technologies and methods for soil improvement. Project workshops will contribute to building human resource capacity among men and women in Palau.

Source: Author's own elaboration from the document FAO. 2015. Healthy soils are the basis for healthy food production. <https://www.fao.org/3/i4405e/i4405e.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> It is recommended that an MOU be established between the Gender Office and the Office of Planning and Statistics to ensure that sex-disaggregated data is collected and analyzed (K. Singeo, personal communication, 2022).



### Box 3. The Global Environment Fund (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP)

In 2013, Palau initiated a Palau Global Environment Fund (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP). In Operational Phase 5 (OP5 2013–2016), 25 projects were approved: 12 projects were women-led and 1 project was a youth project. A total of 290 women and 278 men participated in the projects. Half the projects were awarded to NGOs and the other half to CBOs. More than 50 percent of the projects addressed global land degradation (GLD), including improved community-level actions and practices, reduced negative impacts on agro and native forest ecosystems and ecosystem services, and land-use frontiers of agro and forest ecosystems. Eleven taro garden sites were either restored or improved. The Ngarchelong Mesei project involved over 99 farmers in the restoration of 144 *mesei* (cultivated taro fields). Between 2011 and 2014, the Ngarchelong taro garden area increased by over 33 000 m<sup>2</sup> (3.3 ha), from 22 525 m<sup>2</sup> to 56 059 m<sup>2</sup>.

During Operational Phase 6 (OP6) (2017–2020), the taro projects were upscaled and former participants shared lessons learned. The SGP grantees were connected with government, academia and NGO participants working in the same fields, particularly in climate change adaptation efforts. Projects included networking/training events and the identification and implementation of best practices in at least four locations (involving four communities and twenty women, covering 3.5 ha). The projects entailed mapping and estimating hectares (ha) cultivated and implementing actions to increase climate resilience. The projects also captured and documented taro patch restoration projects as well as traditional knowledge and values. Smaller OP6 projects focused on climate-smart, sustainable agriculture (agroecology) and included a 1-ha agricultural farm. The projects required the following: (1) involvement of beneficiaries from a minority group; (2) protection or conservation of a forest corridor and soil stabilization; (3) photographic and water quality data monitoring at project start and close to show decreased or zero impact (or improvement) on the forest corridor and adjacent/downstream protected areas; and (4) a biophysical monitoring plan and data that indicate improvement of biodiversity or ecosystem function.

Under the strategic plan for OP7 (2020), the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Committee was to reach out to the Palau Gender Division at regular intervals to obtain training on the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy, to obtain advice on proposals, and to participate in social-inclusion training opportunities. Currently, the Committee is working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Health to mainstream gender in their programs.

The Palau SGP has strong participation on the part of women and growing participation of youth. The goal of 50/50 female/male participation has been met. Increased SPG funding for upland agriculture and pelagic fishing projects (traditionally male endeavors) must track impact and beneficiaries to ensure that women participate and benefit. Continued reporting on the direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender is also needed.

Source: Author's own elaboration of the Palau Small Grants Program website. Website consulted August 2022. <https://sgp.undp.org/component/countrypages/?view=countrypage&country=130&Itemid=>

Other initiatives supporting agriculture in the country include: (1) low-interest farm loans provided through the National Development Bank of Palau (NDBP); (2) an initiative by the POGA – Building Prosperity for Women Producers, Processors, and Women Owned Businesses Through Organic Value Chains – funded by Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA), which will support the economic empowerment of women by developing organic value chains directly benefiting women; (3) a pig improvement project and pig slaughterhouse, implemented by the BOA, which will enable local pork to be sold in the tourism market; (4) taro patch rehabilitation projects led by community-based women's groups; and (5) ongoing support to farmers by the BOA, including tilling services, technical advice and propagation of seeds.

In order to continue to improve national food production, more monitoring of food production, local uses and demand (including required inputs), outputs and losses is needed. There are major impacts on food production from climate change. These must be monitored to determine losses and adaptive strategies that help mitigate these impacts must be identified. The recovery rates from Super Typhoon Bopha, Super Typhoon Haiyan, Typhoon Surigae, and future extreme events require ongoing monitoring. Finally, emigration has led to labour shortages and increased the demand for foreign labour. In this regard, the rights of foreign labourers and perceptions and attitudes toward foreign farmers require more study (National Environment Protection Council, 2017).

### 2.5.2 Employment and division of labour in agriculture

According to the 2015 Census on Population, Housing and Agriculture, in rural areas, 84 percent of the rural male workforce (employees 16 years and older) and 16 percent of the rural female workforce works in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. According to the same census, 13 percent of the rural population works in agriculture. As to the rural workforce with market-oriented skills, there are more men with such skills (107 in agriculture and 7 in fishing and forestry) than women (7 in agriculture and 1 in fishing). Unemployment among rural men (16 years old and above) is 2.6 percent, compared to 1.8 percent among rural women (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2021). There is no evidence of forced child labour in Palau.

While agriculture is the primary industry of employment for rural men, a large share of rural women (59 percent) also works in agriculture, as own-account workers and as contributing family workers on family farms. An estimated 6.3 percent of rural women is engaged in wholesale and retail trade, compared to 5.6 percent of rural men. Women also engage in unpaid agricultural work, including raising poultry, pigs and goats for eggs and meat; maintaining taro and tapioca gardens during growing periods; planting, maintaining and harvesting market gardens run by their families or others; small-scale agroforestry production; and washing, sorting and packing products. In terms of skilled work in the

rural sector, 16 percent rural female workers are skilled agricultural workers, compared to 24 percent of male workers; and 2.1 percent of female workers are skilled forestry and fisheries workers, compared to 8.9 percent of male workers (Office of Planning and Statistics, 2016).

During this assessment, gender divisions of agricultural labour were discussed with stakeholders. The discussions show that gender roles are fairly standardized, with variations based upon age, geography, culture, ethnicity and whether one is residing in one's original village or in the village of one's spouse. Generally, men handle the more strenuous farm work, such as clearing and ploughing land, cutting and moving heavy trees (including giant taro, or brak), building structures and planting root crops for subsistence and cash cropping. Men also manage larger livestock, such as cattle and pigs. Women typically grow and process food and raise small livestock. They also often engage in small-scale marketing of excess produce and handicrafts, such as mats and baskets, to generate income for household and personal needs. Among foreign male agricultural workers (primarily Bangladeshi), there is a trend to switch gender roles in taro cultivation. Currently, about 90 percent of taro cultivation is carried out by male foreign labour, primarily Bangladeshi. The price of cultivating taro has increased by 50 percent as foreign labourers demand higher wages (A. Kitalong, personal communication, 2022). Table 5 summarizes the gender-based roles in agricultural activity.

**Table 5. Gender division of labour in agriculture (crop and livestock production)**

Activity	Men's role	Women's role	Men and women's roles
Clearing land	✓		
Ploughing	✓		
Construction of sheds, pens and other livestock infrastructure	✓		
Cash crop planting and harvesting (taro, cassava, tree fruits, coconuts)		✓	
Weeding and maintenance of market and subsistence gardens and cash crop plantations (taro, cassava)		✓	✓
Cash crop and market garden post-harvest processing			✓
Processing of subsistence crops, coconut oil, honey			✓
Market sales			✓
Interaction with business intermediaries purchasing cash crops			✓
Raising poultry and small livestock (pigs, sheep)		✓	
Raising large livestock (cows, horses, goats)	✓		
Niche agricultural ventures in floriculture, vanilla, bees		✓	
Handicrafts (mats, baskets, sewing, niche products) carved storyboards, jewellery			✓

Note: These delineations are generalized for all of Palau. There may be variations by hamlet or state.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on consultations with MAFE and partners.



For Palau women, taro cultivation has greater social and cultural value than monetary value. Women tend to work in taro cultivation in small groups, with their female relatives. Taro cultivation is a means to fulfill family obligations and to strengthen connections with one's clan. Women tend to become more active in taro and tapioca gardening once they retire and have a monthly pension or social security. Some women consider that selling their taro is not sufficiently profitable. They consider the taro to be undervalued at the current price of USD 2.50/pound, particularly in comparison to the crop's cultural value. However, if taro is transformed into flour or chips, this adds value, especially when the taro has imperfections that make it less desirable for customary exchange (I. Vogt, personal communication, 2022).

A number of women's groups are now focusing on adding value to taro by using the stems and leaves to prepare *demok*, a traditional soup, and package and freeze it for sale. In Choll hamlet, in the state of Ngaraard, a women's group is rehabilitating their taro patches to support their livelihoods and maintain the cultural landscape and ecosystem. Twenty-four women participate in this activity, each of whom has rehabilitated her taro garden or *mesei*. The women have formed five groups, and each group has committed to producing 10 pounds of stock taro leaf soup per month. The groups rotate pots, strainers and one vacuum sealer to process and package their soup. Furthermore, the groups are introducing modern technology, including air fryers and electric pressure cookers, to make their work less labour-intensive (C. Emaurois, personal communication, 2022). Each group labels their packages for quality control purposes.

### 2.5.3 Food and nutrition security

Palau imports an estimated 80% of its food. This represents a high percentage of food that is being brought into the country rather than produced locally. These imports include processed foods that are high in sugar, salt, and saturated fat that have become staples in the local diet. This trend of increased imports of low nutritional value has led to poor health of the Palauan population.

The priorities of FAO's Strategic Framework 2022–2030 for the region of Asia and the Pacific include the following: 1) transforming agrifood systems for sustainable production and healthy diets, 2) accelerating sustainable natural resource management for biodiversity conservation and climate action, 3) supporting inclusive rural transformation for

sustainable rural agrifood systems and equitable rural societies, and 4) building sustainable and resilient agrifood systems in the Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (FAO, 2022). The fourth priority includes digital solutions such as e-commerce for agrifood products, online food delivery services, digital farming services and finance technology (FAO, 2021).

### 2.5.4 Farm survey

As of 2016, Palau has 543 ha (5.43 km<sup>2</sup>) of agricultural land (upland, taro and agroforest) (Republic of Palau, 2021), a significant increase from 300 ha from previous estimates (NEPC, 2019). Six percent of all permanent crop parcels (91 parcels out of 1 638) are irrigated (47 percent in Koror and 53 percent in Airai). The most recent farm survey was conducted by the Bureau of Agriculture (BOA) and the Palau Automated Land and Resource Information System (PALARIS) in 2017. A total of 481 farms were surveyed, 331 in Babeldaob, 116 in Koror and 34 in outer lying islands. Four percent of the farms produce exclusively to market their products, 36 percent are subsistence farms that also market some of their products, and 60 percent are subsistence-only farms. Seventy-one farms are in wetlands or semi-wetlands. Around 40 percent of farms (198) are in urban areas (in the states of Koror and Airai), while 59 percent (283 farms) are in rural areas (in Babeldaob and outlying islands). Among farms producing for the market, 50 percent are in urban areas and 50 percent are in rural areas. The 17 highest-valued farms (USD 5 000 + in annual sales) are in Babeldaob. Annual sales of farms producing for the market average USD 7 300, while average annual sales of farms producing for both consumption and sale average USD 3 200 (FAO, 2014). The estimated value of fruit and vegetable production overall (excluding taro) was USD 3.5 million in 2014 (National Environmental Protection Council, 2019). Pesticides are used by 70 percent of the market-only farms and by 30 percent of market and family consumption farms (Republic of Palau, 2021). There are 100 organic farmers (Asia Development Bank, 2017).

At the household level, 25 percent of households in Palau use some land for agriculture. The average size of household agricultural land (including taro gardens) is 1 200 m<sup>2</sup>. (Half these households own more than one parcel of land, and the average size of individual parcels is 530 m<sup>2</sup>.) A total of 593 households have kitchen gardens.

According to the 2015 Census of Population, Housing and Agriculture for Palau, 2 109 individuals over the age of 16 report income from crops. The average annual

income is USD 904 per person (Bureau of Planning and Statistics, 2016). Additionally, 91 individuals (66 percent female, 34 percent male, 44 percent urban and 56 percent rural) earn income from handicrafts or home-based processing of agricultural products (Bureau of Planning and Statistics, 2016; Office of Planning and Statistics, 2015). The estimated value from added-value processing of agricultural products was USD 1 700 per household, per year (Office of Planning and Statistics, 2015).

There are 486 full-time agricultural workers (including individuals working in wetland taro production) – 29 percent female and 71 percent male. This indicates an 8 percent increase in full-time agricultural workers compared to the 2005 census (Bureau of Planning and Statistics, 2016). There are 606 part-time agricultural workers (including those working in wetland taro production) – 33 percent female and 67 percent male. The origin of the agricultural workers is 37 percent Palauan and 63 percent foreigners (Bureau of Planning and Statistics, 2016).

According to a survey conducted by the Bureau of Agriculture in 2019, in a single year 40 farmers raise 500 to 600 pigs in Palau. One producer is a retired female entrepreneur, who employs workers and supplements her income with her piggery (National Environment Protection Council, 2019). Until recently, most pigs were raised in Koror, Palau's most populous state. However, the State of Koror introduced an act prohibiting pig raising in the state, so pigs are now mainly raised in Babeldaob and in the states of Peleliu, Angaur, Hatohobei and Sonsorol. In 2016, a national slaughterhouse opened in Palau. With this, the average number of pigs slaughtered increased from 6.5 per month in 2018 to 9 in 2019 (excluding pigs slaughtered in the outer islands). The constraints in pig production are limited refrigeration and storage facilities, size limit of pigs that can be slaughtered, and the lack of economically priced feed.

## 2.6 Forestry and non-timber forest products

Forests cover about 75 percent of land in Palau, and agroforests cover a further 12 percent (Donnegan *et al.*, 2003). The forests are a source of timber, food, medicine, habitat for wildlife and recreation. Additionally, according to traditional belief, trees are considered to have spiritual value. Both men and women collect medicinal plants from forests and agroforests (Balick and

Kitalong, 2021; Singeo *et al.*, 2021). Of particular importance are the dozens of forest plants that are combined for a steam bath that serves to strengthen and heal a mother after her first birth.

Approximately 30 percent of the land in Babeldaob, the country's largest island, is suitable for agroforestry. Priority areas for sustainable forest use are existing coconut, mahogany and agroforestry operations.

Coconut is a keystone species for Palau, with over forty documented uses for food, shelter, clothing, medicine, art and aspects of traditional culture (Balick and Kitalong, 2021). It is recommended that coconut plantations be assessed to determine the health of the trees and the potential for replanting a mixture of agroforestry trees at these locations. Between 2009 and 2012, the Institute for Sustainable Living (SIUL) initiated the Tree of Life project in Palau, with support from the Global Environment Facility's (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP). A micromill was constructed in Kayangel with technology for small-scale coconut oil production. The mill had capacity to produce 240 gallons per month (P. Leon, personal communication, 2010). However, Super Typhoon Haiyan damaged the mill and heavily damaged the coconut trees in the state. In 2004, Pure Palau, a virgin coconut oil company, was established in the state of Airai. The company was established in partnership with the Institute for Sustainable Living (SIUL). Both companies, which were created and are run by women, have potential to expand to other rural areas in Palau (L. Gilham, personal communication, 2021; Pure Palau, 2020).

In terms of mahogany production, one local commercial operation has been processing mahogany for five years. It took over a year for the company to begin processing mahogany as it was necessary to convince the former government that cutting mahogany was sustainable as it is an introduced tree (P. Reklai, personal communication, 2021; Bureau of Agriculture, 2021). By 2020, the company had shipped three containers of mahogany logs to Japan, China and Taiwan Province of China. The logs were sold at USD 24 per board foot. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, however, exports were halted. Now the company sells the lumber locally at USD 15 per board foot for four-sided cut boards – which is cheaper than the price of imported wood. The wood can remain termite-free if it is kept dry and treated.

As to the medicinal use of forest trees and plants, trees farmed for their medicinal use include *Phaleria*

*nisidai (ongael)* and *Morinda citrifolia (ngel)*, which are processed on a small scale for medicinal drinks (Bureau of Agriculture, 2021). The leaves are being processed and sold to patients. One local female entrepreneur is preparing smoothies using local plants and the Belau Medical Clinic produces *ongael* drinks to sell to their patients.

## 2.7 Fisheries

The fisheries sector is an important contributor to Palau's economy and food system. In 2014, the sector contributed 4.6 percent to the country's GDP (Gillet, 2016). In 2017, offshore production was 9 349 tonnes, generating USD 1.2 million in revenue from taxes (Bureau of Marine Resources, 2019). However, a substantial portion of the catch is unsustainable (involving the capture of undersized fish). In 2019, an estimated 79 percent of the value of nearshore fisheries and 50 percent of the value of offshore fisheries were unsustainable. The contribution of *sustainable* fisheries to Palau's economy in 2019 was about 1.8 percent of GDP (National Environment Protection Council, 2019). Subsistence fishing is also an important component of the sector, comprising 60 percent of total fishing activity in rural areas and 35 percent in urban areas.

Fish features prominently in the Palauan diet. In 2008, fish made up 59 percent of all animal protein consumed by rural populations and 47 percent of animal protein consumed by urban populations. The majority of the Palauan population relies heavily on inshore fisheries for subsistence and income. A total of 865 tonnes of inshore fish were produced, for a value of USD 3.2 million (Gillet, 2016)

With regard to initiatives in ocean conservation and for the enhancement of the fisheries sector, Palau's National Marine Sanctuary (PNMS), established in

2015, is a globally recognized conservation measure as well as an economic strategy to increase the value of Palau's domestic fisheries to feed residents and visitors, while reducing pressure on nearshore reef fisheries. The value of fish caught within 20 percent of Palau's exclusive economic zone and marketed locally is proposed to exceed the value of licence agreements. To reap the economic benefits of the PNMS, Palau is exploring strategic partnerships for developing a local fishing fleet, establishing a central fish auction market, building processing and wharf facilities, and identifying value-added products that can be developed from excess catch or by-catch.

Another important effort in conservation is the recent ban on the export of inshore fish, which has reduced pressure on these inshore resources (see Box 4).

Gender roles in fisheries should also be considered in reef and ocean conservation initiatives. Gender-related specializations in fisheries lead to women and men develop different knowledge and skill sets. Given their different experiences in coastal environments, women and men tend to notice different indicators of stress or change in the environment and have different ideas about using fishery products. Women and men can be invaluable and complementary resource-persons in the management of coastal and marine resources, climate change adaptation, disaster risk management and sustainable economic development.

### 2.7.1 Aquaculture

Aquaculture production is low and does not meet local demand (National Environmental Protection Council, 2019). The total mariculture production and value in Palau has increased from 2 tonnes valued at USD 5 000 in 1989 to 20 tonnes valued at USD 150 000 in 2015 (Barfield *et al.*, 2017). Giant clams and rabbitfish (Reef Resilience Network, 2021) are farmed by both men and women (see boxes 5 and 6).

#### Box 4. Five-year ban on inshore fisheries exports

Inshore fisheries remain undervalued in national accounting and development planning. A combination of increased urbanization, poor management and planning, climate change impacts and overexploitation have reduced reproductive stocks of a number of marine species and altered food web relationships, affecting ecosystem productivity and food security. A five-year ban on the export of nearshore fish was enacted by Congress to reduce the stress on inshore fisheries and provide a time period for the fish stocks to potentially recover. The objective of this ban was to increase consumption of pelagic fish and reduce consumption of nearshore fish.

Source: Author's own elaboration of the Five-year Ban on inshore fisheries exports, 2022.

### Box 5. Clam farms

A 2021 clam farm survey reported a total of 77 clam farms in Palau, of which 60 percent were either neglected or abandoned. Thirty-two percent of the farm were in urban areas: 24 in Koror and 1 in Airai. Sixty-eight percent of the farms were in rural areas: 15 in Ngarchelong, 13 in Ngaraard, 8 in Melekeok, 5 in Kayangel, 2 in Ngardmau, 2 in Ngchesar, 2 in Peleliu, and 1 each in Ngiwal, Ngeremlengui, Ngatpang and Aimeliik. There were more male than female clam farmers (63 percent male vs 18 percent female), and 19 percent of the clam farms were state owned. The report did not indicate the number of male and female clam farmers who were productive. A total of 63 232 clams were farmed, with more clams (78 percent, or 49 515 clams) being farmed in the rural states of Ngaraard (24 974), Ngcherchelong (7 013), Ngardmau (4 502), Kayangel (3 731), Melekeok (3 543), Ngchesar (2,691), Aimeliik (2 000), Peleliu (608), Ngeremlengui (445), and Ngatpang (8), than in the urban states (22 percent or 13 717) in Koror (13 454) and Airai (263). The species farmed are *Hippopus* (64 percent), *Tridacna derasa* (35 percent) and *Tridacna squamosa* (1 percent).

Source: Isechal, A. L. 2022. 2021 Clam Survey. Conference presentation at the 29th Mechesil Belau Conference, September 2022. Unpublished.

### Box 6. Rabbitfish aquaculture

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and partners from the Bureau of Marine Resources (BMR), Environmental Quality Protection Board (EQPB), and the Palau Community College (PCC) held a sustainable development of marine aquaculture and marine spatial planning workshop in 2019. The U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Earth Science Applied Science Program funded this 2019-2022 project, entitled Aquaculture for Food Security and Ocean Health in Palau, to build capacity for sustainable, climate-ready aquaculture using satellite imagery. Training for men and women included siting, management and monitoring. The spatial analysis products assist in aquaculture zoning. The revenues generated from farmed rabbitfish per cage ranged from USD 996 to USD 2 365. The survival and health of the farmed fish depended upon farm management and feeding. Management determines survival and growth rate of rabbitfish, and financial performance for the farmer. Cooperative farming may improve production. Areas further from shore were most suitable for fish aquaculture, because these areas are farther from sensitive habitats and have sufficient water depth, currents and flushing. These more suitable areas for sustainable cage siting, that are individually owned, and small-scale farms with one to five floating cages may not be economically feasible to operate, unless subsidized.

Source: Reef Resilience Network. 2021. Palau – Aquaculture. In: Reef Resilience Network. Cited August 2022. <https://reefresilience.org/case-studies/palau-aquaculture/>

#### 2.7.2 Gender and division of labour in fisheries

Fishing is a key activity for men and women as a food source for families and communities and for small-scale income generation (Singeo *et al.*, 2020). Fisheries in Palau encompass marine and coastal habitats, and there are established gender roles in each area. Men tend to fish outside the reef, using throw nets, which are lined with lead weights, making them difficult for women to handle. They also use spearguns, nets, handlines and trolling using small motorboats. While fishing outside reefs tends to be the domain of men, both men and women fish in the coastal areas. Common fishing methods of men in coastal areas

include fishing from bridges or promontories with hand lines, working from small boats using nets or lines, and wading with nets. Women tend to fish in the shallow areas with handlines, spears, nets and traps, as well as reef gleaning at low tide. (In urban areas, more women fish with small motorboats.) Women also collect sea cucumbers (cheremrum, molech, ngimes), clams (kim) and mangrove clams (ngduul) using simple tools. Additionally, women collect land crabs that are smaller and easier to manage, while men collect the larger mangrove crabs and lobsters. Both men and women farm rabbitfish and giant clams. Table 6 summarizes the fishing activities of men and women.



**Table 6. Gendered division of labour in fisheries**

Activity	Men's role	Women's role	Men's and Women's Role
Fishing from vessels outside the reef	✓		
Fishing from bridges and promontories with handlines	✓		
Wading with nets	✓		
Wading with handlines		✓	
Reef gleaning for shellfish and in mangroves for mangrove clams		✓	
Collecting land crabs			✓
Collecting mangrove crabs and lobsters	✓		
Farming milkfish and rabbitfish			✓
Farming milkfish – digging ponds, piping water and heavy maintenance	✓		
Farming milkfish – pond cleaning and maintenance	✓		
Farming giant clams			✓
Collecting specialty products (i.e. sea cucumber and trochus)			✓
Niche agricultural ventures in floriculture, bees			✓
Handicrafts (mats, baskets, sewing, niche products) storyboards and jewellery			✓
Post-harvest processing of fishery products			✓

Source: Author's own elaboration.

In terms of marketing fish catch, both men and women fishers face a number of constraints, although women are more severely impacted. Fish is marketed either directly to outlets in Koror or at village fishing cooperatives. Women generally process and package their catch and some of the men's catch for sale in Koror. The main constraint in this regard is the lack of transportation. More women are beginning to use small motorboats to catch fish for sale and to market their produce, and, although transport problems were addressed by a Japanese-funded project providing them with boats, many women feel their transport needs are still not being met (Lambeth, 1999). The lack of a central market is another important constraint for both men and women.

In addition to the shared marketing constraints faced by men and women, women fishers face a number of additional constraints. Although Palauan women are actively involved in fisheries, they have not been included in fisheries data collection and research and, as such, have not received formal support. Furthermore, earlier programmes and policies aimed at supporting fishermen did not include women fishers, with most national fisheries development projects focusing on the activities of men rather than women, particularly on income-generating, commercial fisheries. Over 63 percent of nearshore collection of marine species is conducted by women,

and over 70 percent of these women depend upon it as their primary income source to maintain their households. The marine resources that the women fishers depend upon for their livelihoods have declined in the last decade. The sandfish (*molech*) population has dropped over 90 percent in ten years. Sea cucumbers, *cheremrum* and *ngimes* have also declined. The decline is attributed to unsustainable commercial export to China in 2012, increased competition for reef resources, the effects of development, environmental degradation and climate change. In addition to reducing women's catch, this has increased the distance women must travel to fish and harvest seafood. Local knowledge about these marine animals has enabled successful breeding in captivity. It is recommended that juveniles of species bred in captivity be provided to women for aquaculture projects and that aquaculture programmes include incentives for women to reseed the wild in order to bring back the population (Kloulechad-Singeo, 2020).

## 2.8 Education in agriculture, forestry and fisheries

The number of Palauan students enrolled in agriculture and forestry at Palau Community College (PCC) decreased between 2017 and 2020 from 38 to

22 students. Graduate students in these disciplines increased from 4 to 11, between 2015 and 2020 (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2021). As of 2022, there are 20 students in the agricultural programme (C. Kitalong, personal communication, 2022). There was no available data from PCC or the Bureau of Agriculture (BOA) on the number of graduates who either became farmers or participate in agricultural enterprises. Tracking how women graduates apply their knowledge of agriculture, fisheries and forestry will support increased understanding of how to foster transformational change for both gender equality and sustainability in the rural sector. Palauans studying marine science overseas often do not return to work in the country.

With regard to important training initiatives in agriculture, the Taiwan Technical Mission (TTM) in Palau, in partnership with Palau Community College-Cooperative Research and Extension (PCC-CRE) and the Bureau of Agriculture (BOA), are effectively improving traditional water systems on farms and restoring healthy taro growing conditions through training programmes. The Ministry of Education has active school-garden programmes at public elementary school and high schools, where boys and girls are learning how to grow vegetables. The vegetables produced in the gardens are used in school meals.

## 2.9 Access to and control over resources

Access to and control over productive resources is a critical issue which must be addressed in order to promote equitable benefits of rural development outcomes. Overall, women have less access to key productive resources than their male counterparts.

Large, commercial farms are generally managed by men, while small tapioca farms are managed by women. Women have less access to resources such as transportation, technology, extension services and markets, as well as political and economic resources. Men usually have greater access to machinery, vehicles and farm equipment, and more control over most financial assets, including family savings and land leases.

Women own and manage taro and tapioca production. Taro in particular is important as a subsistence crop and a source of income, as well as having cultural importance (Nwe *et al.*, unpublished data). Women also produce sweet potato, cassava, fruits and medicinal plants. A workload survey conducted in 2019 and

2020 with forty women, indicates that 27 percent of the women employ foreign labour to assist with taro production.

The MAFE is currently developing a project management manual to support gender mainstreaming and women's engagement in agriculture, animal husbandry and small business development. The implementation of the guidelines in the handbook will facilitate increased engagement of women in decision-making and management of agricultural resources to ensure policies and budgets address their multiple economic, social, caregiving and reproductive roles.

## 2.10 Tourism

The vision of Palau's Responsible Tourism Policy is "A Pristine Paradise. Palau for everyone" (Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Tourism, 2016, p.9). The stated goals of the policy are to locally produce 50 percent of Palau's food requirements by 2020 and 80 percent by 2025. The policy aims to develop "a resilient, sustainable, and food secured Palau" (Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change, 2015, p. 7). The mission of the Bureau of Tourism is:

**to grow and sustain a visitor industry that is respectful of our people and environment, ensures the optimum flow and retention of revenue in our economy, and consistently delivers on the Promise of a Pristine Paradise Palau experience to all" (Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Tourism, 2016, p.9).**

The Palau Bureau of Tourism aims to make Palau the world's first carbon neutral destination (see Box 7) (Sustainable Travel International, 2020).

The Bureau of Tourism is promoting local slow-food tours with the active participation of local women's groups. One of the challenges in this regard is coordination and communication with the rural community, as many women have multiple tasks they must attend to throughout the day. States are initiating once-a-week tours to enable communities to have an established schedule to prepare food. The weekly night market is another opportunity for rural communities to engage with tourists and sell their products. The more remote communities, however, are hindered from participating in these markets due to the transportation costs involved.

### Box 7. Palau Carbon Neutral Destination programme

The Palau Bureau of Tourism, in collaboration with FAO, Sustainable Travel International, the Coalition of Fragile Ecosystems and Slow Food, has initiated the Palau Carbon Neutral Destination Programme. FAO is providing technical and financial support for this programme. The goal of the programme is to make Palau the world's first carbon neutral destination. The programme combats climate change and boosts community resilience by neutralizing tourism's carbon footprint, improving the livelihoods of local food producers, increasing local food security, empowering women to participate more fully in the tourism value chain, conserving coastal ecosystems that act as carbon sinks, reducing food waste and building a circular economy.

Under the programme, a group of women led by Rose Ongalibang, together with Slow Food International, is currently revitalizing brak (large taro) cultivation in Bungelkelau, Ngchesar. The group is also working with the Palau Community Action Agency (PCCA). There are 27 varieties of brak. This crop has served as a food reserve for at least twenty years. There is river that divides the village from the brak gardens and the women need a boat to reach the gardens. They have taken four trips to Bungelkelau and may need to cut mangroves to enable access to their gardens. The water has become brackish due to sea-level rise. Ms. Ongalibang is also seeking financial aid from the NDBP and intends to apply for loans from three institutions to explore the use of biodigesters for fertilizer and gas.

Source: Authors own expansion on Sustainable Travel International Website. Palau Carbon Neutral Tourism Destination. Website consulted August 2022. <https://sustainabletravel.org/project/palau-carbon-neutral-tourism-destination/>

## 2.11 Women in leadership

In 2019, women occupied 13 percent of seats in Congress. (There were 2 female and 11 male senators and 1 female and 15 male delegates.) That year, the president and vice president were males, and the cabinet comprised 6 male and 2 female ministers. The 2021 administration includes a male president and a female vice president, 1 female senator and 11 male senators, and 1 female and 15 male delegates. The 2021 Cabinet consists of 7 male ministers. In the public and private sectors, women hold 42 percent of management positions (Bureau of Budget and Planning, 2016), compared to 29 percent in 2005. In the interviews conducted for this assessment, there was discussion regarding the need to take action so that more women are in high-level policy decision-making roles in Congress and that women have a narrower window of opportunity to take on such roles. This is due in part to the tendency for women not to vote for women, as this does not conform to the cultural norm. Rather, women tend to support men who then voice their concerns. However, if women believe that a woman is capable, hardworking, with strong family and clan ties, they will vote for her (R. Inabo, personal communication, 2022; S. Pierantozzi, personal communication, 2022).

In 2011 and 2013, the UNDP, in partnership with the National Congress and the Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs, facilitated the training event, Practice Parliaments for Women Leaders, in order to clarify the

role and work of parliaments to women leaders and the general public, and to showcase the leadership and capacity of women as potential delegates and senators in preparation for upcoming national elections. The two Practice Parliaments for women leaders received national media attention and triggered national discussions on the need for gender balance in Congress. The UN Country Team encouraged the Government and Congress to promote national dialogue and awareness-raising on the issue of gender equality in decision-making at the highest levels of government and in Congress, and to develop policies to promote women's participation in national decision-making structures and processes.

Of particular importance in women's leadership is the organization Mechesil Belau – a traditional women's organization with women representatives from all sixteen states that connects female and male leaders to tackle issues including tradition, culture, conservation and the environment. The organization also advocates for overall support for women's and men's roles in food production (starch, taro and tapioca production by women and fish and pork production by men) and advocates for conservation laws, including customary laws, and for healthy living associated with healthy diets. For three decades, Mechesil Belau has held an annual two-day conference with the participation of women and men to discuss current issues and concerns related to culture, health, the environment and the overall well-being of women.

## 2.12 Rural finance

Rural finance in Palau is a challenge for all farmers, especially for women. A major problem is that financial institutions require assets as collateral, and for most rural farmers, land is their only major asset and they do not want to risk losing it. Furthermore, the impacts of climate change, pests and the COVID-19 pandemic have all made farming a risky venture, as production is dependent on optimal growing conditions, and banking institutions do not want to risk a loan default under such conditions. Women have the added disadvantage of generally not having the skills needed to report financial information and project their potential earnings. At present, the main source of rural finance is grants from the international community to supplement loans for smaller businesses.

One loan programme supporting the agriculture sector is the Agriculture Aquaculture Loan Programme at the NDBP, funded by the Government of China. The programme was established to provide loans for men, women and youth interested in starting up a farm on land or sea. The NDBP has an active loan portfolio of 96 loans, 12.5 percent of them provided to women and youth in farming, and 88.5 percent provided to men, women and youth for other types of enterprises. There are 30 active aquaculture loans, 90 percent provided to men and 10 percent provided to women (Claire Harvey, personal communication, 2022). A 2019 assessment of the programme found that the success of the programme was dependent on at least five factors: (1) a consistent supply of fish fry, piglets, seedlings and feed for piglets; (2) alternative sources of locally produced low-cost feed and increased technical assistance for farmers; (3) the establishment of an open central market and a purchasing network to ensure farm and locally made products are bought or consigned in advance so that farmers and aquaculturists can focus on production instead of production and distribution (the current practice of transporting the products to Koror for marketing is impractical due to the distance between Koror and the farming areas); (4) the development of a commercial farm model that is feasible and viable for existing small, traditional agroforests; and (5) the exploration of hydroponic production, which requires little space (National Development Bank of Palau, 2019). During the course of the assessment, a number of recommendations were made to improve the results of the programme. As the findings of the study indicated, it was recommended that a central marketplace be established, aligned with a one-stop-shop for preparing, processing and selling products, and for demonstrating ways to develop high-value

local products. Another recommendation was to use smart phones and internet for marketing, as an alternative to a central market (G. Aitaro, personal communication, 2022).

Another programme providing financial support to small-scale commercial activities is the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), which provides high-quality training and one-on-one counselling to existing small businesses and start-ups. The primary goal of the center is to provide financial education to Palau's population. The center has served Palau for twenty years (2012 to 2022) and has provided counselling and training to 537 clients, including 74 clients involved in agriculture. The center has provided support to 188 women-owned businesses. Many of the agricultural businesses receiving support from the SBDC have applied for loans from the NDBP's Agriculture Aquaculture Loan Programme (L. Fritz, personal communication, 2022).

The lending volume of the banking sector in Palau is 16.5 percent of the nation's GDP, which is much lower than the Pacific Island average of 47.6 percent. Domestic savings are primarily directed by the commercial banks to overseas investments, with only a small portion being retained in Palau as a source of credit. This limits the availability of loans for the private sector to financing and, thus, limits growth. The Women and Youth Entrepreneurs and MSMEs Re-lending Project (Palau) provides long-term funds to strengthen the lending capacity of the National Development Bank of Palau (NDBP), focusing on loans for women and youth entrepreneurs, and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), in order to support the nation's inclusive economic development. The project objective draws upon the critical role of the NDBP in providing private-sector credit, with the ultimate objective of boosting the ratio of private sector credit to GDP. The loan proceeds are provided as a loan from the International Cooperation and Development Fund (Taiwan Province of China ICDF) to the NDBP to support the expansion of its lending operations in Palau.

In addition to these lending programmes, the NDBP and the SBDC provide a range of services, including financial literacy development for women and men.

## 2.13 Agricultural cooperatives

Agricultural cooperatives are not a common model in the Pacific, and there are only a few examples of successful cooperatives in Palau that have operated over an extended period. These include the Palau Organic



Growers Association (POGA) and the Palau Livestock Association (PLA). The POGA serves as a resource center for organic farmers and promotes organic farming in Palau. The PLA assists poultry growers through networks that provide feed supplies as well as assisting pig farmers by providing piglets. The PLA also supports the BOA in creating policies and regulations to address quality and standards of poultry production, feed quality and meat quality. In addition to cooperative organizations, there are traditional community-based men's and women's groups in all states that serve as local cooperatives. Furthermore, there are NGOs that work with women's groups, supporting them with small business capacity development, quality control and branding. The Taiwan Technical Mission (TTM) supports the work of both the POGA and the PLA.

## 2.14 Climate change and disaster risk management

Although Palau is protected by its reef, it experiences frequent natural hazards including typhoons, droughts and storm surges. Palau has been impacted by four major disasters caused by natural hazards since 2012: Super Typhoon Bopha in 2012, Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, a severe drought in 2016, and Typhoon Surigae in 2021. In addition, Palau's annual dry season, which lasts from January to March, reduces the quality and quantity of potable water available to local communities. Measures are put in place to reduce water usage and supply water in places that are in need. Finally, overall, environmental vulnerability in Palau is high due to diverse but limited natural resources and fragile ecosystems that must withstand the pressures of a rapidly growing population and a bustling tourism industry. According to the 2020 INFORM Risk Index, Palau's overall risk score is 2.5/10, which INFORM categorizes as low-risk. Palau's risk score for hazard and exposure is 1.7/10, its risk score for vulnerability is 2.1/10, and its risk score for lack of coping capacity is 4.2/10.

Disaster risk reduction is critical to maintaining agricultural, food and nutrition security. Palau works with development partners to ensure regional and national resilience to climate change and disasters. Increasingly, climate and weather events impact the availability, reliability and quality of food and health services and women's access to them. Where women are not involved in decision-making regarding disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, there can be negative impacts. Community consultations following Super Typhoon Bopha in 2012 and Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 highlighted that, prior to the typhoons, there were challenges in conveying accurate

information about the level of intensity of forecasted weather events and the impacts of storm surge to women. Women were less prepared and did not have the opportunity to contribute to disaster management planning or to make optimal preparations for themselves and their families. This represents a lost opportunity, and resulted in serious negative impacts to health and property. The women consulted felt they would have had different, and better, strategies to manage issues of water supply, food and shelter if they had been more fully informed and more involved in the planning.

Palau has disaster management legislation in place to combat disaster risks. The 2010 National Disaster Risk Management Framework (NDRMF), amended in 2016, focuses on strengthening national disaster risk management structures and mechanisms and incorporating disaster management and climate change adaptation into the national budget and plans. In 2015, the government adopted the Palau Climate Change Policy (PCCP) for Climate and Disaster Resilient Low Emissions Development (Office of the President, 2015). Its main objective is to build resilience to climate change and disasters. The objectives of the PCCP also reiterate and expand on those of the NDRMF. The National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) is responsible for coordinating and implementing preparedness, response and immediate relief arrangements, and collaborating closely with all stakeholders (Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance, 2020.)

Gender is less explicitly addressed than other areas of concern in the Palau Climate Change Policy (PCCP), adopted in 2015. The work undertaken in the country in terms of climate adaptation, however, prioritizes areas in which women are more active, such as agriculture, health and taro cultivation. Many rural community-based women's organizations are leading or otherwise involved in adaptation work. The Dilisor Agriculture Association of Ngarchelong (DANN) has been particularly successful in restoring taro cultivation, and community-based groups are undertaking similar work in their own communities (Republic of Palau, 2019). Palau has taken concrete action to leave no one behind in its disaster risk management efforts. Forty-two staff (21 women and 21 men) from the public sector and civil society organizations who engage in national and community disaster risk management in Palau received training to integrate a gender, age, disability and cultural perspective in policies and practices of disaster risk management. The Red Cross Society and the Center for Women's Empowerment Belau (C-WEB) have provided support for gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and resilience (see Box 8) (Palau Red Cross

Society, 2019). In 2021, Palau's National Emergency Management Office (NEMO), the Bureau of Ageing, Disability and Gender (BADG), and the UN Development

Programme (UNDP) conducted a workshop focused on protection, gender and social inclusion, and integrating these aspects in disaster management (see Box 9).

### Box 8. Palau Red Cross Society and C-WEB

From 2018 to 2020, the Center for Women's Empowerment Belau (C-WEB) and Palau Red Cross Society (PRCS) conducted a gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and resilience-building programme in Babeldaob that supported over 250 women with training in the skills to cope with disasters. The Women's Empowerment through Emergency Preparedness, Crisis Response and Recovery' project, or People Empowerment Project (PEP), funded by The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF). The C-WEB/PRCS project partnered with eight locally based organizations to train women in disaster preparedness, response and recovery, to be first responders and community leaders in humanitarian response. The Palau Red Cross Society and the Center for Women's Empowerment Belau (C-WEB) worked with local women's organizations to organize trainings across 8 of the 16 most vulnerable states of Palau (Kayangel, Ngerchelong, Ngaraard, Ngiwal, Melekeok, Ngchesar, Peleliu and Angaur). These eight priority states were chosen due to the impact of storm surge from past super typhoons and sea level rise. In addition to the training, the participants (253 women and 12 men) received 270 climate-resilient breadfruit saplings. The communities also received water testing kits, family disaster toolkits and general training on disaster management and food and water security.

Source: Palau Red Cross Society. 2019. 2019 Annual Report. Koror. [www.palauredcross.org/pdf/PRCS-2019-Annual-Report.pdf](http://www.palauredcross.org/pdf/PRCS-2019-Annual-Report.pdf)

### Box 9. Enhancing disaster and climate resilience (EDCR) through improved disaster preparedness and infrastructure

The project, Enhancing Disaster and Climate Resilience through Improved Disaster Preparedness and Infrastructure (EDCR), funded by Japan and initiated in March 2019 by UNDP in partnership with the Government of Palau, will be implemented through to 2023. The project focuses on strengthening gender responsiveness while encouraging an inclusive approach to national and community disaster risk management. Its four outputs are the following: (1) strengthened gender-sensitive disaster communication and climate-monitoring systems; (2) enhanced gender-sensitive national and state disaster responders' readiness capacity; (3) enhanced community disaster resilience through improved water resource management; and (4) integrated gender and social inclusion awareness. The project is aligned with the Palau 2020: National Master Plan for Development (NMPD) and supports Palau's efforts to increase resilience to climate disasters and related hazards by strengthening the preparedness and adaptive capacity of institutions, systems and communities. The EDCR project also supports Palau's Sustainable Development pathway in relation to Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries; Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; and Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

In February 2021, under the EDCR project, the UNDP conducted a two-day workshop, through Palau's National Emergency Management Office (NEMO), the Bureau of Ageing, Disability and Gender (BADG). The workshop was conducted in partnership with the Palau Red Cross Society (PRCS), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the Pacific Community (SPC), and Omekesang Association of Palau (OAP), a civil society organization working for the rights of persons with disabilities. The workshop focused on protection, gender and social inclusion, and on integrating these aspects in disaster management before, during and after an emergency, in accordance with the Palau Disaster Risk Management Framework (PDRMF), the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy (PGMP) and the National Disability Inclusive Policy (NDIP). Participants learned approaches to gender concepts; how to collect quantitative and qualitative data disaggregated by sex, gender and age, including disability and variables that capture situations of vulnerable communities; and a rights-based approach to gender and social inclusion analysis in disaster risk management work.

Source: UNDP. Palau Disaster Preparedness and Improved Infrastructure Programme. Website consulted August 2022. <https://www.undp.org/pacific/projects/palau-disaster-preparedness-and-improved-infrastructure>









# III. Gender equality and women’s empowerment in the policy, legislative and institutional context

The Government of Palau has committed to advancing gender equality by endorsing several international and regional conventions and agreements, complemented by a series of national commitments, which are highlighted in the following sections (see Table 7).

**Table 7. United Nations conventions explicitly supporting gender equality ratified by Palau**

Convention	Relevance to gender equality
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Signatory, not yet ratified.	The articles of CEDAW address gender equality and non- discrimination in areas such as education, employment, marriage, health, finances and decision-making. CEDAW establishes internationally endorsed norms and standards for women’s human rights.
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Ratified in 1995	This convention addresses gender equality by recognizing that girls are often discriminated against. It sets norms and standards against harmful practices such as denying girls’ right to education, early marriage and female genital mutilation. The Ministry of Health and Human Services (MOHHS) is responsible for implementing the CRC and reporting on progress. The most recent report was submitted in 2017.
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Ratified in 2013	This convention recognizes that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple forms of discrimination, in the areas of health, education, access to services, mobility and others. The preamble and seven articles specify attention to non-discrimination for women and girls. An interministry council is responsible for implementing the convention and reporting on progress. Implementation is supported through the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2018). A report was submitted in 2018.
Family Protection Act Passed in 2012	Palau has taken steps to address domestic violence and child abuse. In 2012, Palau passed the Family Protection Act (FPA). The FPA criminalizes domestic violence, institutes a no-drop policy (the victim cannot drop the case) for domestic violence and stipulates that customary restitution for domestic violence cases does not nullify with criminal charges.
Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Ratified in 2012	The convention promotes equal remuneration to male and female workers for work of equal value. It defines and explains equal work and gender. Monitoring and implementation of the convention is the responsibility of the Ministry of Human Resources, Culture, Tourism & Development (MHRCTD).
Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111) (ILO) Ratified in 2012	This convention prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, maternity and family responsibilities. The convention prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace. Palau became a member of the ILO in 2012 and ratified the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) in 2006. The UN Country Team recommends that Palau ratify and implement the eight fundamental conventions of the ILO and recommends strengthened government effort to improve adequate protection of workers, especially migrant workers, against acts of anti-union discrimination in respect of their employment.

Source: Author’s own expansion based upon literature review.

### 3.1 International commitments to gender equality

Palau ratified two UN environmental conventions that are relevant to rural women – the Convention on Biodiversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Palau's Climate Change Policy five-year action plan includes strengthening resilience within vulnerable segments of society, including single mothers.

Actions include support for local food production and development of nutritional guidelines (Palau Climate Change Policy, 2015). However, the conventions themselves – especially in combination with the SDGs – can provide rationales and guidance for increased investment in gender analysis and gender-responsive programme planning and design. Palau endorsed the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway (2014), the SDGs (2015) and the conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The SAMOA Pathway promotes gender equality, women's empowerment and the full realization of women and girls' human rights. It sets forth recommendations regarding eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and girls; strengthening women's economic empowerment; ending all forms of violence against women; ensuring women's full, equal and effective participation at all levels of decision-making; and promoting and protecting women's human rights, including reproductive rights (United National General Assembly, 2014).

The SDG targets respond to different facets of rural women's lives, such as discriminatory norms surrounding domestic roles and responsibilities that prevent women from participating in the economy and in decision-making. SDG 5 – achieve gender equality and empower all girls and women – provides high-level guidance for addressing issues that are critical for rural women with limited access to health services and to information regarding their

right to live violence-free lives. The SDGs provide a framework for policy development and indicators for monitoring progress, and function as advocacy tools for development agencies and CSOs. Palau attends the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The conclusions of the sessions provide recommendations to support progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the SDGs and women and girls' rights in general. The priority theme of the sixty-second session of the CSW, held in 2018, was the empowerment of rural women and girls. The 2018 CSW recommended support for rural women's roles in agriculture and fisheries (UN Women, 2018b) (see Box 10).

### 3.2 Regional gender-equality agreements

Palau endorsed key regional agreements on gender equality, including the Pacific Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (PPA, 1994, 2004 and 2017) and the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED, 2012). These agreements identify regional priorities and provide guidance to countries in developing their own national gender policies. The PPA, endorsed by 22 Pacific Island countries and territories in 1994, was the first regional charter on gender equality. This initial version of the PPA included 13 critical areas, mirroring the critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA). In the 2004 revision, the priority areas were clustered into four strategic themes: 1) mechanisms to promote the advancement of women; 2) women's legal and human rights; 3) women's access to services; and 4) women's economic empowerment. The PPA was reviewed again in 2015 and reformulated around strategic outcomes for accelerating progress towards gender equality as committed by the Pacific governments through the PLGED and the SDGs. The name of the PPA was changed to the Pacific

#### Box 10. CSW recommendations in support of women in agriculture and fisheries and infrastructure

The priority theme of the sixty-sixth session of the CSW, held 14 to 25 March 2022, was: Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes. A side event, Empowering rural women in value chains for sustainable tourism in Small Island Developing States, was co-organized by FAO, Mountain Partnership and Slow Food, with the participation of the Government of Palau and the UN World Tourism Organization. The case of Palau as a carbon-neutral tourism destination, valuing the heritage of agricultural products and the preservation of agricultural biodiversity, while addressing gender equality and women's empowerment, was presented at the event.

Source: UN Women. CSW66 (2022)-Commission on the Status of Women. Cited August 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw66-2022>

Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018–2030, to better reflect the importance of promoting human rights. Current implementation of the PPA focuses on knowledge generation and information, gender mainstreaming, partnerships, investments and accountability. The triennial Conference of Pacific Women and Meeting of Ministers for Women are regional conferences convened by the SPC. Senior officials of Pacific Island governments responsible for women's affairs, representatives of NGOs, development partners, researchers and academics meet to review progress, discuss challenges and make recommendations to further advance gender equality across the region. Through the triennial outcomes document, the countries involved identify priorities for advancing gender equality. The Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration was endorsed by leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2012. It renewed the countries' commitments to gender equality while identifying five priorities: 1) gender-responsive policies and programmes; 2) leadership and decision-making; 3) women's economic empowerment; 4) ending violence against women; and 5) health and education.

### 3.3 National commitments to gender equality

#### 3.3.1 National Human Rights Institution

Palau does not have a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI). At the 2011 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council, Palau accepted recommendations to establish a NHRI [61.5-61.13]. The Palau Executive Order 368 provides for the creation of a Reporting Committee on United Nations Conventions on Human Rights. The duties of the committee are limited to compliance with Palau's reporting obligations to international treaties. The UNCT continues to encourage Palau to establish an independent NHRI to lead, coordinate, provide capacity development and assist with strengthening human rights implementation throughout the country and encourages Palau to seek the support of the UN in this regard (Republic of Palau, 2016).

#### 3.3.2 Family Protection Act

Palau has taken steps to address domestic violence and child abuse. In 2012, Palau passed the Family Protection Act (FPA). The FPA criminalizes domestic violence, institutes a no-drop policy for domestic violence and stipulates that customary restitution for cases of domestic violence does not nullify criminal charges for domestic violence. The elimination of

violence against women is one of the primary areas of the government where interministry technical cooperation on gender issues is beginning to be seen. The FPA defines domestic violence, makes protection orders accessible and highlights the need for the establishment of various services for survivors of violence and coordination between such services. The FPA strengthens and expands on the ability of police officers to assist victims of family violence and outlines legal penalties for acts of family violence and abuse. However, the definition of rape is limited to sexual intercourse, and spousal rape is exempt from prosecution. The common law rule requiring proof of physical resistance in order to prove absence of sexual consent is still applied, as is the defence of reasonable belief that a victim was of lawful age of consent. Protection measures are outlined in the FPA, yet limited protection measures are in place, in particular adequate shelters and other services to support victims, especially women and children. An amended Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to the FPA was endorsed in March 2022. The MOU clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the Office of the Attorney General, the Bureau of Public Safety, the Office of the Victims of Crime Advocate and the Ministry of Education in order to successfully implement the FPA and strengthen interagency cooperation (Ministry of Justice, 2022).

#### 3.3.3 Human trafficking

In 2021, Palau did not show an increase in efforts against human trafficking compared to the previous reporting period. There were no standard operating procedures for victim identification and referral to services, which leads to insufficient identification and protection services and the penalization of potential victims. For the second consecutive year, Palau did not convict any traffickers or investigate indicators of trafficking in labour recruitment and violations experienced by many foreign workers. Official complicity played a role in facilitating trafficking and hindered law enforcement efforts. As a result, Palau was downgraded to the Tier 2 watchlist on the Trafficking in Persons Report issued by the U.S. State Department. Prioritized recommendations were as follows: (1) increase efforts to investigate, prosecute and convict traffickers, including complicit officials, under trafficking laws, and sentence traffickers to penalties with prison terms; (2) develop, disseminate and train officials on standard operating procedures for taking initiative to identify victims of trafficking and refer them to protection services; (3) amend anti-trafficking laws that allow for fines in lieu of imprisonment for sex trafficking crimes and allow

the prosecution of victims for unlawful acts they are compelled to commit by traffickers; (4) enforce anti-trafficking laws punishing recruiters, employment agents and labour officials for illegal practices that facilitate trafficking; (5) increase resources for and develop victim protection and rehabilitation services, including long-term shelter options, interpretation services, and medical and psychological care; (6) create and implement a system to proactively offer foreign victims of human trafficking job placements and work visa extensions; (7) establish and implement witness confidentiality procedures; (8) increase anti-trafficking awareness among vulnerable populations, including foreign migrant worker communities; (9) establish a mechanism for the systematic monitoring of government anti-trafficking efforts (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

### 3.3.4 Gender mainstreaming

The 2018 Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy (PGMP) recognizes women's rights to participate in all levels of decision-making and in the economy and to live free from violence (Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs, 2018). The PGMP includes four strategic actions: (1) a high-level coordination mechanism across the government to support the mainstreaming process; (2) the integration of gender perspectives in national, state and sector-level policies, legislation, strategies and programmes; (3) an organizational culture responsive to gender mainstreaming; and (4) a monitoring, evaluation, learning and accountability mechanism to assess progress towards gender equality. These recommendations require collaboration, cooperation and coordinated interventions with multiple entry points in ministries, civil society and development partners. The PGMP sets the direction for the integration of gender into sector-level strategic planning. The Gender Division, under the Ministry of State, is responsible for implementing the PGMP across ministries. However, the division is highly constrained by its limited staff capacity and budget.

A 2018 stocktake of the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming in Palau, conducted by the SPC in collaboration with the Ministry of Cultural and Community Affairs (MCCA), showed commitment to gender equality in key strategic planning documents, but limited technical capacity for gender analysis (Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs, 2018). Revisions of national strategic planning documents changed the focus and responsibility for gender integration from central planning to individual ministries. However, capacity for gender analysis and gender planning to effectively mainstream gender aspects into sector priorities was seen to be

a challenge in those ministries. Budget allocations for gender mainstreaming were inadequate to effect meaningful change or support the capacity development among ministry staff. The Gender Division, the main agency responsible for gender equality, was underfunded and had insufficient human resource capacity to be effective. Currently, the Gender Division is under the Bureau of Domestic Affairs (BDA), which is under the Ministry of State, and is administrated by the BDA Director. The position of Gender Chief has been vacant since mid-March 2022 and key staff have been reassigned to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and the Ministry of Finance (MOF).

A High Level Committee for Gender Mainstreaming has been initiated through the MOS. Key stakeholders and potential members of this high-level committee are as follows: all ministries, the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO), the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), the Office of Climate Change, the Office of Planning and Statistics (OPS), the National Environment Protection Council (NEPC), the Chamber of Commerce (COC), Palau Organic Growers Association (POGA), Palau Red Cross Society (PRCS), Mechesil Belau Inc., Palau Community College (PCC), Risel Belau and top businesswomen in Palau.

## 3.4 Main governmental institutions and policies relevant to agriculture, rural development and gender mainstreaming

There are multiple governmental institutions operating in and supporting rural development in Palau, across social, economic and environmental realms. At the initial meeting for this study, the following agencies were identified as key to promoting and supporting gender equality and the management and use of natural resources for improved and sustainable development:

- » Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment (MAFE)
- » National Emergency Management Office (NEMO)
- » Ministry of State (MOS) – Gender Division (under the Bureau of Domestic Affairs)
- » Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS)
- » Ministry of Public Infrastructure and Industries (MPII)
- » Ministry of Human Resources, Culture, Tourism and Development (MHRCTD)
- » Ministry of Finance (which manages Palau's climate change portfolio)
- » Palau Community College Cooperative Research and Extension.



The MAFE, the Gender Division (under the MOS), the MOE and the MOH were the main focus of this stocktake of governmental institutions. The MAFE, MOS, MOF and Palau Community College Cooperative Research and Extension participated in a meeting at the start of the assessment, and additional meetings were held with each of the three ministries and the college to collect further information. Each ministry responded to a similar set of questions regarding its current efforts and abilities to provide an enabling environment for gender mainstreaming. Information on the national government and other ministries was obtained through desk research. The findings of this research supplement the 2018 stocktake of gender mainstreaming in Palau.

Both the MOS and the MAFE have a specific gender policy within their policy frameworks. Other ministries are in the process of incorporating gender into their planning commitments. More research is needed to explore the constraints and opportunities that exist to fully support rural sectors through all ministries. Such research needs to be well coordinated across the multiple ministries.

A primary challenge in the rural sector is the need for follow-up support and technical knowledge dissemination to manage and maintain small projects, such as livestock projects, after initial training. Support of existing private livestock operations is also needed (E. Akiwo, personal communication, 2022). Communication and coordination with the ministries are essential for the success and sustainability of women's projects. Furthermore, more staff and extension officers are needed to support women's organizations, and such support should take into account that women have family subsistence, care-giving, community and church activities that make it difficult for them to participate in training and follow up activities.

The Gender Division, under the MOS, implements the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy and other national policies, such as the Climate Change Policy, that have specific priorities that support and direct government programmes for rural women. These policy priorities are linked to the work of those responsible for agriculture, fisheries, land management, climate change and infrastructure.

#### **3.4.1 The Ministry of State and the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy**

The MOS's Gender Division implements the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy and other national policies, such as the Climate Change Policy, which have specific priorities that support government programmes for rural women and are linked to the work

of the ministries responsible for agriculture, fisheries, land management, climate change and infrastructure. The Gender Division's focus is on social well-being. It provides services to rural women, working with rural-sector ministries and working through women's village or community groups. These groups are formed with training provided by the MOS in order to operate as formalized groups. The Ministry also assists these groups to access grants and technical support.

#### **Policy implications of the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy**

The Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy identifies action areas for the advancement of gender equality and the participation of rural women in development processes. The policy states that a "gender and socially inclusive and balanced lens" be applied to every programme and project (Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs, 2018, p. 9). Each ministry responsible for gender analysis, needs assessment, developing staff capacities, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The Gender Division is mandated to coordinate with the gender focal points in each ministry and with networks of rural women's groups in order to increase their access to financial and human resources.

Consultations with government stakeholders indicate that there is a gap in high-level coordination and financing for gender equality and a need for coordinated monitoring of progress across ministries. Adequate services depend upon the Gender Division being in contact with rural women's groups and on coordination and communication between the Gender Division and other ministries. For instance, rural women's organizations depend upon the ministries and state governments for transport to training events and potential market venues. Programmes that provide grants to rural women to start small livestock or other agricultural projects need extension support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment (MAFE) and the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS). The Gender Division relies upon local networks of women's groups to take the lead in working with the MAFE on gender-responsive agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture development. (Such networks exist and have established formal ties with the MAFE, but gaps within the government system hinder successful follow-up on initiatives.) To date, communication and coordination channels have been established between the Gender Division, the Bureau of Agriculture and Palau Community College Cooperative Research and Extension (PCC-CRE). A summary of the assessment of the enabling environment for RWE within the MOS's Gender Division is provided in Table 8.

**Table 8. Assessment of enabling environment for rural women’s empowerment and gender equality within the Gender Division of the Ministry of State**

Indicative findings		
Enabling environment criteria	Enabling factors	Constraint
Commitment at leadership level	The Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy (PGMP) and the establishment of a Gender Division demonstrate Palau’s commitment to gender equality. The stated goal of the policy, that gender be incorporated into plans of all ministries and linked to the PGMP, also indicates such commitment. The Sustainable Land Management Policy addresses gender and the gender component is implemented by the Gender Division.	The ministry would have greater impact and authority to mainstream gender equality if its High Level Mainstreaming Committee were in full operation, with close links to the MOJ, the MHHS, the MOF, the MAFE and the President’s Office.
Organizational culture and internal willingness to address gender issues	Gender Division staff members have specific roles linked to the implementation of the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy.	Low staff numbers, staff turnover, limited budget and competing priorities the effective implementation of the division’s mandate.
Accountability mechanisms and systems to enforce commitments to gender mainstreaming	Gender Division staff members have specific responsibilities for implementing the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy.	The division’s accountability mechanisms do not extend to authority over the gender mainstreaming work of other ministries. Thus, the division has limited ability to catalyse changes.
Technical capacity to identify and address gender issues	Gender Division staff members have the capacity to address immediate responsibilities.	Staff skills for gender-based analysis of issues across sectors and experience within the staff to influence transformational change and facilitate whole-of-government mainstreaming is limited.
Adequate financial and human resources to implement gender mainstreaming	A budget exists for the work required to implement the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy.	The operational budget of the Gender Division is low and restricts the implementation of cross-sector activities. Budgets for staffing are low, leaving the division understaffed and limited in its ability to achieve the stated goals of the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy.

Note: Source of information regarding the Sustainable Land Management Policy: Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Industries and Commerce. 2012. *Sustainable Land Management Policy*. Koror, Palau.

Source: Author’s own expansion based upon findings of this assessment.

The MAFE noted that they have collaborated with the Gender Division on the implementation of the Gender Mainstreaming Policy within the MAFE, that the decisions have been documented and work has begun. In order to implement the Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy (PGMP) and strengthen rural women’s role, there is a need for the MOS to participate more effectively in agriculture and fisheries interventions. The Gender Division is mandated to coordinate and influence the provision of adequate financing to advance gender mainstreaming.

### 3.4.2 Ministry of Health and Human Services

Under the MOH, the Division of Primary and Preventive Health, the Division of Behaviour Health and the NCD Prevention Unit provided grants ranging from USD 5 000 to USD 25 000 in 2020 and 2021 for

community-based programmes and activities to support NDC prevention. Project funding included support to increase the production of local agricultural and fisheries products in order to improve local diet and reduce NDCs.

### 3.4.3 Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment (MAFE) and policy implications for the Bureau of Agriculture

The MAFE’s policy direction on gender focuses on the inclusion of women agricultural producers in all matters under the Ministry’s mandate, with targeted technical assistance to accelerate women’s uptake of agricultural activities. Policy direction also includes supporting women’s greater participation in decision-making through the establishment of men’s and women’s associations, including the Palau Organic

Growers Association, and representation on the Forest Stewardship Council.

The MAFE began incorporating gender and social inclusion into its implementation of national projects funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in 2021. Projects include targets for gender and social inclusion at the community level (including representation of women, men and various social groups) and increasing the capacity of resource managers to track progress in gender mainstreaming and social inclusion in their programs. Gender mainstreaming and social inclusion will follow the guidelines established in the new Project Management Manual Handbook. In 2017, a baseline analysis was conducted in preparation for the implementation of the GEF6 National Project. In 2018, a gender analysis was conducted in preparation for the mid-term review of the GEF5 National Project. A key finding was that the outcomes of national initiatives that include land-use planning and PAN/Protected Area Planning could have unintended negative consequences for women, men and social groups with explicit incorporation of gender and social inclusion mainstreaming (National Environment Protection Council, 2019).

### Policy implications for agriculture

The **National Policy Institutional Framework and Strategy for Resilient Agriculture and Aquaculture** of the Bureau of Agriculture (BOA) was developed in 2015 to strengthen food security in Palau as a priority measure for climate change adaptation. The overall goal of the policy is to attain the vision: A resilient, sustainable and food secure Palau.

The strategy of the policy was built upon four cornerstones of resilience: institutional, ecosystem, community and economic resilience. One of the goals for institutional resilience is to collect data and information and make it available for improved decision-making through institutional networks and partnerships, with the objective being to establish a database with gender-disaggregated information. A second objective is to promote transparent, accountable and gender-balanced governance and management in local food production. The policy was incorporated into the Palau Climate Change Policy, and the 2021 Pathways to Sustainable Food Systems in Palau builds upon this policy.

Over the past six years, the following gender-related objectives of the Strategy for Resilient Agriculture and Aquaculture have been achieved: (1) gender-segregated data are available on the Palau Automated

Land and Resource Information System (PALARIS) and, upon request, from the MAFE; (2) the number of women in managerial and technical roles in agriculture has increased; (3) there is greater public awareness of the roles and contributions of women in agriculture; (4) the Palau Organic Farmers Association (POGA) and the Forest Stewardship Council have been established, each providing support for women; and (5) targeted training programmes for women agricultural producers have been designed and implemented.

During consultations for this assessment, the Bureau of Agriculture noted that the collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender-balanced governance and management in local food production have been addressed. (For instance, the collection of sex-disaggregated data has been built into a recent agricultural survey.) Furthermore, the directors of agriculture, fisheries and the environment, under the MAFE, are women. The MAFE is addressing constraints to gender-responsive agricultural development with refined data collection, including in subsistence farming and family operated and managed farms. More efforts will be made to identify and analyse the roles, knowledge, contributions and needs of women farmers. At present, the MAFE partners with the Taiwan Technical Mission (TTM) and Palau Community College Cooperative Research and Extension (PCC-CRE) on programmes targeting women farmers. These partners receive ongoing training on gender analysis of agricultural issues, needs and services.

The United Nations held a Food Systems Summit in 2021 to discuss priorities and pathways for achieving sustainable food systems towards achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Prior to the UN summit, Palau held a Food Systems Summit Dialogue to develop pathways and solutions to achieve greater food security. The vision that was developed at the dialogue of a sustainable food system is expressed in the **2021 Pathways to Sustainable Food Systems in Palau** document, as follows:

**By 2030, Palau's Blue and Green Food Systems are coordinated holistically across sectors, are modernized and efficient, support sustainable livelihoods, drive nutritional hunger to zero, and are environmentally and culturally sustainable and resilient (Republic of Palau, 2021, p.2).**

The goals of the 2021 Pathways to Sustainable Food Systems in Palau are the following (Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Environment, 2021):

- » Provide food for the resident population of 18 000 people (14 000 Palauans, 4 000 foreign workers), with 75 percent of the population living in urban areas.
- » Locally-produced foods provide 15 to 20 percent of the diet.
- » Provide food and experiences for tourists (90 000 to 140 000 people per year).
- » Exchange and source foods, particularly locally-produced foods such as fish and taro, play a key role in cultural identity and traditional practices.
- » Provide adequate real-time information on the contribution of a dynamic food system.
- » Provide for livelihoods and jobs, from producers and processors to retailers and restaurants, and participant profiles for effective interventions and assessment.
- » Provide locally-grown and diverse processed foods as a key factor of resilience during global stresses.

Palau’s food system is complex, including economic, social, environmental and cultural sectors across multiple processes, from production to consumption.

In order to achieve food security, all sectors must be included in relevant efforts. The MAFE is promoting the application of a systems approach to fisheries, aquaculture, crops, livestock, production, consumption and distribution, and the 2021 Pathways to Sustainable Food Systems in Palau includes objectives for a collaborative, cross-sector approach to managing and planning for food security. This has the potential to facilitate social analysis of food production issues and to support enhanced and more holistic gender analysis and programming within the food system. In order to achieve this, an interministry coordination mechanism on the promotion of gender equality in agriculture and rural women’s empowerment should be agreed upon. Capacity building on gender, cross-sector coordination and gender-responsive planning will also support gender mainstreaming. The MAFE is also taking specific action in this regard. See Box 11 regarding the Gender Mainstreaming, Social Inclusion and Natural Resource Use training workshop conducted by the MAFE in 2021, and Table 9, which summarizes aspects of the enabling environment for women’s empowerment within the Bureau of Agriculture.

**Table 9. Summary of assessment of the enabling environment for rural women’s empowerment and gender equality within MAFE-Bureau of Agriculture**

Indicative findings		
Enabling environment criteria	Enabling factors	Constraints
Commitment at leadership level	<p>Strong statements of commitment to gender equality from the ministerial and executive levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management is committed to the implementation of a new strategic direction on gender, with a female director of the Bureau of Agriculture</li> <li>• The MAFE-BOA initiative for gender mainstreaming and gender-segregated data</li> </ul> <p>BOA-TTM-CRE partnership to provide taro for women farmers</p>	<p>The MAFE-BOA has limited staff and operational budget to fully implement the programmes targeting women in agriculture</p>
Organizational culture and internal willingness to address gender issues	<p>Guided by strategic plan priorities, senior staff will support gender mainstreaming in selected action areas and share traditional values on the key role women play in agriculture -especially in taro production</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff have limited gender awareness and analysis skills to initiate mainstreaming approaches.</li> <li>• Staff are challenged by the role foreign male farmers play in agriculture.</li> </ul>
Accountability mechanisms and systems to enforce commitments to gender mainstreaming	<p><b>2021 Pathways to Sustainable Food Systems in Palau</b> stipulates increased mainstreaming of gender equality in the Ministry’s work in order to foster the inclusion of women in agriculture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry collects sex-disaggregated data on men’s and women’s attendance at training sessions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No specific milestones or targets for women’s engagement are identified.</li> <li>• Currently there are limited systems to enable and ensure that staff members implement commitments to gender. This includes lack of training on gender and limited reporting requirements.</li> <li>• There is no monitoring of the quality of women’s participation and no follow-up on women participants in training provided in rural communities.</li> <li>• Most Ministry data are sex-disaggregated but not analysed in relation to men’s and women’s needs or how they benefit from programmes.</li> </ul>

Source: Author’s assessment based upon interviews, discussion



### Box 11. Gender mainstreaming, social inclusion and natural resource use

During 2021, a workshop entitled Gender Mainstreaming, Social Inclusion and Natural Resource Use, was conducted by MAFE's Environmental Planning and Coordination Unit (EPCU), the Gender Division of the MOS, and Ebiil Society. The target audience was the GEF6 project partners. The workshop aimed to: (1) understand how to implement Palau's Gender Mainstreaming Policy, especially in GEF6 projects; (2) increase awareness of gender and social inclusion in natural resource use, biodiversity management and land-use planning; and (3) present the Palau Gender and Natural Resources 2020 National Report and the GEF6 Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices (KAP) Report. The workshop included training on incorporating gender mainstreaming and social inclusion into the work of the MAFE GEF6 project partners.

Source: MAFE Palau Biodiversity Project (GEF 6). Gender and Social Mainstreaming. Cited August 2022. <https://sites.google.com/view/gef6palau/gender-social-mainstreaming>

#### 3.4.4 Bureau of Fisheries and policy implications for fisheries

Fisheries and aquaculture are key to nutrition, culture and heritage. Palauans rely on fisheries for subsistence and income generation. In 2014, the sector contributed 2.2 percent of Palau's GDP (Gillet, 2016). The Bureau of Fisheries (BOF), under the MAFE, supports women, men, families and communities who depend upon fisheries.

The BOF included gender mainstreaming as a planning component in 2021, in line with national directives. The first indicator of the BOF programme is related to developing a programme on women and fisheries. To this end, the government will collaborate with and fund CSOs to: (1) undertake inventories to assess women's participation in offshore fisheries, inshore fisheries, aquaculture, fisheries research and administration; (2) support women as owners or operators of small- and medium-sized fishery enterprises; and (3) develop a centralized database on women engaged in all aspects of fisheries. Data for this database is available in the MAFE-supported Palau Gender and Natural Resources 2020 National Report. The second indicator aims to increase the number of women who own fishery companies and the number of women on the boards of fishery enterprises.

#### Policy implications for fisheries

The MAFE's operational planning objectives for gender entail the collection of sex-disaggregated data on men and women's economic participation in fisheries, which is in progress. This will shed light on the extent of women's engagement in fishery businesses. Ongoing regular surveys will show how women integrate fishery-related work into their economic

and subsistence roles. Analysis of such survey data will indicate women's multiple and overlapping roles, the scope of their productive employment and the contribution of such employment to their livelihoods, as well as women and men's relative access to and control over resources. This type of analysis can be then used to inform policy, budgeting and programming.

Areas where more knowledge can inform equitable approaches to fishery management, sustainable livelihoods and community well-being are the following: 1) decision-making regarding use rights for communal coastal fishing grounds; 2) policy frameworks and government systems that increase women's access to and participation in fisheries; 3) economic support programmes for fishers; 4) access to formal and informal markets; and 5) financial services to enhance the fishery-based economy.

The MAFE brings together women who have scientific and technical fishery knowledge and an interest in the advancement of women in fisheries. Gender-disaggregated data, annual plan priorities for gender, and collaboration with the Palau Aquaculture Clam Association (PACA), community fishing cooperatives, the Palau Sportfishing Association and Friends of the Marine Sanctuary can advance the implementation of the MAFE's gender policies within the fisheries sector. Collaboration and information-sharing with the MOS's Gender Division can support policy implementation for empowerment and engagement of rural women in fisheries. Table 10 provides indicative findings on various aspects of the enabling environment within the Bureau of Fisheries, based on interviews with selected MAFE staff identified by the MOS Gender Division.

**Table 10. Summary of the assessment of the enabling environment for women’s empowerment and gender equality within the Bureau of Fisheries**

Indicative findings		
Enabling environment criteria	Enabling factors	Constraints
Commitment at leadership level	Prominent levels of commitment are reflected in the Ministry objectives and in the interest of staff.	Gender data analysis is limited and often not visible in planning objectives
Organizational culture and internal willingness to address gender issues	The director of the Bureau of Fisheries is a woman.	Limited awareness that gender issues are relevant to programme effectiveness in rural communities Limited staff to collaborate with rural women fishers and clam farmers, with limited opportunities for collaboration
Accountability mechanisms and systems to enforce commitments to gender mainstreaming	MAFE policies include accountability mechanisms and systems to enforce commitments to gender mainstreaming. The BOF provides information on women’s participation in fisheries to inform programming and create a baseline for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Systems are improving to increase accountability.	While the Ministry collects, consolidates and analyses some sex-disaggregated data, this is often not linked to decision-making.
Technical capacity to identify and address gender issues	The Gender Division has conducted awareness training on the Gender Mainstreaming Policy with ministry staff. Planned work with men and women’s cooperatives and associations brings technical capacity into research and programming areas. Staff are comfortable conducting qualitative assessments on the social aspects of technical issues.	MAFE staff members have undergone some gender training, but more is needed. Ongoing gender training for staff is needed so that both female and male staff understand gender issues, in order to facilitate gender work in the field.
Adequate financial and human resources to implement gender mainstreaming	The budget allocated to the achievement of gender objectives in the Annual Corporate Plan is available.	Limited resources are allocated to gender mainstreaming as a general area of work. Staff training on gender is limited within the Gender Division.

Source: Author’s summary of findings in this assessment.

Recommendations to ensure that all sectors of fishing communities participate in fisheries development and management programmes are the following: (1) The Division of Marine Resources (DMR) and NGOs should work with the Gender Division to improve information and support services for women. To facilitate this, the DRM should appoint a Community Fisheries Officer (CFO) with expertise in women’s issues, who, with support from the DMR, NGOs and the Gender Division, will provide technical assistance and training to both men and women in fisheries management, development, gear and fishing techniques. (2) The Gender Division can collaborate with the CFO to provide services, coordinate programmes and extension activities with DMR. (3) Increase women’s participation in DMR work, planning and programme implementation. (4) Provide local training to women using local expertise, delivering place-based workshops. (5) CFO should liaise with partners to

support women in regional projects and to organize and conduct training for women on seafood quality, processing and preservation; marketing (including packaging) and business skills; and seafood recipes (for preparing and marketing lunch packs). (6) The DMR should examine the feasibility of a central market for the fishery and agriculture sectors. (7) The National Scholarship Office (NSO) should provide support and incentives to marine science majors, in partnership with the Palau Community College (PCC) (Lambeth, 1999).

### 3.5 Major stakeholders

#### 3.5.1 Key civil society organizations

Civil society organizations (CSOs), together with development partners and donors, support Palau’s progress towards gender equality and promote rural women’s empowerment. CSOs play a key role in filling

gaps in government services for rural women through coordinated and ad hoc initiatives, working in the areas of gender, sustainable natural resource management, women's health and economic empowerment, coastal resource management, climate change adaptation and conservation. Two important CSOs are the Palau Organic Growers Association (POGA) and the Palau Livestock Association (PLA), which support organic farmers and piggeries through training, financial management and overall networking for supplies and cooperative exchanges. The MAFE supports CSOs by bringing together women who have scientific and technical fishery knowledge and an interest in the advancement of women in fisheries.

### 3.5.2 Pacific Women

In 2012, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women) was launched by the Australian government at the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Leaders Meeting. Pacific Women is a ten-year (2012–2022), USD 320 million programme, funded by Australian Aid, which aims to improve the political, economic and social opportunities of women in the Pacific by: (1) increasing the effective representation of women and women's interests, through women's leadership at all levels of decision-making; (2) expanding women's economic opportunities to earn an income and accumulate economic assets; and (3) reducing violence against women and increasing access to support services and to justice for survivors of violence. In Palau, Pacific Women supports assessment, stocktaking, policy development and analysis to assist the country in fulfilling its commitments to the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, under the [Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Palau Country Plan](#).

### 3.5.3 UN Women in Palau

UN Women supports four programmes in Palau. The programme Advancing Gender Justice in the Pacific (AGJP) supports advocacy initiatives to promote women's political participation, providing knowledge products on harmonised human rights treaty reporting and implementation and training for women candidates running in elections. UN Women supports government initiatives to increase access to gender-responsive legal systems for women. The Ending Violence against Women (EVAW) programme provides stakeholders with access to virtual knowledge platforms, tools and evidence-based resources to better equip them with the knowledge and evidence to advocate for strengthened EVAW legislation, improved policies and services for women survivors of violence. Social media tools are also made available to support

community mobilization aimed at ending violence against women and girls, through campaigns such as the United Nations Secretary General's UNiTE to EAW and Say NO-UNiTE. The Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) programme supports informed and evidence-based decision-making in gender issues by assisting in the production of nationally-generated disaggregated data and statistics on the economic situation of women. Finally, the programme Increasing Community Resilience through the Advancement of Women to Address Climate Change and Natural Hazards (IREACH) supports the incorporation of gender dimensions in strategic documents for disaster risk management and climate change through the provision of knowledge products and tools on the gendered implications of climate change and disasters (UN Women Asia and the Pacific, 2022).

### 3.5.4 Asian Development Fund, Japan Fund for Prosperous and Resilient Asia, and Ireland Trust Fund for Building Climate Change and Disaster Resilience in Small Island Developing States

The Asian Development Fund (ADB) project, Palau: COVID-19 Response for Affected Poor and Vulnerable Groups, targets poor and vulnerable groups affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19 pandemic). This USD 3.71 million project is funded by a USD 766 444 grant from the ADB, a USD 2.4 million grant from the Japan Fund for Prosperous and Resilient Asia and the Pacific, and a USD 550 000 grant from the Ireland Trust Fund for Building Climate Change and Disaster Resilience in Small Island Developing States. The project takes a comprehensive approach to addressing the complex and varying levels of vulnerabilities affecting marginalized populations. The overall objective of the project is to improve the capability of vulnerable groups to withstand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by providing immediate assistance to these groups while positioning them to achieve higher levels of economic and social well-being post-COVID-19 pandemic. The project will (1) respond to the immediate physical, mental, social and environmental needs of home-bound older people and persons with disabilities who are highly vulnerable to COVID-19 pandemic; (2) boost local food security and help smallholder agricultural producers generate income; and (3) help address family and gender-based violence (Asian Development Bank, 2022).

In March 2022, Palau's Ministry of Finance signed contracts with three NGOs to implement the project, as follows: the Belau Wellness Center Inc. (BWC) delivers services to home-bound senior citizens and

persons with disabilities; the Semesemel a Klengelakel (SKO) delivers services for family protection and case management; and the Belau Association of NGOs (BANGO) delivers social marketing and awareness raising for activities for gender-based violence prevention (Island Times, 2022).

Another Asian Development Bank (ADB) project, Strengthening Urban Planning and Management, proposed for 2022, will support the implementation of the Urban Multisector Strategic Development Plan for Improved Land Use and Investment Planning by providing technical assistance to strengthen Palau's institutional capacity in urban planning and management. It will build upon The Koror–Babeldaob Resilient Urban Development Strategy and Action Plan 2030. The vision is to have resilient and widespread improvement in general standards of living, while preserving Palau's cultural and environmental values. The specific goals of the project are to: (1) build resilient housing and liveable neighbourhoods; (2) ensure that Palau's tourism industry benefits the people of Palau; and (3) develop effective urban planning and management of public assets including built, natural and cultural resources (Asian Development Bank, 2021). The project will be implemented in the urban states of Koror and Airai and in nine rural states in Babeldaob. As such, it will strengthen rural planning and management in Babeldaob and support women, men and children in rural areas.

### 3.6 Summary of findings on the enabling environment

Consultations held with the MAFE in the course of the assessment indicate that there is willingness to integrate gender aspects as well as awareness of the benefits of this for communities, the private sector and the national economy. Enhanced management of natural resources, targeting of extension services, economic gain for families, and informed decision-making were acknowledged as necessary components to effectively integrate gender into Palau's economy.

#### 3.6.1 Stocktake of gender mainstreaming capacity

The recommendations for developing an enabling environment for gender mainstreaming which arose from the Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming

Capacity of Pacific Island Governments, Republic of Palau (Ministry of Culture and Community Affairs, 2016) cover the legal and policy framework, political will, organizational culture, good governance, technical capacity and adequate resources. The recommendations are: (1) Develop a gender mainstreaming toolkit to educate political leaders and human resource personnel within each ministry. (2) Establish a comprehensive programme to collect and analyse gender-disaggregated data. (3) Establish a resource centre for gender. (4) Appropriate national funds for the Gender Division, for personnel and operational costs. (5) Foster the production of annual reports and work plans by the Gender Division with a performance-based budget. (6) Develop a sustainable financing strategy for the Ministry of State (MOS) that includes the Gender Division. (7) Establish gender focal points within each ministry to mainstream gender (Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs, 2016).

The assessment identified a strong willingness to mainstream gender perspectives within the ministries. The Palau Gender Mainstreaming Policy was developed and endorsed with clearly stated commitments to national objectives for gender mainstreaming that are reflected in key documents in ministries. There are measurable indicators in the Gender Mainstreaming Policy linked to the achievement of gender mainstreaming outcomes. In most ministries there are staff who can articulate how these commitments would support improved achievement of strategic outcomes in core business areas. There is greater awareness of the importance of increased budget allocations for integrating gender into the activities of the ministries. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment (MAFE) has established gender policies, strategies and plans. Gender analysis, data and implementation of gender commitments are found in areas of each ministry's work.

The assessment also identified gaps. These include: (1) lack of clarity related to interministry responsibility for social and gender analysis at national, state and community levels and gaps in coordination with the Gender Division; (2) limited collection and analysis of data on gender roles in agriculture, women's access to and control over resources,<sup>5</sup> and women's access to services; (3) limited technical understanding and capacity to conduct gender analysis, design interventions to promote gender equality and deliver gender-responsive programmes; (4) limited data

<sup>5</sup> According to Maked Besebes, no one is addressing the issue of women accessing their own private family or clan land or public land (personal communication, 2022).



to inform budgeting for developing gender-related capacity within the MAFE; and (5) insufficient political will as the Gender Mainstreaming Policy has not been endorsed by the National Congress (T. Mekreos, personal communication, 2022).

### **3.6.2 Progress since the stocktake of the gender mainstreaming capacity of the Government of Palau**

The MAFE has conducted a gender analysis of strategic issues in agriculture and incorporated the findings into its strategic plan. The Ministry has also analysed gender roles in food security, climate change and disaster resilience and incorporated these findings into current plans. However, budget allocations for gender mainstreaming are limited. The development of a stand-alone gender policy in the MAFE, along with an implementation strategy for efficient gender mainstreaming into sectoral plans and programmes, would improve coordination, planning and budgeting and clarify how gaps could be addressed strategically. The MAFE's current policy highlights actions to enhance mainstreaming by increasing data on women's roles and increasing women's participation on decision-making boards and committees. In addition, all three of the MAFE bureaus have female directors. Furthermore, budget information for gender mainstreaming in the MAFE was made available for the GEF6 project, so it was possible to assess how investment compares to stated plans, and to understand if there were budgets in other areas that could be used to advance gender equality.

In consultations with the MAFE and the MOS, staff highlighted that traditional norms and attitudes surrounding gender roles in society are strong at the

rural level. These norms constrain the implementation of gender-responsive programming. Decision-makers at all levels (from ministry management and senior staff to extension officers, household heads and community leaders) understand the rationale of increasing women's involvement and empowerment, value women's contributions, and support interventions that benefit rural women. From a strategic policy standpoint, there is clarity about which ministries should take responsibility for raising community awareness regarding the benefits of mainstreaming gender. Technical ministries understand their mandate to do this (T. Mekreos, personal communication, 2022). Although the Gender Division has limited staff and financial resources, they collaborate with their partners to deliver services on the required scale.

Another important point of progress in gender mainstreaming capacity within the MAFE is that the Ministry collects, analyses and uses sex-disaggregated data. The development of inventories and a database on women in fisheries and agriculture will increase informed decision-making. It is very positive that there is recognition of the need to respond to currently available data on gender inequalities and to set quantitative targets for women's involvement in decision-making on agricultural and fishery issues. The MAFE is also tracking women's participation in their extension programmes and plans to qualitatively assess how active women are in training programmes and how they use the knowledge they have gained. Finally, the MAFE allocates financial resources for gender mainstreaming.







# IV. Findings and recommendations

Palau has declared its commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women through a variety of national, regional and international instruments. Both men and women have benefitted from progress in education, health care, basic infrastructure and employment; and women enjoy greater participation in decision-making. However, remoteness, insularity, economic factors and social norms continue act as barriers to accessing development resources, information, public services, technical support and justice, especially for rural women. This CGA-ARD identifies gaps between women and men in access to information, quality of livelihoods, and opportunities to benefit from development outcomes. These issues are interconnected and, thus, require a strategic approach to support the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of rural women.

## 4.1 Major findings

1. The contributions of rural women and men to household and rural economies require more recognition and inclusion in policies, strategies, plans and programmes. Women's roles in agriculture and other rural development sectors remain unaccounted for in most surveys. Although efforts are being made to increase sex- and age-disaggregated, and rural- and urban-disaggregated data, such data is limited, as is gender-related information across the development sectors. As such, it is difficult to assess the value of rural women's contributions to ARD and identify the right solutions to support rural development.
2. Gender inequalities affect rural women's and men's capacity to develop their potential. In the rural sectors in Palau, particularly in agriculture and fisheries, women have less control over economic resources and less decision-making power than men. Women's effective participation in decision-making regarding natural resource management

in particular is constrained by traditional social norms and rules of community governance. Most women participate in subsistence and cash economies while bearing a heavier burden of responsibility for day-to-day household work and caregiving. Women spend more time than men on paid and unpaid work. Women and men fulfil distinct roles in agriculture and fisheries, use diverse types of equipment and often have different sets of knowledge and experience. Lack of public infrastructure, such as roads, put an extra burden on women to continue cultivating taro. Consultations for this report indicated that government ministries and CSOs working in agriculture, fisheries and sustainable rural development do not often discuss gender-equality issues.

These factors have policy and programming implications. From a policy perspective, it is important that the diversity in knowledge, behaviour and roles of men and women be integrated into data collection mechanisms and programme approaches. It is key to ensure programmes accommodate the constraints on women's time due to caregiving and household and community responsibilities. With regard to climate change adaptation and disaster risks, women and men have different skills related to managing environmental resources that can be combined to improve the effectiveness of efforts in this regard. Based on their distinct roles and types of knowledge, women and men may be aware of different indicators of environmental stress that, if combined, could contribute to effective management approaches. This requires strengthening the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming in government agencies and strengthening evidence collection and analysis.

3. The integration of gender equality is key to sustainable development and is being systematically mainstreamed in public policies, strategies, plans

and programmes. Integration of gender aspects into strategic planning at all levels is in progress, with a holistic application of gender analysis across all ministries (leveraging what gender-related information is available) and with mandates and monitoring and evaluation to determine what works to foster increased gender equality. The High-Level Committee for Gender Mainstreaming serves as a coordination mechanism to share and mainstream existing information among line ministries with synergistic programming and monitoring of higher-level efforts.

The results of the desk review, site visits and consultations conducted to inform this assessment indicate that progress is being made in mainstreaming gender in the agriculture, fishery and other rural sectors in Palau. There is demonstrated political will at the policy level, nationally and in line ministries, and senior staff consulted discussed how gender mainstreaming will support the achievement of government mandates for rural development. The MAFE has budgets allocated for gender mainstreaming with specific targets for engaging women in their respective sectors. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment, through their GEF6 Project, with the Bureau of Agriculture and the Bureau of Fisheries, and the ADB Social Protection project, are working to build their base of sex-disaggregated data to inform decision-making.

Awareness regarding gender analysis and gender mainstreaming needs to be strengthened among staff working at the field level to implement extension programmes. Ministry plans should include capacity development in gender-mainstreaming and clear accountability for interministry coordination and outreach. Consultations with CSOs and government agencies stressed the need to build such capacity within each ministry alongside the implementation of each ministry's programmes. Collaboration among government extension workers and CSOs working in the same communities reinforce approaches and create multiple entry points for change. It is important that findings at the micro level inform policy and strategic planning at the macro level. Such an exchange of information facilitates efficient intergovernmental coordination mechanisms currently in progress.

## 4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this assessment and on further policy recommendations from ministries involved in the endorsement of the report,<sup>6</sup> the following recommendations are targeted to the Government of Palau and to FAO with a view to align their respective commitments to address gender inequality and work towards empowering women in agriculture and the rural economy. The recommendations reflect Palau's commitments at the national, regional and international levels, and aim to support the implementation of such commitments. The recommendations support the empowerment of rural women, the improvement of policies, and the strengthening of institutional capacity to deliver gender-responsive programmes and services. They aim to make rural women's contributions to household and rural economies visible and to foster gender equality in policies, strategies, plans and programmes. The recommendations are grouped as follows: 1) recommendations for policies, strategic plans and legislation; and 2) recommendations for community-based action.

### Recommendations for policies, strategic plans and legislation

- » Support the High Level Committee for Gender Mainstreaming as an intragovernmental coordination mechanism on gender equality and RWE mandated to fully take charge of the coordination of gender equality and RWE efforts across the government system (at central and local levels). This mechanism would involve the having gender focal points at all relevant ministries and institutions.
- » Adopt a coherent cross-sector approach that explores the linkages between poverty, trade, gender, sustainable livelihoods, nutrition and regional food production and distribution practices.
- » Assess the impacts of legislation and policies, including macroeconomic policies, structural reforms and aid and trade agreements, on women's productive assets and economic empowerment.
- » Adopt and implement gender-mainstreaming strategies and plans in key ministries that provide rural services (including ministries responsible for agriculture, fisheries, infrastructure, women, justice, climate change and disaster risk management).

<sup>6</sup> The recommendations to support rural sector development in Palau also include the main issues raised in *Palau Organic Policy Development Project-Analysis of possible organic policy options for the Republic of Palau* (Pacific Community, 2022).



- » Strengthen the capacity of ministries involved in ARD to mainstream gender equality and RWE across their policies, programmes, budgets and services (including extension services), through annual training for ministry staff. Based on this capacity building at the ministry level, share good practices and lessons learned with CSOs involved in gender and ARD.
- » Mandate all ministries to monitor and report on the impacts of their policies, plans, programmes and services for rural populations with age- and sex-disaggregated data and indicators and strengthen their capacity to do so.
- » Implement a comprehensive monitoring framework on gender equality and RWE in agriculture that will cover all key economic, social and political aspects to ensure that gender-sensitive legislation and strategic plans translate into field- and household-level impacts.
- » Promote research and analysis on gender equality and rural women's and men's empowerment in the agriculture sector to inform policies and strategic planning, and conduct systematic gender analysis of legislation and policies, including macroeconomic policies, structural reforms and aid and trade agreements.
- » Design gender-responsive policies and strategies for climate change adaptation and disaster risk management that support rural women's and men's activities in small-scale agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture and cultural industries.
- » Support the systematic integration of a gender perspective in public policies, strategies, plans and programmes.
- » Develop and implement stand-alone gender policies for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment (MAFE).
- » Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation, including regular tracking and auditing of expenses on gender-responsive budgeting, in order to understand changes in women's status. Periodically review the processes, criteria and indicators for gender-responsive budgets to make them more effective and relevant from gender, social and geographical perspectives.
- » Ensure that gender mainstreaming will be deployed in policies and programmes considering the sociocultural context, heritage and local customs of Palau, and the specific roles of girls, boys, women and men.
- » Recognize rural women's and men's involvement in farming, forestry and fishing activities as agricultural producers in their own right so that ARD policies,

strategies, plans and programmes are designed and implemented in a gender-responsive manner and effectively contribute to the sustainable empowerment of rural women and men.

- » Improve the production and analysis of sex-, age- and rural/urban-disaggregated data relevant for gender equality and rural women's empowerment in policies, strategies, plans and programmes.

#### **Recommendations for community-based action**

- » Address the shortage of Palauan agricultural labour and the growing gender imbalance in the agriculture workforce by positing agriculture as a vocation of choice for young Palauan entrepreneurs.
- » Improve statistical surveys, including cultural statistics to measure the complexity of rural women's and men's contributions to the rural and national economies, including the informal economy. In parallel, conduct age- and sex-disaggregated time-use surveys in rural areas to assess the amount of time women and men dedicate to productive and reproductive work (including unpaid household work and care, community-related activities, subsistence activities, and income-generating activities).
- » Conduct studies to identify economic opportunities for women and men in the context of the green economy, including through value-chain development of agricultural and fishery products, to support ecological resilience, sustainable development, more domestic production of traditional, nutritious foods, and to address gender inequalities in the rural sector and support the empowerment of rural women.
- » Establish concrete measures to improve rural women's access to technical support, extension services, technology, transportation, productive resources and financial services, including credit and loans and saving schemes to support rural women's financial inclusion and entrepreneurial potential.
- » Increase access to, or local production of, organic inputs, such as seeds, animal feed, fertilizers and pesticides, on the part of men and women farmers; include organic production methods in existing nurseries to increase the supply of organic seeds and seedlings; and provide access to training and expertise on organic production methods.
- » Encourage government institutions and rural finance institutions, such as microfinance and development banks, to offer special promotional packages that include group collateral, business literacy, insurance schemes with low premiums and assurance of markets for agricultural products to strengthen

women's engagement in agriculture and in the rural non-farm economy (including in cultural industries) and to stimulate their access to markets and market infrastructure.

- » Promote accessible information, through online channels, communications technologies and systems such as radio, texts and other media, as a way for rural women producers and sellers to access: (1) agricultural extension, rural advisory services and weather information; (2) information on opportunities to apply for grants and in-kind services and support; and (3) support and information from other women growers (for instance, on topics such as how to improve production and how to use financial services and develop opportunities).
- » Support sustainable traditional knowledge and practices in order to build rural women's and men's resilience to climate change impacts and increase the sustainability of their livelihoods in agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture.
- » Prioritize the needs of rural women in relation to their livelihood activities in disaster recovery programmes and empower them as key actors in food and nutrition security and as custodians of local ecological knowledge and practices.
- » Increase rural women's and men's access to programmes and services that support survivors of domestic violence and their access to justice.
- » Improve the delivery of quality rural services adapted to women's needs, including accessible childcare, care for the elderly, mental health care and disability care, to alleviate the burden of rural women's unpaid care work.
- » Improve rural infrastructure, including infrastructure for transportation, water and sanitation and sustainable energy, with specific measures to promote women's access to such services.
- » Stimulate the participation of rural women and men in decision-making, through dialogue and collaboration with customary institutions, including reviewing gender-biased norms and practices, adopting measures to support women's representation in local and national institutions and in natural resource governance mechanisms (covering land, water, forest and marine resources).
- » Support rural women's groups to increase their bargaining power to access financial resources, technology, markets and land.
- » Develop partnerships with civil society organizations and government mechanisms to transform gendered stereotypes and other adverse gender norms.

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# Annexes



## Annex 1. Stakeholder meetings

Date	Participants	Title	Email/telephone
10 February 2022 First Stakeholders' Discussion on Early Warning Early Action Youth in Palau	Carol Emaurois	Consultant and member of Ngara Ungiang (women's organization for taro cultivation and processing)	cemauroise@gmail.com
	Gwendalyn Sisior	Acting Director, Bureau of Agriculture	gsisior07@gmail.com
	Keizy Shiro	Education Specialist, Ministry of Education	keizyshiro@gmail.com
	Joe Aitaro	Climate Change Policy Officer	joe.aitaro@gmail.com
14 February 2022 Second Stakeholders' Discussion Early Warning Early Action Youth in Palau	Carol Emaurois	Consultant and member of Ngara Ungiang Women Association of Choll for taro cultivation and processing	cemauroise@gmail.com
22 February 2022	Gustav Aitaro	Minister of State	gustavaitaro@gmail.com (+680)767-2509/488-5593
	Eunice Akiwo	Director of Domestic Affairs	mekisang@gmail.com
24 February 2022 Gender Mainstreaming Working Committee Members	Eunchung Hideyos	Research and Management Associate (Ebiil Society)	ghideyos@gmail.com (+680)775-5343
	Ilebrang Olkeriil	Gender Specialist/ Deputy Project Manager	ilebrang@gmail.com (+680)775-1279
26 February 2022	Kloudil Singeo	Former Director of Gender Bureau	koudil.mcca.rop@gmail.com
4 March 2022	Gwen Sisior	Acting Director, Bureau of Agriculture	gsisior07@gmail.com
28 March 2022	Cisca Vogt	Governor of the State of Ngeremlengui	ngeremlenguistategovt@gmail.com
28 March 2022; 1 April 2022	Rose Ongalibang	Community Leader on Slow Food Initiative in the State of Ngchesar	rose.ongalibang@gmail.com

Date	Participants	Title	Email/telephone
29 March 2022	Carol Emaurois	Entrepreneur (added value products)	cemauroise@gmail.com
30 March 2022	Uduch Sengebau Senior	Vice President of Palau	moj@palaugov.org
30 March 2022	Tkaki Merkreos	Country Focal Officer	Tmekreos.mos.rop@gmail.com
31 March 2022	Sandra Pierantozzi	Former Vice President of Palau	sandrapierantozzi@gmail.com
1 April 2022; 8 April 2002	Claire Harvey	President/CEO of Palau National Development Bank	charvey@ndbp.com
6 April 2022	Rukebai Kikuo Inabo	Senator for Palau Congress	Rukiinabo@gmail.com
8 April 2022	Ltelatk Fritz	Director SBDC	LT@pacificbdc.com
9 May 2022	Eunice Akiwo	Director of Domestic Affairs	mekisang@gmail.com
10 May 2022	Eunice Akiwo	Director of Domestic Affairs	mekisang@gmail.com
10 May 2022	Gustav Aitaro	Minister of State	gustavaitaro@gmail.com (+680)767-2509/488-5593
21 May 2022	Christopher Kitalong	Vice President of PCC CRE	ckitalon@gmail.com
26 May 2022	Kloudil Singeo	Former Director of Gender Bureau	koudil.mcca.rop@gmail.com



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