



**REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS**  
**NATIONAL REVIEW**  
**FOR THE**  
**BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION**  
**BPfA+25**

**JUNE 2019**

## Foreword

*Iakwe!*

It is an honor for me to introduce this national review of progress in the twenty-five years of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). We, as a Government, recognize that positive advancements towards gender equality is vital for the sustainable future of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and we recognize the need to do more. We are grateful for the strong partnerships and networks that have continued to support and assist the RMI in its efforts towards compliance with national and regional instruments, and convention commitments towards progressing gender equality.

As a matrilineal society, women have always held great power as landowners and decision-makers, recognized for the many roles they play to secure the well being of the family, community, and the overall peace and sustainability of society. We culturally value women and girls, but we realize that the lived experiences of our Marshallese women are far from perfect. While women and girls continue to bear the challenges in different areas of gender equality, women have proven to be effective agents of change, advocating for our atmosphere, communities, environment, blue pacific, and importantly for future generations.

In the following report, RMI goes through the strengths and weaknesses of our policies and activities towards implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. Despite limited human and financial resources, RMI is committed to ensuring that appropriate action takes place towards creating an enabling environment that allows women and men to develop capacities and reach their full potential. Let us continue to build strong partnerships and harmonize our efforts to deliver on the promises made in Beijing 25 years ago.

*Komol tata* and thank you,



**Minister Amenta Matthew**  
Culture and Internal Affairs

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## List of Acronyms

AA	Associate in Art
AS	Associate in Science
AG	Attorney General
APTC	Australia Pacific Technical College
ART	Antiretroviral Therapy
APF	Asia Pacific Forum on NHRI
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CMI	College of the Marshall Islands
Con.Con.	Constitutional Convention
CPBR	Child Protection Baseline Report
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention of the Rights of People with Disability
DM	Disaster Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DRMNAP	Disaster Reduction Management National Action Plan
DV	Domestic Violence
DVPPA	Domestic Violence Protection and Prevention Act
EPPSO	Economic, Policy, Planning and Statistics Office

EU	European Union
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FHSS	Family Health Survey Study
FY	Fiscal Year
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GED	General Educational Development
GID	Gender in Development
GRMI	Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands
HIV/STI	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Sexual Transmitted Infection
HPV	Human Papillomavirus
HRC	Human Rights Committee
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JNAP	Joint National Action Plan for Climate Change
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MIMA	Marshall Islands Mayors Association
MIPD	Marshall Islands Police Department

MIDPO	Marshall Islands Disabilities Persons Office
MIJ	Marshall Islands Journal
MIPSSA	Marshall Islands Public School System
MOCIA	Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs
MOHHS	Ministry of Health and Human Services
NCCPF	National Climate Change Policy Framework
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NGO	Non Government Organization
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
Nitijela	RMI National Parliament
NMRF	National Mechanism on Reporting and Follow-up
NSP	National Strategic Plan
NTA	National Training Council
NTHT	National Taskforce on Human Trafficking
OEPPC	Office of Environmental Protection
OHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PDNA	Post Disaster Needs Assessment
PGEP	Progressing Gender Equality Pacific
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PPA	Revised Pacific Platform for Action

PRSD	Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability
PSC	Public Service Commission
PSS	Public School System
RDC	Resource Development Committee
RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
RO	Reverse Osmosis
ROC	Republic of China (Taiwan)
RRRT	Regional Rights Resource Team
RPD	Rights of Persons with Disabilities
RPDA	Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2015
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOPAC	South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission
SPC	Pacific Community
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
SRH	Sexual Reproductive Health
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United National Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNFPA	United National Family and Population Fund

UNTF	United National Trust Fund
USA	United States of America
USP	University of the South Pacific
VAW	Violence Against Women
VIA	Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid
WAM	Waan Aelon in Majol
WASH	Water Sanitation Hygiene
WE	Women Empowerment
WHO	World Health Organization
WiM	Weto in Mour
WUTMI	Women United Together Marshall Islands
YSB	Youth Services Bureau
YTYIH	Youth to Youth in Health

## **Executive Summary**

This Report reflects the Republic of the Marshall Islands' commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and its implementation. This Report has been prepared in accordance with the guidelines note of the comprehensive National Review. The goal of this National Review is to assess how well the Republic of the Marshall Islands is implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). The objectives of this review are as follows:

- To identify achievements, gaps and setbacks, and outline strategies for addressing those gaps and challenges;
- To renew commitment and clear sets of priority actions, with timelines, actors and resources for their implementation;
- To align and build synergies with work on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and galvanize its gender-responsive implementation and involve all stakeholders.

Furthermore this review discusses progress made in implementation and identifies challenges that occurred. This review provides a discussion on future plans and initiatives to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

## Section One: Priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks

### **1. What have been the most important achievements, challenges and set-backs in progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women over the past 5 years?**

#### **Important Achievements:**

Over the past five years, the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (GRMI) has undertaken important steps towards progressing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The key achievements are as follows:

- March 2015: Acceded to the Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). CRPD State Report is currently with Cabinet for endorsement;
- January 2016: RMI made history by electing the first woman President, Head of Country H.E. President Dr. Hilda C. Heine. Progress is also evident in the increased number of women in *Nitijela* (Parliament) from one (1) to three (3), which is also historical since RMI has never had more than one (1) woman in *Nitijela* since its independence in 1986, and through five electoral cycles;
- July 2016: RMI submitted its combined 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Periodic Reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- September 2016: RMI submitted its combined 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Periodic Reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- August 2017: H.E President Dr. Hilda C. Heine initiated the Micronesian Women's Conference, to collectively identify opportunities and challenges to develop strategic recommendations to increase progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women in the thematic areas of economic empowerment, eliminating violence, health, climate change and leadership;
- March 2018: Ratification of Convention Against Torture (CAT), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);

- May 2018: Publication of the *Gender Equality Where Do We Stand Booklet*. The booklet provides statistical analysis on the priority outcomes within the Gender Mainstreaming Policy;
- September 2018: First island nation to do so, RMI released Tile Til Eo (Lighting the Way) Climate Strategy 2050, a long term climate strategy to become carbon neutral by 2050;
- September 2018: RMI puts forwards its candidacy to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council for 2020-2022;
- November 2018: RMI became the first country to submit its second national determined contribution (NDC) which sets a revised, more ambitious binding target of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to at least 32% below 2010 levels by 2025 and to at least 45% below 2010 levels by 2030;
- November 2018: First female Ambassador to the Republic of China (Taiwan);
- March 2019: The Inaugural Pacific Women Leaders Coalition Conference was convened by President H.E. Dr. Hilda C. Heine, as the first virtual conference for women around the Pacific to establish a women's coalition to support leaders to accelerate progress toward gender equality and empowerment of women.
- March 2019: Establishment of the Kora im an Kil Fund, for progressive support towards gender equality and women's economic empowerment for Marshallese women and girls.
- April 2019: Establishment of a new diplomatic post to the UN Geneva Office, with the first Ambassador a female;
- April 2019: GRMI and the World Bank launched a Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Project to support areas such as reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health and nutrition services, with a focus on the first 1,000 days of life;

### **Challenges & Setback**

While progress has been made in the last five years, despite considerable efforts, RMI acknowledges that particular challenges remain.

- Limited Economic Opportunities: According to the RMI Census and Population Housing 2011, women's participation in the workforce was 28% in terms of the

work-to-population ratio, 23% points lower than the male equivalent, which was 51%. These percentages suggest that many people were significantly under-employed, if not actually unemployed, although there is no information about how these women and men used their time in terms of productive and reproductive work. Working men were more likely to work for wages or salaries than women, and women were more likely to work producing goods for sale than men, with 30% of women working in craft and related occupations compared to 23% of men. Three-in-10 women (31%) worked in vulnerable employment as own-account operators, unpaid workers in family enterprises or producing goods for own consumption or sale, compared to one-in-five men (21%).<sup>1</sup>

There are training programs largely focused on handicrafts and sewing, but there are limited opportunities available to put these skills to work after training or to create viable businesses. The Bank of the Marshall Islands, privately owned, offers microcredit loans. However, many women have trouble accessing these because of high interest rates. Furthermore, if business grows slowly, the entrepreneur will have trouble making the repayments and may end up defaulting. There are no other microcredit programs aimed at encouraging women entrepreneurs. It is anticipated that the Kora im an Kil Fund will provide women as well as men an innovative mechanism to progress gender equality in the RMI.

- Low Representation in Decision Making: Representation of women in the *Nitijela* (3 out of 33 members are women) and Local Councils (3 out of 24 members are women) are low, despite the Marshall Islands having a woman as president, as well as the low proportion of women in senior management positions. In the public service, women comprise 43% of employees and 38% of management positions. Women are under-represented on the boards of statutory bodies and state-owned enterprises, making up 25% of board members.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Republic of the Marshall Islands. Gender Equality Where Do We Stand. 2018

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

- Impact of Climate Change: Women are more vulnerable than men to the effects of humanitarian crises such as climate change, and their critical role in recovery and resilience is gaining recognition. The 2015-2016 drought reduced women's incomes from handcrafts because of reduced supply of materials (pandanus, coconut, vines, etc.), increased their time and effort, and in some cases cost, to secure water for drinking and other household tasks for their families across the RMI, as well as compromised their food security with related malnutrition notably in the outer islands. Natural disasters have resulted in an unknown number of internally displaced people, forced to leave their homes and, for some, their island because of climate change.

Recent research examining the need for child protection in RMI found that there was little knowledge within communities about plans in place to deal with natural disasters and the effects of climate change, and that children, who make up about 40% of the population, were the group most vulnerable to the impacts of disasters.

- Prevalence of violence against women: in 2015, Women United Together Marshall Islands (WUTMI), a local women's group Nongovernmental Organization (NGO), completed a comprehensive survey on domestic violence. The survey showed that violence against women and girls is alarmingly high, with 51% of women experiencing intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime and 18% of women currently experiencing physical and/or sexual violence. Two out of every three women are survivors of physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or another person in their lifetime. Attitudes to domestic violence perpetuate prevalence, with 85% of women agreeing that domestic violence is justified under certain circumstances. When women did report the violence, it was because they were severely injured, their life had been threatened or they could not endure the violence any longer. Most women who experienced physical violence had experienced it multiple times. The violence starts early in a relationship, with 38 per cent of survey respondents aged 15–24 years already reporting partner violence.

The Family Health and Safety Survey reported on sexual violence, emotional abuse and controlling behaviors. Of all ever-partnered women, 21 per cent reported that they had experienced at least one act of sexual violence in their lifetime. More than one-quarter of women reported that their partner either took the money that they earned / saved or refused to give her money for the needs of the family.<sup>3</sup>

- Epidemic levels of NCDs: There is very little information about morbidity and mortality trends for women and men. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are at epidemic levels, with about 74% of deaths for both men and women aged 15 to 49 years attributed to NCDs in 2017. Providing equitable access to affordable health care is a major challenge, with 94% of rural women and 79% of urban women reporting problems in accessing healthcare, regardless of age, number of children, education, or wealth quintile. Within the lifetime of the cohort of the population exposed to fallout radiation in 1954, the excess cancers caused by the radiation are estimated at 530; with an expected total number of cancers (fatal plus non-fatal) of about 6,130. With women being mostly responsible for the health of their family, they are on the front line for ‘outbreak-prone diseases’ such as pink-eye (including chlamydial conjunctivitis), diarrhea, hepatitis and tuberculosis.
- High Rate of Teenage Pregnancy: Childbearing starts early and is nearly universal among Marshallese women. The teenage pregnancy rate (20.6 percent of total number of live births) is higher than in most other Pacific Island countries.<sup>4</sup> Although statistics show that teenage pregnancy has decreased by one third since 2014, prevalence of teenage pregnancy remains an issue.<sup>5</sup> On average women marry when they are 24 years old, compared with 26 years for men, and women

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Republic of the Marshall Islands. Family Health and Safety Survey. 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Ministry of Health and Human Services Annual Report. 2013

<sup>5</sup> Source: RMI Gender Equality Where Do We Stand. 2018

aged between 20 to 24 years are married or in a union before age 18, often associated with childbearing and rearing.

- Data collection and management: Due to the lack of financial and human resources, and technical capacity, RMI continues to face the challenge with producing statistical information in a timely manner.
- Delivery service to the outer islands/rural areas: The GRMI continues to struggle with achieving the proper capacity for initiating, supplying and sustaining outer island support. Human, technical and financial resources continue to be lacking and what resources are available are often unable to reach much further than the urban centers of Majuro and Ebeye.

Transportation from urban centers to the outer islands is fairly affordable but not easily accessible. Air transport is only available through Air Marshall Islands, a state owned enterprise. Mechanical and other logistical difficulties make air travel an unreliable mode of reaching the outer islands. Travel by ship is also fairly unreliable with inconsistent scheduling and trips frequently postponed.

Transportation within atolls is affordable if undertaken by walking or riding on traditional canoes, but can be prohibitively expensive if undertaken on motor vehicles or motor boats, as fuel is available at very high cost.

Generally, communication on the outer islands is limited to shortwave and CB radio. Most dispensaries and schools will have a shortwave radio they can use to communicate with their home base in Majuro. Many islands will also have an NTA shortwave radio with which they can place calls to cell phones or landlines in the RMI or abroad. In recent years, several outer islands have also received DAMA phone systems. DAMA sites allow outer islanders to make phone calls and be reached by phone.

**2. Which of the following have been the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country over the past five years through laws, policies and/or programmes? (please check relevant categories)**

The priority areas the RMI has continued working towards over the past five years for accelerating progress for women and girls are embedded in the National Gender Mainstreaming Policy. The Gender Policy recognizes that women and men are equal partners in the development of the RMI. The policy was developed in line with the NSP, which acknowledges gender equality as an issue affecting all development priorities that needs to be considered and integrated into the five main sector covered within the NSP, even though gender goals and priorities are specifically outlined in the Social Sector focus of the Plan. The policy aims to address gender inequality for the overall population and to benefit all women living in the RMI.

Priority Outcome 1: Strengthened capacity across government to deliver gender-responsive programs and services

The delivery of gender-responsive programs and services requires a good understanding of the diversity of needs women and men may have across all dimensions of their life. Additionally, we must consider the fact that women face additional hurdles due to social and cultural barriers that contribute to disadvantages they may face, inducted discrimination, social, cultural, or economic inequalities, and prevention from accessing equal opportunities. Therefore, all ministries and departments, including local government bodies, must adopt a gender mainstreaming approach.

Strategic actions that the RMI has taken to address priority outcome 1 are outlined below:

- Continuously advocate and raise awareness on gender inequality issues
- Increasing capacity of senior government managers and all staff in the public service on gender mainstreaming through training, the development of guidelines, and technical assistance.
- Use CEDAW and other human rights instruments in the process of developing, reviewing and adopting new laws and policies, and reviews.

- Establishment of gender focal points in every ministry to monitor accountability of government institutions and staff for mainstreaming gender within their functions.
- Strengthened the GID Office to improve coordination between government institutions, and effectively implement the National Gender Mainstreaming Policy

### Priority Outcome 2: Secure Family Wellbeing

Family is a basic unit of our society, responsible for the well-being and safety of all its members. Men and women must work together as equal partners to support their families to overcome many challenges, particularly arising from the changing environment. The Gender Policy encourages strong partnership between civil society organizations, faith-based organizations as well as the private, local, and central governments to ensure that women and men, as well as boys and girls, receive the attention required and that our support promotes equitable access to resources and services, and promotes gender equality.

Strategic actions that the RMI has taken to address priority outcome 2 include:

- Continuous support to WUTMI and their work to promote shared responsibility between women and men in the household as well as parental skills training for both mothers and fathers.
- Expand sports programs for boys and girls, and disseminate information about healthy nutrition.
- Currently reviewing school curricula and all teaching materials produced in the RMI in order to eliminate gender stereotypes and all forms of discrimination. Also strengthen family life education through the school curriculum. Promote respectful relationships at school, and adopt policies against sexual harassment and bullying.
- Continuously awareness raising, and disseminate information about sexual and reproductive health and rights.

- Involve women and men in disaster risk preparedness and climate change adaptation initiatives. In addition, support the role of women and men in food and water security.

### Priority Outcome 3: Elimination of gender-based violence and protection and care of survivors

Gender based violence is a challenge that is complicated by social practices, cultural beliefs, and a lack of institutional support and agencies to provide relief of shelter. The Family Health and Safety Study (FHSS), conducted in 2013 and 2014, sought information on the prevalence, frequency and types of violence against women. According to the study, 48% of ever-partnered women reported having experienced violence in their lifetime and 16% had experienced physical violence in the 12 months preceding the study.<sup>6</sup> Domestic violence is not a private matter and cannot be justified for any reason. The Government is committed to create all the conditions to prevent domestic violence, to protect the victims, and to provide justice and care for the survivors.

Key progress to eliminate gender-based violence in the RMI has been the enactment of the *Domestic Prevention and Protection Act (Amended) 2018* and continuous support to civil society organizations in providing effective services to survivors. GRMI through the Gender in Development (GID) office has an MOU with WUTMI to fund the *Weto in Mour* Project (WiM), the first ever support service to address violence against women and girls and its victims, to access support and protections. The Australian Government through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women) Initiative supports the WiM program as well. Other achievements include training for judges, prosecutors, and other law enforcement officers on the Domestic Violence (DV) legislation through the technical assistance from developing partners. The Government, along with civil society organizations will continue to bolster their awareness raising campaigns and tailor such campaigns to fit Marshallese way of thinking.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: RMI. Family Health and Safety Survey. 2014

Priority Outcome 4: Enabling environment for equitable participation in, and benefit from, economic development.

Women's economic empowerment remains a key challenge, as women continue to face limited job opportunities and remain under-represented in management positions. While GRMI has yet to establish the Gender Equality Bill, the Bill will address equal opportunity for women and men in the workforce. Nevertheless, a majority of women are involved in income-generating activities, in the cultural industry or in food production and processing. In many outer island/rural areas families facing scarce job opportunities, income earned by women is necessary for the survival of families. Handicraft making is a vital source of income and one which has gained momentum for outer islands women as well as women in the urban centers.

There have been several independent projects addressing women's economic empowerment through both non-governmental and governmental institutions. These include the ongoing jaki-ed (fine clothing mats) weaving training programs run by USP; Waan Aelōñ in Majōl (WAM), a very successful grassroots NGO working with young Marshallese. WAM provides a six-month program of vocational and life skills training to youth-at-risk using the medium of traditional outrigger canoes, boat building, carpentry and woodworking; program capacity is twenty-five students; and the Juren-Ae, teaches school dropouts and young mothers basic handicraft and sewing skills. Additionally, the government has supported attendance of local handicraft practitioners in national, regional, and international cultural expositions such as the 12th Festival of Pacific Arts that took place in Guam in May 2016. Over 100 participants represented the RMI during the 12th Festival of Pacific Arts.

Priority Outcome 5: Equitable participation for women and men in decision-making

The Marshall Islands, like the majority of the Pacific Island countries, has low representation of women in the legislature compared to international rates. In 2017, the adoption of temporary special measures in the form of electoral quotas for women in our Parliament and the inclusion of sexual orientation as a ground for non-discrimination

were both proposed as amendments to the Constitution. However, both proposals were unfortunately defeated during the 2017 Constitutional Convention. Provisions to address this are under the Gender Equality Bill.

In 2015 and 2018, Government and WUTMI conducted a women's mock local government and training session. The Mock Parliament provided many women, including some who were standing for national and local office, the chance to gain experience as parliamentarians. Something that they were not able to receive elsewhere.

There are no legal barriers that prevent women from running for local or national office. However, a negative perception about women's participation in politics continues to exist and there are social barriers in place, including historically low numbers of female candidates. The 2015 General Election records show that of the 822 candidates running for local government council seats, 165, or just 16% were women. Only 56 women won seats, as opposed to 258 males. For the *Nitijela*, there were 91 candidates, 5 of them were women, or 95% males and 5% females.

While men still dominate in most senior positions, it should be worth noting that there are increasing numbers of women in high level government positions, management, government boards and diplomatic posts. Our highlight in this area is that in 2015 and after 39 years of independence, the Marshall Islands elected three women to parliament, one of whom is currently President of the RMI. Females occupy other positions listed below:

- Minister of Culture and Internal Affairs;
- Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations;
- Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN Office in Geneva;
- Ambassador to the Republic of China (Taiwan);
- Deputy Chief of Missions to the UN;
- Deputy Chief of Mission to the Republic of China (Taiwan);
- Consul General to RMI Honolulu Consulate;
- Secretary of Natural Resources & Commerce;

- Secretary of Finance;
- Administrator of Marshall Islands Social Security;
- Clerk of the *Nitijela*;
- Chief Clerk of Courts;
- Clerk of Council of Iroij.

Institutional arrangements for the implementation of the National Gender Mainstreaming Policy

The Gender and Development (GID) Office in the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs (MOCIA) is responsible for RMI's National Gender Mainstreaming Policy. However, the implementation of the Gender Mainstreaming Policy requires the contribution of all levels of government institutions, from every sector, and from civil society organizations. While RMI does not have a National Human Rights Institute (NHRI) or a formal National Mechanism on reporting and follow-up (NMRF), the Human Rights Committee is a multi-stakeholder committee with a broad mandate to promote the human rights of the Marshallese people. This includes providing advice to the Government and supporting the development of human rights policy and legislation; monitoring human rights implementation; preparing reports to UPR and UN Treaty Bodies; and investigating complaints of human rights violations. Proposal 18 to create an Ombudsman's Office in the RMI was approved by the Constitutional Convention and is with the Parliament for referendum.

**3. Over the past five years, have you taken specific measures to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination? (please check relevant categories)**

**Strengthened legislation**

Since the last national review submitted to the Beijing Platform for Action in 2014, national legislations have been enacted or amended by Parliament to strengthen legal context for equality and human rights. The following legislations show the progress the

RMI has made, in the last five years, in terms of adopting laws and policies towards progressive compliance with CEDAW and other convention commitments:

- *Child Rights Protection Act, 2015*: An Act to declare the rights of children and provide for their protection, promotion, enforcement, and implementation in the Republic of the Marshall Islands as required under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *The Sale of Tobacco Act 1966, Child Abuse and Neglect Act* and *Adult Film Act 1994* were repealed and strengthened by the *Child Rights Protection Act*.
- *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2015 (RPD)*: An Act to declare the equal rights and freedoms of all persons with disabilities and provide for the protection, promotion and enforcement of those rights and freedoms, as a step towards implementing the legal obligations of the Marshall Islands.
- *Human Rights Committee Act, 2015*: An Act to establish a Human Rights Committee (HRC), to provide for its membership, functions, powers and administration, to establish a complaint mechanism for the redress of human rights violations, and for related purposes. HRC replaced the Resource Development Committee (RDC).
- *Youth Service Corps Act, 2016*: An Act to provide voluntary service for community development and conservation related activities.
- *Birth, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act (Amendment) 2016*: Amended the age of female from 16 to 18 years of age.
- *Equal Employment Opportunity Act 2017*: Ensure that all employees of a person or other entity doing business in the Republic of the Marshall Islands are treated equally in regards to obtaining employment benefits.
- *Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2017*: Strengthens the legal framework for dealing with trafficking, including sex trafficking of girls and women. It creates various offences in trafficking and applies stiffer penalties than previously applied.
- *Domestic Prevention and Protection Act (Amended) 2018*: An Act to amend the Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act 2011.

- *Minimum Wage Act (Amended) 2018*: An Act to increase the minimum wage to three dollars (\$3.00) and fifty cents.
- *Senior Citizens Act 2018*: An Act to grant benefits and privileges to Senior Citizens and related purposes.

### **National Action Plans, Policies and Strategies**

The following is a list of the current government policies and action plans that impact the lives of women and address challenges they face, including discrimination.

- National Strategic Plan (2015-2017): The government adopted a national framework, the National Strategic Plan (NSP), designed as a rolling plan to coordinate development goals and objectives in the medium term (2015-2017) and will be continuously updated to meet longer term objectives as RMI moves towards scheduled completion of Compact of Free Association, as Amended funding in 2023.<sup>7</sup> The objective of the NSP is “sustainable, equitable and measurable development reflecting the priorities and culture of the Marshallese People.” The NSP includes five sectors, in which each sector is broken down into several related strategic areas. The five sectors include: (1) Social Development, (2) Environment, (3) Infrastructure Development, (4) Sustainable Economic Development, and (5) Good Governance. The Social Development Sector is comprised of the following strategic areas:

- 1A. Health
- 1B. Education
- 1C. Gender
- 1D. Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Groups
- 1F. Community Development

The NSP was developed in line with RMI’s various regional and international commitments that call for the protection and promotion of gender equality and human rights such as CEDAW, CRC, CRPD, Beijing Platform for Action,

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<sup>7</sup> RMI NSP. Available: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/cobp-rmi-2016-2018-ld-04.pdf>

MDGs, Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration 2012, amongst others. The NSP also shows linkage of Government's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals.

- Agenda 2020: A Framework for Progress (Agenda 2020): Identifies major national challenges and priority reforms to be addressed by Government by the year 2020. It aims to strengthen the results-focus, proactively address the most pressing problems, and develop a culture of customer service in the public sector. Agenda 2020 builds on the RMI NSP and other policies and strategies.
  
- National Gender Mainstreaming Policy 2015-19: In 2013, the combined efforts of the RMI Government and NGOs, in collaboration with technical assistant from Pacific Community (SPC) led to the establishment of the National Gender Mainstreaming Policy to replace the National Women's Policy, which had expired in 2010. In early 2015, the new Gender Policy was reviewed and approved by the Government. The main purpose of the policy is to “guide the process of developing laws, policies, procedures and practices that will address the needs, priorities and aspirations of all women and men and effectively eliminate all forms of discrimination and inequality.” The policy was established in line with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Pacific Plan, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Revised Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality, the 2012 Forum Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration, and the RMI NSP. The five priority outcomes are:
  - strengthened capacity across the government to deliver gender responsive programs and services;
  - secure family wellbeing
  - elimination of gender based-violence and protection and case of survivors
  - enabling environment for an equitable participation in and benefit from economic development; and

- an equitable participation of women and men in decision making.
  
- National Policy on Disability Inclusive Development Action Plan (2014-2018): In 2014, *Nitijela* approved this policy which “provides a comprehensive framework for improving the quality of life of a person with disabilities and to increase their meaningful participation in society” in line with the goal that the “RMI becomes a barrier-free society that respects the rights of all persons with disabilities by empowering, including and providing them with the means of achieving their rights.” The Disability Policy was developed in line with the CRPD, the Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability (PRSD) and the Incheon Strategy. The 10 priority areas within the policy specifically address women with disabilities and the multiple discrimination they are likely to face. Objectives include that all women with disabilities enjoy their full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, that violence against women with disabilities is effectively addressed, and that youth with disabilities are empowered to participate fully in society. *Nitijela* ratified the CRDP in January of 2015, and in September, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was passed. The policy is currently being reviewed and revised.
  
- National Reproductive Health Policy/Strategy (2014-2016): In light of RMI’s commitments under the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the MDGs, the RMI is active in improving reproductive health services, including making pregnancy safe and offering adequate family planning services. The policy envisions quality service of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) for all the people of the RMI. The thematic areas of the policy are maternal and neonatal health, provision of family planning, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, the control of STIs/HIV and integration with other SRH programs, other gynecological morbidities, cervical and breast cancer, gender and reproductive health, reproductive health commodity security, and male involvement in reproductive health.

- RMI Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy: A 3-year Strategy (2014-2016):  
Adolescent pregnancy in the RMI has been a major social issue, with a recorded adolescent fertility rate of 85 births per year per 1000 women aged 15-19, which is by far the highest adolescent pregnancy rate in the Pacific. To address this social issue, the 3-year strategy was developed in 2014 with specific actions based on qualitative and quantitative data collected. The five strategic areas are: commitment, prioritization and policies, youth friendly services and environment, early education and intervention, and support. To implement this strategy, YTYIH has been granted the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Project, which commenced in 2016 and continuing in the next 5 years. Collaborating partners with YTYIH are MOH, PSS, and MOCIA.
- RMI Joint National Action Plan for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management (JNAP) (2013-2018): The JNAP provides a detailed strategy for “holistically and co-operatively” addressing risks in the RMI. The JNAP’s goals include: establishing and supporting an enabling environment for improved coordination of disaster risk management/climate change adaptation in the RMI, public education and awareness of effective Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management from local to national level, enhanced emergency preparedness and response at all levels within the RMI, improved energy security while working towards a low carbon future for the RMI, enhanced local livelihoods and community resilience for all people of the RMI, and an integrated approach to development planning including consideration of climate change and disaster risks.
- RMI Public Service Regulations prohibit discrimination against a person with HIV/AIDS, TB or another communicable disease. In 2009, a review of HIV, Human Rights, and the Law was conducted by the SPC RRRT, which suggested that Government and the private sector should develop a code of practice on HIV in the workplace, which protects people from stigma and encourages information, education, access to services, and confidentiality.

The following are a list of bills currently in Nitijela:

- **Gender Equality Bill 2019**

In early 2019, Cabinet submitted a *Gender Equality Bill*, the first standalone anti-discrimination bill. The Bill establishes a legislative framework for domesticating many of the fundamental rights and obligations under CEDAW. As a gender equality law, it provides a straightforward initial response to RMI's legislative obligations as a State Party to the Conventions and makes a strong symbolic statement about the importance of Government attaches to achieving gender equality.

The Gender Equality Bill is an enabling piece of legislation that addresses key areas of gender discrimination and inequality of relevance to Marshallese society. It establishes general prohibitions of discrimination, outlines obligations to protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls on an equal basis with men and boys, and otherwise promotes gender equality across all areas.

- **Rights of Persons with Disability (Consequential Bill)**

In 2015, *Nitijela* enacted the *Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPD) Act 2015*, which gave legal effect to the *CRPD*. The Act came into force in October 2016 and incorporates all the substantive rights and obligations under the Convention, requiring that all domestic laws, regulations, and by-laws are harmonized, over the past few months in Ministries and Agencies.

The consequential amendments that form the substance of the Bill are the product of a detailed review of approximately 300 statutes: the full complement of the MIRC as in January 2018. Over 100 statutes across 41 Titles require consequential amendment for harmonization with the *RPD Act* and the *CRPD*. The amendments address several areas of non-compliance and consolidate the mainstreaming of disability rights across the full spectrum of sectoral laws, as required by the Convention.

Amendments relate to several core disability rights and common areas of discrimination. Shortfalls are found in respect of the rights to equality and non-discrimination (Article 5), accessibility (Article 9), equal recognition before the law and the right to legal capacity (Article 12), access to justice (Article 13), liberty and security of person (Article 14), education (Article 24), work and employment (Article 27), and participation in public and political life (Article 29). Many statutes contain the same or similar rights violations.

- **Labor (Minimum Conditions) Bill 2018**

As a state party to the International Labor Organization, an Act setting out the minimum conditions of employment is necessary. Employment conditions for Government employees are provided for under the Public Service Regulations or the Public School System Human Resources Regulations, but no such conditions exist for the private sector. This Bill endeavors to remedy that and provide minimum conditions such as employment of children and women, annual and sick leave, and so forth.

#### **4. Has the increasing number of humanitarian crises—caused by conflict, extreme weather or other events—affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country?**

Yes. Climate change poses a considerable threat to both economic and social life. If sea levels rise as expected, life in the RMI will become significantly more difficult and dangerous and daily life is being affected currently. For example, in March 2014, inundation occurred as a result of extremely high tides and a southern swell. Over one thousand residents of Majuro atoll were forced from their homes, and residents on outer islands including considerable property and crop damage.

The Government of RMI declared a state of drought emergency on 3 February 2016, which was subsequently elevated to a state of disaster on 4 March. On 27 April 2016, US

President Barack Obama declared the drought a disaster for the Marshall Islands. With the assistance of The European Union, the Pacific Community, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations, and the World Bank, a Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) commenced on 1 August 2016. As the assessment was being carried out, it became apparent that the financial impacts were considerable across all sectors, and that the private sector was affected to a much greater degree than the public sector. The PDNA also revealed a significant decline in the quality of life for people in RMI as a direct result of the drought conditions experienced.

The drought affected the activities of families in terms of reduced income from handicrafts because of reduced supply of materials (pandanus, coconut, vines, etc.). In general, however, the fragility of outer island economics was strained under disaster conditions. Many families in RMI, especially in the outer islands, produce a significant proportion of their own food, notably fish, traditional tree crops like coconut, breadfruit and pandanus, and other crops such as bananas and taro. During the drought, fishermen reported that they had to go further to get their normal fish catch, resulting in more time spent fishing. Most atolls and islands reported the total loss of local crops and traditional medicines. Many reported having to change from their 'traditional' diet to relying on imported goods and canned food.

Families reported on the increased burden of the drought in terms of normal household roles and responsibilities. A wife and mother of three reported spending three extra hours a day collecting and fetching water during the drought, while a young man from Arno spent two hours a day collecting his family's drinking water from the Reverse Osmosis (RO) unit some distance away. Families highlighted the cost of the drought in terms of additional financial and time burdens to secure potable water for drinking and other water for household tasks. The drought research indicated that it is mostly men, and young men, in households who collect drinking water, because of their physical strength, while water resources are managed by both women and men, based on their household roles and responsibilities. However, when water supplies were at their lowest levels, whole families would go to the water stations to collect and carry as much water as they could.

Women in women-headed households relied on family members, friends and neighbors for their drinking water – the traditional social protection systems and social capital. Children’s education was affected by the need to collect drinking water in the mornings, the lack of drinking water and sanitation in some schools, the closure of one school for 20 days affecting 39 children, not being able to attend school because of insufficient water to bathe or wash school uniforms and general lassitude related to the high temperatures and insufficient drinking water.

Women are largely responsible for the health and well-being of their families, especially their children and older persons. The drought worsened seasonal disease outbreaks, notably conjunctivitis, diarrhea, influenza and scabies. The drought impact assessment shows that children with malnutrition treated in hospital increased almost five-fold, implying that the overall level of child malnutrition could have substantially increased. Low-income families were faced with difficult and stressful decisions about spending their limited income on water security rather than other regular purchases.

Women often bear the brunt of climate change effects. Events like the inundation and the drought necessitate the relocation of families, and in some cases, communities. As the traditional homemakers, women are put under pressure to ensure that their families are able to meet their needs. Additionally, relocation poses serious safety and sanitation threats to women and children.

**5. Which of the following does your country consider to be the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country for the coming five years through laws, policies and programmes? (please check relevant categories)**

While RMI continues to progress towards priorities mentioned in Question 2, RMI plans to include the following priorities:

- Gender and climate change: Gender responsive disaster risk prevention, reduction, and resilience building; Strengthening women's participation in ensuring environmental sustainability
- Gender-responsive budgeting.

## Section Two: Progress across the 12 critical areas of concern

### Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

#### **Critical areas of concern:**

Women and poverty  
Women and the economy  
Human rights of women  
The girl child

#### **6. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to advance gender equality in relation to women's role in paid work and employment?**

The *Minimum Wage Act 1986* was amended in 2017. The act states that the minimum wage for every Government employee or any private employer shall be two dollars and fifty cents (\$2.50) per hour of work performed by such employee. A subsequent increase of fifty cents (\$.50) will be added on September 8, 2018 and every year thereafter until the minimum wage reaches four dollars (\$4). The *Equal Employment Opportunity Act 2017* proposes to provide equal employment opportunities for all employees. It prohibits discrimination and requires that employers or business entities doing business in the RMI treat employees equally in regards to obtaining employee benefits.

Although there has been increases in women's participation in the workforce, the overall context of the economic development of the RMI, particularly women's economic empowerment, remains a key challenge as women continue to face limited job opportunities and remain underrepresented in management positions. Nevertheless, a majority of women are involved in income-generating activities, in the cultural industry or in food production and processing. In many outer island families facing scarce job opportunities, the income earned by women is necessary for the survival of families.

Handicraft making is a vital source of income and one which has gained momentum for outer islands women as well as women in the urban centers.

One of the significant changes for women in the RMI since the adoption of the Beijing Platform has been the increased presence of women in the workforce.<sup>8</sup> According to the 2011 Census of Population and Housing, the number of working women since 1997 increased by 54% and men by 33%. Furthermore, the gross average earnings for men increased by 27% and for women by 55%, reducing the gender gap earnings from 27% to 10%.

Recent data shows that in 2017, 93% of women worked in the service industry such as wholesale and retail trade, public administration, education and financial intermediation. Also in that same year, women's gross earnings in fisheries were higher than those of men, who earned \$.89 for every \$1.00 earned by women. In electricity, gas, and water supply, men earned \$.77 for every \$1.00 earned by women. However, in the service sector, where most women work, for every \$1.00 earned by men, women earned \$.83.

Women working in public enterprises such as the National Telecommunications Authority, Marshall Electricity Company, Tobolar, and Air Marshall Islands, on average had higher gross earnings than men. Similarly, women in government agencies, such as the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority and Social Security Administration, on average had higher gross earnings than men. However, women's gross average earnings in the baking sectors were 14% lower than those of men because more women work in lower paid jobs (clerks, tellers) than men (managers, supervisors). In addition, men working in the US Base in Kwajalein, local government and private sector had, on average, higher gross earnings than women.<sup>9</sup>

In 2017, women had higher gross average earnings than men in public enterprises, the RMI government and government agencies. This was due to the fact that women hold

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<sup>8</sup> Source: RMI Census and Population. 2011

<sup>9</sup> Source: RMI. Gender Equality Where Do We Stand. 2018.

professional and managerial occupations in these sectors. In comparison to men, average gross earnings were higher than women's in the private sector, banking, and local government and NGOs. The local government was the highest gender gap in earnings in which women earned \$.57 to every \$1.00 earned by men. The highest gender gap in earnings in favor of women was highest in government agencies, where for every \$1.00 earned by 254 women working in the sector, on average the 474 men earned \$.80.

The most recent innovative mechanism to accelerate progress towards gender equality is the Kora im an Kil Fund. The purpose of the Kora im an Kil Fund is to create a groundbreaking and sustainable change for women and girls, men and boys in the Marshall Islands, through transformative grants for organizations, groups, networks and communities to achieve outcomes that accelerate progress towards gender equality. It will guarantee gender equality in the uptake of opportunities, resources and rewards; build and strengthen gender-focused networks and coalitions to improve the lives of women throughout the RMI; foster economic growth while protecting and promoting human rights; and provide support to organizations that assist GRMI implement policies and programs for gender equality and women's human rights.

**7. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work and promote work-family conciliation?**

Maternity leave provisions for the government employment system is provided under the Public Service Regulations. The Regulations on maternity leave states:

Female employees may be granted maternity leave for such periods and subject to such conditions as the Commission from time to time prescribes. The following conditions for maternity leave shall be followed:

- (1) The employee shall be entitled to 20 work days of maternity leave.

This leave can be taken before and/or after delivery;

(2) The employee on maternity leave shall be paid full salary;

(3) Maternity leave shall be granted only for four deliveries.<sup>10</sup>

Culturally, extended family is always so prevalent and close at hand that childcare is always been assumed to be a family task. The GRMI has not moved towards providing childcare programs or regulations. GRMI recognizes the need to invest more into this issues.

**8. Has your country introduced austerity/fiscal consolidation measures, such as cuts in public expenditure or public sector downsizing, over the past five years?**

Yes. The Decrement Management Plan was introduced to cut the national budget. However, impact on women/men has not been assessed.

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<sup>10</sup> Source: RMI Public Service Regulations. 2011. Available: <http://rmicourts.org/wp-content/uploads/Public-Service-Regulations-2011.pdf>

## Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

### **Critical areas of concern:**

Women and poverty  
Education and training of  
women  
Women and health  
Human rights of women

### **9. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls?**

A number of advancements were made in the last five years that enable the government to continue to ensure the enjoyment of the right to education and the right to health. In the area of education, major advancements include the enactment of the *Marshall Island Public School System Act 2013* (MIPSSA), replacing the *Education Act* of 1992. Important features of the MIPSSA include a newly established public school system and governing board as well as clear standards for curriculum, attendance, teacher certification, student and teacher conduct, nutrition, transportation, and student health and safety. Additionally, beginning in 2013, collection of all registration fees was suspended and all public school students were able to attend school free of charge. Another initiative that has done much to improve outer island students' ability to access education is the solar panel installation project that enables school children to study after dark.

In the area of health, a number of independent initiatives have addressed existing obstacles in accessing healthcare. In 2014, Majuro Hospital opened a new Maternal and Child Health (MCH) clinic. This increased ability to provide quality care to mothers and children is further supported by the early childhood hearing screening program. An important development to ensure access to quality specialty care has been MOHHS's partnership with medical missions

from abroad who have been able to deliver care in fields like obstetrics and gynecology, orthopedics, and ophthalmology to patients on Majuro and Ebeye. Preventative health and education programs on the outer islands are conducted mostly through the Health mobile teams. Representatives from the different departments, including public health, will go along with the mobile team, and education and prevention programs will be presented on these visits.

As mentioned in Question 1, the ECD project will address issues relating to health and education such as poor nutrition and lack of early learning opportunities, which has had a detrimental effect on the country's development. The new program will address this by focusing on:

- increasing access to effective and quality maternal and child health services;
- creating opportunities for early stimulation and learning;
- piloting a social protection system and support for families with young children; and
- addressing the limited affordability of nutritious diets, especially for children in vulnerable families.

In addition, the Kora im an Kil Fund (Question 6) will support women and gender-interested groups, organizations and networks to implement projects and programs to achieve gender equality.

#### **10. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to improve access to social protection for women and girls?**

RMI does not provide social assistance in the form of family benefits. There is no overall welfare system based on need, disability or other qualification. Benefits to those who have paid into the social security system come under the *Social Security (Amendment) Act* of 2016, which includes old age insurance benefits, disability insurance benefits, surviving spouses insurance and parent's benefit and surviving child's insurance benefit.

The RMI government acknowledges that in practice, persons with disabilities (PWD) still have difficulty in accessing public services and also challenged with the limited employment opportunities available. Considering these issues faced by PWD in the RMI, the government has taken steps to initiate discount services for PWD and senior citizens at government service institutions. This program is in its drafting stages but GRMI hopes to launch the full program by 2020.

**11. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to improve health outcomes for women and girls in your country?**

Refer to the answer in Question 9.

The *Public Health, Safety and Welfare Act*, the *Marshall Islands Health Fund Act* of 2002, the *Health Care Revenue Fund Act* of 1986, and the *School Immunization Act* 1981, provide the legislative framework for access to health care. With the exception of one private doctor, one private optometrist and one private dentist, who are all located on Majuro, the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MOHHS) provides all the health services located in the urban centers as well as the outer island/rural area health clinics. The MOHHS also includes the 177 Program, providing health care services to people from the four nuclear affected atolls. The health care system is comprised of two hospitals, one in Majuro and one in Ebeye and fifty six health care centers in the outer atolls and islands. Both hospitals provide primary and secondary care, but limited tertiary care. Patients who need tertiary care are referred to Honolulu or the Philippines.

Pharmaceutical services are provided by the main pharmacy located within Majuro and Ebeye Hospitals as well as one privately owned pharmacy located on Majuro atoll. Additionally, all health centers have a stock of basic over the counter and prescription medications, including contraceptives.

Oral health care is provided mainly through the two main hospitals on Majuro and Ebeye. There is a high demand for services and the division is under-resourced. Staff from the dental division also conducts awareness at health outreach events and travel with MOHHS mobile teams to outer islands to provide dental health services. However, despite the outreach activities, oral health remains a serious issue. Preventative oral care is not widely practiced.

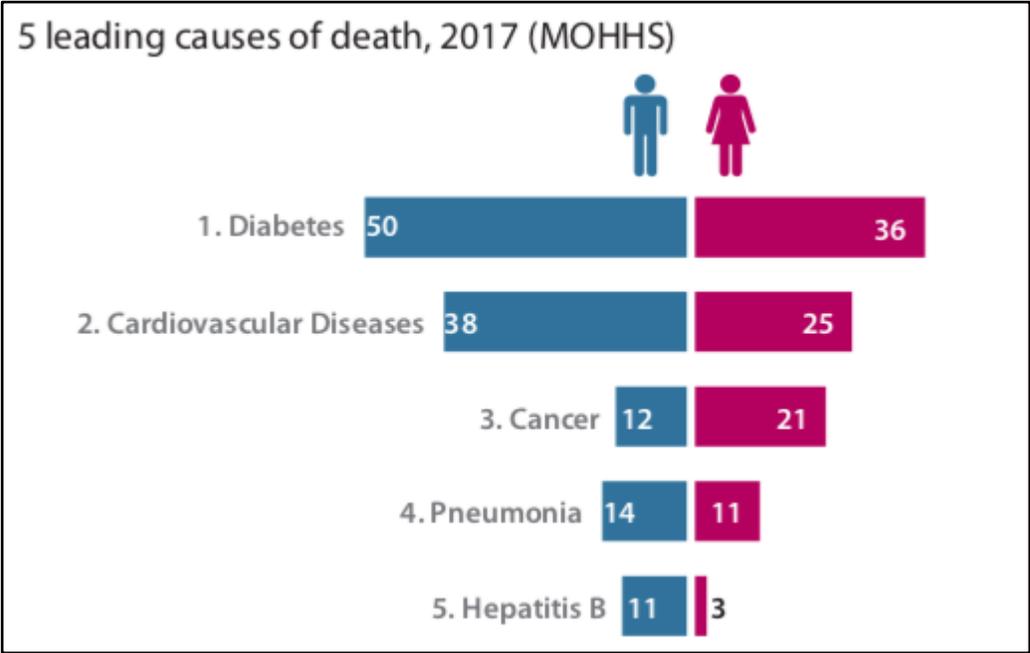
Prenatal care is provided through the prenatal clinics at the hospital for women living on Majuro and Ebeye. There are regular clinics where prenatal care services including pregnancy management, STI screening, pap smears, oral health education and care, and immunizations are provided. Some pregnant women on the outer islands have the option to travel to Majuro and Ebeye for prenatal care and to give birth. Otherwise, outer island health centers provide pregnancy management, working in cooperation with staff from the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Department on Majuro. Mobile health teams also provide more extensive prenatal care and screenings when they visit outer islands. Outer island health assistants receive training in prenatal health care from the MCH Department.

Family planning services fall under the Reproductive Health Clinic. The main Reproductive Health Clinic is provided under the Primary Care Division of MOHHS, located both in Majuro and Ebeye Hospitals. The services include maternal and child health care, family planning, pre and post-natal care, dental oral health care and children with special health care needs. Through the Reproductive health clinic, women can seek medical care from a gynecologist on the urban centers of Majuro and Ebeye. However, lack of trained specialists remains a serious issue, there is frequently no trained obstetrician or gynecologist available to provide these services. On the outer islands, there is no access to specialized care. Outer island residents need to come to Ebeye or Majuro to see a specialist, and unless they are urgently sick, they are responsible for their own travel costs. The Reproductive Health program runs additional clinics at Youth to Youth in Health (YTYIH) and Laura Clinic in Majuro. A variety of contraceptive methods are available, the most popular being the 3 months hormonal injection and oral

contraceptives. Male and female condoms are also available free of charge in the Family Planning Clinics, the STD/HIV clinics, Health Centers, YTYIH, and hotels and bars.

There are small fees associated with health care. For example, on the urban centers, a regular doctor's visit at the hospital will cost \$5.00, for a Marshallese citizen. Fees are higher for non-Marshallese citizens and certain procedures will cost more. Fees are significantly lower on the Outer Islands. Waiting times to see a specialist can range, and for highly specialized care, a patient may need to be referred off island or wait for visiting medical missions. Referrals for those who receive the Basic Health Plan are only given in life threatening cases. Those who are able to afford the monthly fee can join the Supplemental Health Plan, which offers easier access to off island referrals.

Epidemic levels of NCDs have negatively been affecting human development in the RMI. MOHHS reported that in 2017, 74% of deaths for adults aged 15-49 years were attributed to NCDs. Diabetes Mellitus has been the center of health intervention and public discussion by the officials of MOHHS and the Government for so many years. A few years ago, the MOHHS entered into a management contract with the Canvasback Mission to create a mechanism to reduce and reverse diabetes mellitus in the Marshall Islands by establishing the Diabetes Wellness Center.



(Source: RMI Gender Equality Where Do We Stand, 2018)

Apart from diabetes, the other two leading NCD conditions are cardiovascular disease and cancer. Cancer of all types is on the rise and it is one of the risk factors of NCD, which MOHHS in partnership with other NGOs have been and are still attempting to reduce.

National Cancer Prevention activities include church-to-clinic cancer screening campaigns in Majuro, Ebeye, and working with the outer/rural islands. Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid (VIA) screening is now implemented in the outer islands (Women Ages 30-49 years) and pap smears are conducted for women ages 21-65 years. The main challenge for cervical cancer screening is the fact that RMI has no Cytologist/pathologist and all specimens have to be sent off-island. Breast screening is done with mammography machines in both Majuro and Ebeye. The National Cancer program is continuously searching for new ways to strengthen the knowledge of breast self-exams and clinical breast exams. Colorectal cancer screening is primarily done with a Fecal Occult Blood Test. There are also upcoming healthcare provider trainings to educate on Colorectal Cancer, to build knowledge and capacity to increase screening rates. Breast,

cervical and colorectal cancers are being prioritized by MOHHS in line with available resources, and are set in the current national cancer screening guidelines.

Cervical cancer in women is the most common cause of death. The RMI is addressing cervical cancer through its National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program. The cancer program is active on Ebeye and Majuro, as well as the outer islands through the health mobile team. The program supports a cancer registry as well as a cancer prevention program and cancer support group. While the program addresses all cancer, it is most focused on cervical cancer. The program focuses on prevention of cervical cancer by raising awareness and encouraging women to get tested. The program also holds trainings, which are especially focused on increasing prevention on outer islands.

Another arm of the cancer prevention program is providing the Human Papillomavirus Vaccine (HPV) that can prevent most causes of cervical cancer. This vaccine is also being provided on the outer islands through the health mobile team. However, vaccination rates are fairly low because many parents are not consenting to their daughters receiving the vaccine. There is a renewed focus on raising awareness to increase the rates of vaccination.

The Ministry of Health and Human Services has introduced a dynamic three-year rolling plan, the *3-Year Rolling Strategic Plan 2017–2019*. With the theme of “Kumi Ejmour” or “Health is a shared responsibility”, the MOHHS aims “to strengthen the commitment on healthy islands concept in implementing health promotion, to protect and promote healthy lifestyles, to improve the lives of the people through primary health, and to build the capacity of Ministry of Health, communities, families and partners to actively participate and coordinate preventive services programs and activities as the core resources in primary health care services.” The following are the health priorities of the Strategic Plan:

- Secure high-quality health care in the outer/rural islands;

- Achieve universal access to high- quality care for all people with communicable diseases;
- Provide integrated NCD services along with the tools and support that people need to manage their health;
- Strengthen national capacity to deliver high-quality maternal, infant, child and adolescent health and community-based interventions for family resource management;
- Increase access to community-based care and support for adults and children with mental illness and/or substance use disorders through a network of service providers that are committed to a person-centered and recovery-oriented system of care;
- Increase immunization rates and reduce preventable infectious diseases;
- Promote and educate the public on healthy lifestyle changes; and
- Provide efficient and effective administrative and coordinated functions of preventive and public health care services.

To implement this dynamic strategy, MOHHS has continued to work with other Ministries, sectors, development partners, regional and global health initiatives, UN agencies, and others.

## **12. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls?**

In addition to the educational improvements as stated in Question 9, other measures to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls include the current review of the educational curriculum, equal participation in technical and vocational education and training, and equal access to adult and tertiary education.

### **Educational Curriculum Review**

The RMI Public School System (PSS), with the assistance of the Pacific Community (SPC) Regional Rights Resources Team (RRRT), are reviewing elementary school

curriculum to integrate social citizenship values, human rights obligations, gender equality, social inclusion, and nuclear issues into the formal school curriculum. The goal is to connect gender and social inclusion rights and responsibilities to Marshallese cultural values and practices in the school curriculum. This project is intended to evolve into an opportunity for informal education components targeting out of school youths that can be introduced alongside the formal education module (i.e. outreach trainings/workshops for youths on outer islands).

This curriculum initiative is aimed at creating a generation of “social citizens”. Social citizens are those able to claim their rights and also fulfill their responsibilities to other citizens and to the wider community. Building social citizens through formal education means instilling students with values of respect, dignity, care, consent, and responsible participation in the community. The goal of this project is to address root causes of gender inequality and gender based violence through formal education. The ‘Whole School’ program in partnership with SPC’s Educational Quality and Assessment Program and Social Development Program will be comprised of six components:

1. Integration of gender equality and human rights into the school curriculum;
2. Delivery of teacher training sessions for teachers, as well as training sessions for other school staff, on gender equality and human rights to promote gender equality and human rights through example in formal education and allied school activities;
3. Integration of gender equality and human rights into extra-curricular activities for students, including any music, theatre or dance activities, student clubs, campaigns, sports activities or environmental activities;
4. Support for schools to adopt appropriate policies, including against sexual harassment and bullying, through participatory processes;
5. Fostering of positive relationships between students, teachers, school staff, parents and communities in order to ensure support from all key stakeholders for gender equality and human rights in both formal education and the wider community;
6. Creation of gender equality and human friendly classrooms/school environments.

## Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Vocational training is a vital tool to address the pervasive issue of youth unemployment. The largest and most successful post-secondary vocational skills training programs have been developed by the College of the Marshall Islands (CMI) and the University of the South Pacific (USP), Majuro Campuses, in collaboration with the National Training Council (NTC), the Community Training Center, and others. CMI focus has been on skills needed in the formal economy, both life and vocational. USP's focus has been on traditional and life skills needed in the informal economy.

NTC works at giving confidence and skills necessary to youth and Marshallese citizens to find work and be able to fill positions that often go to expatriates. The legal framework for NTC provides that both men and women, including youths, benefit from training. NTC provides internship trainings as well as off-island trainings. NTC also supports programs on outer islands, as seen in the chart below. The Table below shows sex disaggregated participation in NTC funded programs based on program type.

<i>Program Name</i>	<i>Total Trainees</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>% Female</i>
Sustainable Livelihoods and Basic Ed	130	23	107	82%
Technical and Vocational Skill	161	154	7	4%
Total Overall	291	177	114	64%

*(Source: 2015 NTC Report)*

The following table shows sex disaggregated participation in NTC programs in the outer atolls and islands.

Location	Male	Female	Total
Ailinglaplap		15	15
Ebon		10	10
Jaluit		25	25
Likiep		15	15
Mejit	10		10
Ebeye	6	15	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>96</b>

*(Source: 2015 NTC Report)*

Training programs are also provided by a number of NGOs, in which women and girls have been equal participants. The Waan Aelöñ in Majōl (WAM) is a very successful grassroots NGO that provides a six-month program of vocational and life skills training to youth-at-risk using the medium of traditional outrigger canoes, boat building, carpentry and woodworking. NGOs providing Basic Education and Life Skills and Sustainable Livelihoods are: YTYIH for Majuro and Ebeye; WUTMI; Juren Ae for Majuro, and Rukjenleen (WUTMI Chapter) for Ebeye. Furthermore, Australian-Pacific Technical College (APTC) provides training for Marshallese in the following areas: tourism & hospitality, automotive, manufacturing, construction, electrical trades, health, and community services.

### **Adult and Tertiary Education**

The local tertiary institutions, CMI and USP, offer adult education courses in the RMI. CMI has a General Education Development (GED) programs that helps students prepare for the United States GED test within a structured classroom environment. The following tables show the enrollment in the GED program for Spring and Fall of 2015:

<i>Spring 2015 GED Enrollment (Majuro and Ebeye)</i>			
Level	Male	Female	Total
Level 1	46	7	53
Level 2	27	18	45
Level 3	36	19	55
Level 4	63	26	89
Level 5	41	22	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>305</b>

<i>Fall 2015 GED Enrollment (Majuro and Ebeye)</i>			
Level	Male	Female	Total
Level 1	46	15	61
Level 2	29	18	47
Level 3	45	32	77
Level 4	55	37	92
Level 5	40	22	62
<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>339</b>

*(Source: CMI 2015 Report)*

USP offers a number of community education courses as well as diploma and certificate courses. USP also provides a gateway to the APTC that allows workers with some experience in a field to gain certification at campuses located around the Pacific.

The *Scholarship Assistance Act 1979* has been an important avenue for students to continue achieving higher education. The Marshall Islands Scholarship Grant and Loan Board was established to administer scholarship funding to qualifying Marshallese students to work towards their Bachelor’s Degree or advanced degree. Marshallese citizens living within the RMI and abroad are eligible for this scholarship. The scholarship is an important pathway for families, especially young mothers, to continue towards their higher education as the scholarship provides for living expenses, including allowing parents to provide for their families and attend school full time.

## Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

### **Critical areas of concern:**

- Violence against women
- I. Human rights of women
- Women and the media
- The girl child

**13. In the last five years, which forms of violence against women and girls, and in which specific contexts or settings, have you prioritized for action?**

### **Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence**

The *Domestic Prevention and Protection (Amended) Act* and the *Criminal Code* provides sexual assault provisions and includes new provisions criminalizing harassment and stalking. The law was amended to update sexual assault laws; expanded the definition of rape to include a broadened definition of sexual assault penetration and removal of the exception to rape for forced sex with a marital partner. Additionally, the law provides different degrees of sexual assault. It also recognized non-consensual sexual contact without penetration as sexual assault. Domestic violence is further discussed in Question 14.

### **Trafficking in women and girls**

The Republic of the Marshall Islands plans to continue to actively address trafficking in persons through national, regional and international partnerships. The *Criminal Code*, *Child Rights Protection Act 2015*, and the *Prohibition on the Trafficking In Human Persons Act 2017*, provides the legal framework for the prohibition of human trafficking in the RMI.

The Presidents of ROC (Taiwan) and the RMI appeared at a signing ceremony of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) “Concerning Cooperation in Immigration Affairs and Human Trafficking Prevention” on Monday, 30 October 2017 in Majuro. The MOU detailed the ways in which the respective parties should assist one another in addressing issues of immigration and human trafficking:

- To facilitate the exchange of criminal information;
- To facilitate exchange visits for official business;
- To invite one to three immigration officers from the other Party to participate in immigration training held by one of the Parties if possible;
- To implement other mutual assistance that might be requested but not mentioned above.

The *Prohibition of Trafficking Human Persons Act 2017* makes human trafficking in the RMI illegal. MIPD currently has no concrete policies with regards to dealing with victims of Human Trafficking. However, the MIPD works with other stakeholders to assist victims when cases are brought to their attention. Then cases are brought to the AG’s Office for prosecution. Other relevant stakeholders may provide available services to victims of trafficking such as health care.

The National Taskforce on Human Trafficking (NTHT) has started conversations with the US Embassy to secure funding through the Department of State’s Office for training and technical assistance to better monitor and combat Trafficking in Persons and to implement a comprehensive study on human trafficking in the RMI. The Endorsed Terms of Reference and National Action Plan on Human Trafficking include an active task force in Majuro, and working group in Ebeye. These are comprised of government, civil society and international organizations. The NTHT has created a human trafficking awareness raising curriculum for schools and communities. Since 2015 the Taskforce has reached over 5,000 women, men, boys and girls in Majuro, Ebeye, Jaluit, Wotje, and Kili. This includes a training of trainers in both Majuro and Ebeye to conduct awareness raising sessions. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) held a training of Trainers on Psychological First Aid (50 participants) in October/November 2017.

There are drafted Standard Operating Procedures for law enforcement on human trafficking. There are also drafted Standard Operating Procedures of referral regarding human trafficking for service providers. A mapping of service providers for survivor assistance has been completed. The WiM program by WUTMI supports survivors of trafficking that are women and girls 14+. There are memorandums of understanding for service provision between IOM and WUTMI and between WUTMI and MIPD.

#### **14. What actions has your country prioritized in the last five years to address violence against women and girls?**

The government took the first step towards implementing a system to counter violence against women by passing the Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act (DVPPA) in 2011. This led to the Costing Analysis conducted in early 2012 which formed the basis for the MOCIA *Aenemmon* (Peace) Project funded by the United Nations Trust Fund (UNTF) to End Violence Against Women to support implementation of the DVPPA. In 2018, the Act was amended to impose stiffer penalties.

Additionally, Marshall Islands Police Department (MIPD) has undergone extensive capacity building activities in partnership with Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme (PPDVP). This includes the creation and staffing of a Domestic Violence Unit. Furthermore, MIPD endorsed the First Response Protocol developed in cooperation with WUTMI to ensure appropriate institutional response to victims of domestic violence. MIPD continues to work to strengthen their ability to respond appropriately to cases of domestic violence.

Key measures to support the implementation of the DV legislation includes two major studies, the Child Protection Baseline Report (CPBR) 2013 and the Family Health and Safety Study (FHSS), which was completed in 2014. The CPBR was conducted with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and provides necessary baseline data for addressing child protection issues. The FHSS was undertaken with the

support from United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as part of a regional effort to collect prevalence data on violence against women. The data collected in these reports as well as the accompanying recommendations provide an important road map for addressing child protection and violence against women.

Local and state Judges, as well as law enforcement officers have received training provided by the SPC RRRT on presiding over DV/VAW cases. Comments during the workshop showed limited knowledge on the dynamics of VAW, and the culture around VAW in the RMI, particularly on the outer islands. WUTMI was on hand to provide talks about DV/VAW and the services they provide to victims of violence.

In 2014, the DVPPA Technical Working Group was established based for the *Aenemon* Project Award. The group was comprised of representatives from MOCIA, MIPD, AG, WUTMI, Faith Based Organizations, MOHHS, PSS and Micronesian Legal Services Corporation. The purpose of the working group was to review the implementation plan and carry out activities within their respective agencies. These are most of the same agencies that participated in the mobile team outreach programs to the outer atolls and islands.

Since the inception of the DVPPA in 2011 to 2015, there have been a total of 47 DV protection orders issued out by the courts. Out of these 48 cases:

- 25 were Granted;
- 7 were Dismissed by Plaintiff;
- 7 were Dismissed by Court;
- 7 were Dismissed by Stipulation;
- 1 was Dismissed by Petitioners;
- 1 is Pending.

Out of the 48 protection orders, 47 were issued to females and 1 to a male. 12 cases of criminal offenses against women have been investigated and prosecuted.

Currently, MIPD reports DV/VAW matters to the MOCIA during the investigative stage and from there MOCIA coordinates with WUTMI to ensure shelter for victims. WUTMI is leading WiM which is an initiative created to tend to and protect the needs of women/children victims of violence. WiM also offers services to the outer islands. Under the WiM Program, emergency accommodation is provided to victims until family members are identified whom the victim(s) feel safe staying with. The program also provides emergency transportation to outer island victims who are then able to access the range of services WiM offers in Majuro. Unfortunately, this program is not universally available in the outer islands. The Caseworkers and Prevention workers make trips to outer islands and can provide what services they can. Sometimes victims travel back to Majuro with the WiM workers. It is a goal of WiM's to establish a safe haven; however WiM does not have the human or financial capacity to establish a shelter at this time.

Data sharing is done by key agencies dealing with domestic issues alongside MIPD. The MOCIA is the focal point for collecting data on gender-based violence against women in coordination with the MIPD's Domestic Violence Unit. However, GRMI hopes to relocate all data collection and analyzing to EPPSO by the next CEDAW Reporting cycle.

#### **15. What strategies has your country used in the last five years to prevent violence against women and girls?**

The majority of awareness raising to prevent violence against women and girls has been undertaken by the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) community, in particular WUTMI. The Government also continues its awareness raising programs through local media outlets including the national radio station V7AB, the Marshall Islands Journal (privately owned) and the social media. The Public School System (PSS) and the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MOHHS) have regular information programs on the national radio station that often touch on human rights issues including sanitation, parenting skills, and substance abuse in youth.

WUTMI has developed a four-hour in-depth community education curriculum about gender-based violence. WUTMI piloted the curriculum in 2018 and has been actively implementing the curriculum on five islands and with the Marshallese community in the state of Hawaii (the closest Marshallese population outside the Marshall Islands). WUTMI has also developed awareness materials to include brochures on the basic information about VAW, posters to address power and control, sticky notepads with short and sharp messages about the DVPPA, and a pamphlet that goes more into detail about the DVPPA. WUTMI conducted a study in March 2017 on the values and attitudes toward violence against women. More targeted materials will be developed based on the outcomes of this study.

As stated in Question 12, curriculum review of elementary schools is an important step towards changing attitudes and behaviors through the formal education system. The intended outcomes for the program is as follows:

- Youth in the formative years of their development become critical thinkers and involved in gender equality, human rights and social change;
- Schools become hubs for nurturing core values around gender equality, non-discrimination, inclusion and participation, with continued positive effects in local communities;
- Students, teachers and school staff will be empowered to participate meaningfully and equally in the creation and implementation of gender equitable school policies and practices;
- Pacific Island governments become more aware of the benefits and importance of gender equality and human rights education as a means to bring about transformative change in attitudes and behaviors, and as part of the formation of socially responsible citizens;
- A comprehensive package of gender equality and human rights education (syllabus package and teacher training package) using a ‘whole school’ approach specific to the Pacific context will be available for adaptation by interested Pacific Island governments;

- Gender equality and human rights education becomes institutionalized as part of primary school education in Pacific countries, opening up the possibility of extension into the secondary school level;
- The successful implementation of gender equality and human rights education using a ‘whole school’ approach will encourage other Pacific Island governments to review their national curriculum frameworks with the view of introducing similar process.

**16. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls facilitated by technology (online sexual harassment, online stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images)?**

Yet to be implemented. GMRI recognized the need to develop legislation on the matter of violence against women and girls facilitated by technology and notes that it should be part of moving plans forward.

**17. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to address the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and/or gender bias in the media?**

At this time, GRMI does not have any legislations, policies or restrictions on media usage. GMRI recognized the need to develop legislation on the matter of violence against women and girls facilitated by technology and notes that it should be part of moving plans forward.

**18. Has your country taken any action in the last five years specifically tailored to address violence against specific groups of women facing multiple forms of discrimination?**

The introduced Gender Equality Bill (Question 4) prohibits gender discrimination, whether direct or indirect in all areas and by any person, State, entity or organization. This includes multiple and intersectional discrimination, violence against women and

girls, including sexual harassment. Section 110 of the Gender Equality Bill prohibits any form of violence against women and girls in the domestic or public sphere without exception. Women and girls with disabilities' are addressed in Section 118 (1) which states "women and girls with disabilities are entitled to gender equality and non-discrimination on equal basis with other women." Furthermore, as stated above in question 3, GRMI continues to take action to address groups of women facing multiple forms of discrimination, including violence. The RMI Disability Inclusive Development Action Plan includes a priority area specifically addressing the needs of women with disabilities, including addressing violence against women with disabilities. RMI Public Service Regulations prohibit discrimination against a person with HIV/AIDS, TB or another communicable disease. The Regulations, as well as government policies will be reviewed and adjusted to provide corresponding protection policy against discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, age, or other status to reflect the Constitutional mandate against such forms of discrimination.

## Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

### **Critical areas of concern:**

Women in power and decision-making

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

Human rights of women

### **19. What actions and measures has your country taken in the last five years to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making?**

The *Elections and Referenda Act* 1980, provides the legislative framework for elections and voting. The law provides that all citizens of the RMI over eighteen (18) years of age who are not certified to be insane or imprisoned or on parole or probation for felony convictions have the right and duty to vote in elections for members of the *Nitijela*. All eligible voters have the right to vote in one electoral district where the voter either resides or has land rights. Eligible voters also have the right and duty to vote in local government elections for the ward in which they have registered. Article IV of the *Constitution* and the *Elections and Referenda Act* 1980 provides that every eligible voter over the age of twenty- one is qualified to be a candidate for the *Nitijela*. And that any eligible voter in a given district may run for local government office within that district.

Marshall Islands has one of the lowest rates of representation at the legislative level internationally, with currently 3 women elected into the 33-seat *Nitijela*. The 12-seat Council of Iroij (Chiefs), which serves a largely consultative function dealing with customs and traditional practices, currently, has 2 women members. Other important decision-making structures, including in the religious, private and judicial spheres are male dominated.

Temporary Special Measures were discussed during the 2015 Constitutional Convention (Con.Con.) Proposals 9 and 13 are *Nitijela* resolutions that were shared with the Con. Con. for consideration.

- Proposal 9- sought to amend the Constitution to establish a quota or reserved seats (6) explicitly for women: 2 seats from Majuro Atoll, 1 from Jaluit Atoll, 1 from Kwajalein Atoll, 1 from Arno Atoll and 1 from Ailinglaplap Atoll. After the bill was passed from *Nitijela* it then reverted to the Con. Con. for deliberations as well as public consultation. Unfortunately, this proposal was defeated in the 2017 Con. Con.;
- Proposal 13- sought to amend provisions under the Equal Protection and Freedom in the Constitution, to include sexual orientation as a basis for non-discrimination. Unfortunately, this proposal was defeated in the 2017 Con. Con.

There are no legal barriers that prevent women from running for local or national office. However, a negative perception about women's participation in politics continues to exist and there are social barriers in place, including historically low numbers of female candidates. The 2015 General Election records show that of the 822 candidates running for local government council seats, 165, or just 16% were women. Only 56 women won seats, as opposed to 258 males. For the *Nitijela*, there were 91 candidates, 5 of them were women, or 95% males and 5% females.

There is nothing in RMI laws that actually prevent a woman from taking top positions. There are increasing numbers of women high level government positions, management, government boards and diplomatic posts. Education or earning of higher college level degrees has driven the progress of women in the workplace. GRMI is supportive of equitable access for women and men to participate in public life and decision-making posts in both public and private sectors.

**20. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technologies (ICT)?**

The Bill of Rights, Article II Section 1 (1) protects freedom of speech and of the press, and the government is reported to respect these rights in practice. The *Radio Communication Act* 1993, the *Marshall Islands National Telecommunications Authority Act* 1990, and the *Political Broadcast Access Act* 1996 are the main legislative frameworks for media in the RMI.

Media in the RMI is restricted to Majuro Atoll, and the only media outlet with national coverage is the government's AM radio station. Radio is the most important and diverse media platform across the islands. The government radio broadcast called V7AB, is the only government radio broadcast reaching outer island communities. V7AB is a medium whereby awareness on social, economic, political issues linked to CEDAW are aired on a daily basis by WUTMI and other women organizations including GID Office as allotted one hour weekly.

In the past, WUTMI had a radio station that aired important announcements to the public, weekly awareness sessions, and the station was also used to air campaign speeches for women, generally, but men also utilized the opportunity. The radio program also aired the services that WUTMI provides and how the public can be involved and learn about the issues women face. Furthermore, issues related to teens such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancy and other health issues, and a wide range of topics were also aired.

The *Marshall Islands Journal* (MIJ) is the only newspaper in the RMI. In the past, the RMI produced *Marshall Islands Gazette*, however it has not done so for many years. A newspaper, *The Island Voice*, was launched but closed in 2011. Government ministries often utilize the paper to promote and inform the public on various issues, as well as issues pertaining to women and girls.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are relatively underdeveloped in the RMI. The National Telecommunications Authority (NTA) is the only service provider for mobile and internet provision in the RMI.

**21. Do you track the proportion of the national budget that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (gender-responsive budgeting)?**

Yet to be implemented. GMRI recognized the need to develop legislation on the matter of violence against women and girls facilitated by technology and notes that it should be part of moving plans forward.

**22. As a donor country, does your country track the proportion of official development assistance (ODA) that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (gender-responsive budgeting)?**

N/A

**23. Does your country have a valid national strategy or action plan for gender equality?**

Yes. The RMI National Strategic Plan (NSP) acknowledges gender equality as an issue affecting all development priorities that needs to be considered and integrated into the five main sectors covered within the NSP. The Social Sector includes focus on gender goals and priorities.

Within in the Gender Mainstreaming Policy are proposed series of inputs and strategic action plans that will support the achievement of each of the five priority outcomes of the Gender Mainstreaming Policy. With technical assistance from SPC, GID Office has in its

plans, a comprehensive gender mainstreaming policy implementation plan, which includes programs addressing gender sensitivity and understanding.

**24. Does your country have an action plan and timeline for implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (if a State party), or of the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review or other United Nations human rights mechanisms that address gender inequality/discrimination against women?**

While action plan has yet to be fully implemented, there is a draft tracking tool for UPR, CEDAW, and CRC. The tracking tool identifies lead agencies, indicators and actions to be taken. Human Rights Committee is responsible for monitoring and evaluating progress towards implementation of recommendations.

**25. Is there a national human rights institution in your country?**

There is no National Human Rights Institution or Ombudsman. Under the Constitutional Convention Act, 2015, Proposal No. SC 17 seeks to amend the Constitution to allow for a separate and independent office or body to institute, conduct or discontinue, any proceedings relating to fraud, corruption, misconduct of office and other ethical misconduct by elected or high officials. Proposal No. SC 18, requests appropriate provisions in the Constitution to provide for the establishment of an Office of Ombudsman. The government acknowledges the valuable role that a National Human Rights Institution or Ombudsman could play, and remains interested in accessing technical assistance in the establishment of such an office or ombudsman.

In November 2016, GRMI requested technical assistance from the SPC RRRT and the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF) to undertake a scoping study on the feasibility of establishing a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI). The

scoping study was conducted in March 2017. Study results were submitted to the RMI in September 2017. The following recommendations were made for the GRMI to consider:

- The Scoping Team recommended that the RMI establish a NHRI as a Constitutional Office with a status equivalent to that of the Office of the Auditor-General;
- The Scoping Team recommended that the currently convened Con. Con. be asked to consider the establishment of an Ombudsman's Office with both good governance and human rights mandates;
- If an Ombudsman Office is established, it should comprise of a Chief Ombudsman and an Ombudsman or Deputy Ombudsman with specific responsibility for human rights – both full-time.
- The legislation enabling the NHRI should provide a broad mandate:
- To promote and protect the human rights of every person in the Marshall Islands;
- To foster the dignity, equality and security of everyone in the Marshall Islands, including women, children and people with disabilities. As well as all citizens and residents whether permanent or temporary.

The primary objectives of the NHRI should be:

- To advocate and promote respect for and an understanding and appreciation of human rights;
- To ensure compliance with the Paris Principles and to build community trust in the NHRI throughout the Marshall Islands;
- To incorporate explicit legislative guarantees of its independence and provide for an open, transparent and inclusive hiring process.

## Peaceful and inclusive societies

### **Critical areas of concern:**

Women and armed conflict  
Human rights of women  
The girl child

### **26. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the women, peace and security agenda?**

Traditionally women have been an integral part of decision making and peace keeping in the RMI. Marshallese proverbs and stories reiterate lessons of respect for women. The following traditional Marshallese proverbs depict the traditional role of women and the value they contribute to creating and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies:

- *Jined ilo Kobo*: woman as the compassionate mother, mother and promoter of the Marshallese people, responsible for holding the family together and addressing the needs of the family members;
- *Lejmaanjuri*: peacemaker, in each family the mother and older sisters are expected to keep the peace or stop fights between male members of the family;
- *Ieb jeltok, kora menunak*: women as supportive providers, preparing nourishment for the family as well as taking part in making copra, handicrafts, collecting food;
- *Limaro bikkikir kōlo eo*: women as those who preserve and enliven the livelihood of the family and the community, responsible for ensuring that the family and the community do not slack or abandon major or crucial projects, decisions or goals important to the livelihood of the family or the community and that they encourage the men in times of war to be brave and courageous.

The RMI National Strategic Plan (NSP) acknowledges the need to enhance capacity of youth, children, and vulnerable groups, that needs to be considered and integrated into the five main sectors covered within the NSP. The Social Sector includes focus on youth, children, vulnerable groups and community development. GRMI will continue to strengthen awareness, policies, and legislation to be inclusive for sustainable development.

**27. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to increase the leadership, representation and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peace building, humanitarian action and crisis response, at decision-making levels in situations of armed and other conflicts, and in fragile or crisis settings?**

The Republic of the Marshall Islands continues to support the Regional Plan of Action on Women Peace and Security. In terms of participation of women in humanitarian crisis response, women have been active in participating in climate and nuclear justice, consultations and active to assist in relief efforts relating to impacts of climate change and disaster risks. GRMI supports the role of both women and men in building resilient communities to face natural disasters and climate change.

The RMI continues to advocate for climate and nuclear justice, linking the issue of climate change to the ongoing effects of nuclear testing. At the climate change summit in Paris 2015, a number of Marshallese young women and men joined former and late Minister Tony Muller, in the fight for climate change justice to the RMI. Such young women as Ms. Cathy Jetnil-Kijiner, Ms. Milan Loeak and Ms. Selina Leem did the RMI proud by advocating and demonstrating to bring to the attention of the world leaders their aspirations and demands for a climate change agreement in Paris.

In partnership with IOM and the Marshall Islands Red Cross Society, WUTMI conducted hazard and vulnerability mapping in communities surrounding all five public high schools as well as fourteen public elementary schools on six atolls Majuro (2 high

schools, 4 elementary schools), Ebeye (1 high school, 3 elementary schools), Jaluit (1 high school, 2 elementary schools), Wotje (1 high school, 2 elementary schools), Kili (1 elementary school), Arno (2 elementary schools). Following these mapping activities, action plans were developed to address the pressing and continuing impacts on the livelihoods of women and their families as a result of natural and climate change-induced disasters.

WUTMI assisted with relief efforts during the 2013 and 2016 severe drought events. In the 2016 efforts, WUTMI conducted the Cookhouse Confidential focus group discussions with women and young girls about the impacts of disasters on their health and wellbeing, particularly looking at menstrual hygiene management. IOM and WUTMI distributed female hygiene kits during the disaster as a result of the pilot focus group discussions. These were proven to be useful for the women who received them.

In partnership with the Office of Environmental Planning and Policy Coordination (OEPPC) and the GRMI, WUTMI was part of a team in 2016 that consulted with 22 atolls for a Green Climate Fund (GCF) grant application. The grant is meant to fund climate change adaptation and mitigation projects. The GRMI applied for a water security project to benefit the entire RMI. Part of the application was a gender and social inclusion study to determine the kinds of challenges women and young girls faced within the community and at school in times of water insecurity. This study gave way to determine the kinds of adaptation activities necessary to address the challenges and build on the strengths of the community and the schools.

WUTMI and youth group Jo-Jikum represented women during Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and climate change initiatives. Jo-Jikum is highly involved in raising awareness through art camps and other summer camp activities through their three main core programs. The youth programs are designed to enable youths across the Marshall Islands to be an active and sustainable part of the disaster and climate landscape.

**28. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to enhance judicial and non-judicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women and girls in situations of armed and other conflicts or humanitarian action and crisis response?**

RMI continues to support the Regional Plan of Action on Women Peace and Security.

**29. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child?**

Legal protection against discrimination is provided by the Constitution. Although not explicit, this includes protection for all children as well. The *Child Rights Protection Act*, the *Human Rights Committee Act*, the *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act* and the Disability policy adopted by the *Nitijela* also ensure that children and persons with disabilities are not being discriminated against.

The Government acknowledged that in practice, people with disabilities still have difficulty in accessing public services and are also challenged with the limited employment opportunities available. The Government is committed to addressing these issues and is, therefore, open to assistance, both financial and technical, from partners in the areas of legal and policy review, as well as infrastructural changes.

In recent years, PSS's partnership with World Teach provides volunteer teachers with hearing impairment to work with students with similar hearing disabilities on Majuro. Additionally, the Disability Coordination Office within MOCIA, provides support to MIDPO and coordination for activities that support children with disabilities.

It is compulsory for a child who attains the age of 5 years to attend school. Beginning in 2013, collection of all registration fees was suspended and all public school students were able to attend school free of charge. Another initiative that has done much to improve

outer island students' ability to access education is the solar panel installation project that enables school children to study after dark.

The enrolment data from 2015 shows nearly equal enrolment of males and females at both public and private elementary and secondary schools. In all elementary schools, 49.4% of students were female. In all secondary schools, 50.6% of students were female.

The PSS Child Protection Policy promotes a right-based approach to child protection. The Code of Conduct for Working with Children provides that all regular and volunteer teachers are required to make a signed declaration of compliance with the Code of Conduct for Working with Children as a condition of their engagement. This includes an agreement to report to the designated child protection officer at PSS whenever they have a reasonable belief that a child has been harmed or is at potential risk of harm. PSS teachers and volunteer teachers and staff working with children with disabilities are required to participate in induction training that raises their awareness of particular risk factors and provides examples of good practice.

The Government is continuing its efforts to address challenges affecting access to quality education in the outer islands. The main factors that affect Government's efforts include logistical challenges given the geographic dispersion of the islands, and transportation and shipping delays which affects the delivery of school materials in a timely manner. Other factors include school disruptions due to deteriorating weather conditions; and the difficulty of attracting qualified teachers from urban schools to teach in outer islands.

The Government has put in place the following initiatives to address this issue: (1) intensive teacher trainings, including on outer islands, minimizing the distance that outer island teachers must travel; (2) requirement that all teachers must have, at least an Associates of Arts (AA) or Associate of Science (AS) degrees, including those in outer island schools. In the last decade, the Government carried out several improvements to existing school structures. Many outer island schools have been renovated, providing safer more appropriate school environments. Active mentor relationships between PSS School District Supervisors and outer island schools/teachers also provide the monitoring

and support necessary to improve conditions. New positions were created in order to better service the outer island schools. There are five supervisors servicing the five districts.

In the area of health, as mentioned in Question 9, quality care for mothers and children is provided by the new Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Clinic. MOHHS will continue to strengthen partnerships with medical missions from abroad to build capacity and staff training to deliver care in various medical fields.

## Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

### **Critical areas of concern:**

- I. Human rights of women
- K. Women and the environment
- L. The girl child

### **30. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies?**

RMI adopted a number of important gender-friendly national policies including our National Strategic Plan, National Climate Change Policy Framework, and National Energy Policy, among others. All of these incorporate goals and outcomes to progress gender equality and advancement of women and call for the development of gender sensitive strategies for climate change responses and advancement of women in decision-making and economic empowerment. The HRC continues to ensure when developing policies and plans that it is inclusive to ensure that the right stakeholders participate. Furthermore, MOCIA continues to ensure that a gender lens is integrated into policies and plans.

The National Climate Change Policy Framework (NCCPF) presents five strategic goals that aim to provide a pathway to an integrated, whole-of-RMI response. Objectives and outcomes are identified for each goal.

- Strengthen the Enabling Environment for Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, including Sustainable Financing
- Adaptation and Reducing Risks for a Climate Resilient Future
- Energy Security and Low-Carbon Future
- Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery
- Building Education and Awareness, Community Mobilization, whilst being mindful of Culture, Gender and Youth

In recognition of the need for integration of climate change into development planning, the National Climate Change Committee developed the Joint National Action Plan on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management (JNAP) for RMI. The JNAP was developed in a multi-stakeholder process conducted in 2010–2011. The JNAP matrix aligns with actions identified under the National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Management 2008–2018 and the National Climate Change Policy Framework to provide a comprehensive guide for implementation of risk reduction measures relating to disaster and climate change. The implementation and monitoring of the progress of JNAP across key sectors requires significant increases in human, technical and financial resources. The JNAP provides a detailed strategy for “holistically and cooperatively” addressing risks in the RMI.

As a cross cutting issue, some of the achievements so far include the following:

- RMI Youth Policy 2014: takes into consideration climate change and youths’ role and empowerment;
- Small Grants Program: youth and gender is always incorporated into concept development and;
- Cookhouse Confidential Initiative: Indigenous methodology to disseminate information and collect data on related and relevant gender issues as it relates to climate impacts, such as droughts and other extreme weather events. This methodology was developed in order to be better aware of women's and girls’ needs during an emergency or disaster situation as well as to understand better idea how to plan and respond to longer term climate change adaptation needs.

**31. What actions has your country taken in the last five years to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation?**

Disaster management (DM) was formalized with the passing of the National Disaster Management Plan and the enactment of the *Disaster Assistance Act*, both in 1987, which established the National Disaster Management Committee and the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) located in the Office of the Chief Secretary. Local governments are responsible for assisting the NDMO to develop specific programs for each atoll. To facilitate this process, the NDMO provides technical advice and serves as the focal point for the coordination of Government resource support.

At a strategic level, the National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Management (DRMNAP) 2008 to 2018 outlines priority actions for risk reduction. The Joint National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change (JNAP) was subsequently established in 2010 to 2011 and aligns with actions identified under the DRMNAP, as well as the subsequently developed 2011 National Climate Change Policy Framework (NCCPF). Together, these policies provide a comprehensive guide for the implementation of risk reduction measures relating to disaster and climate change.

Disaster response is coordinated through five clusters that can be activated when the need arises. These clusters are: water and sanitation (WASH), health, logistics, food security and agriculture, and the infrastructure and shelter cluster, thus, the national cluster system has been institutionalized into the disaster risk management operations structure. Different clusters have different levels of operational capacity depending on how often they have been activated and their composition. The WASH cluster was the most active cluster during the 2016 El Niño drought response, and also has the largest membership, bringing together government agencies, non- governmental organizations and civil society.

Women have participated and are represented in consultations on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change initiatives. Often times, the government and other inter-governmental partners such as the IOM issue out contracts to women and youth NGOs to conduct surveys and other post response analysis instruments to communities in the outer islands. WUTMI, and various youth NGOs are highly involved in Disaster and Climate

related work. The youth group Jo-Jikum, is highly involved in raising awareness through art camps other summer camp activities through their three main core programs. The youth programs are designed to enable youths across the Marshall Islands to be an active and sustainable part of the disaster and climate landscape. GRMI will continue to involve both women and men in building resilient communities to face climate change impacts and disaster risks.

### **Section Three: National institutions and processes**

#### **32. What is your country's current national machinery for gender equality and the empowerment of women? Please name it and describe its location within Government.**

The Gender in Development (GID) Office functions within the Community Development Division (CDD) under the Ministry of Culture and Internal Affairs (MOCIA) is the RMI's national machinery for gender equality and the advancement of women. The GID Office is supported by and works in close cooperation with the other offices within the CDD, which include Youth Services Bureau (YSB), Disability Coordination Office, Child Rights Office and Senior Citizens Affairs Office. With a Gender Development Coordinator and new Gender Development Officer, including technical assistance from the newly appointed RRRT Country Focal Officer (CFO) to the RMI, the GID Office has strengthened its plans for the upcoming years ahead.

#### **33. Is the head of the national machinery a member of the institutional process for SDG implementation (e.g. inter-ministerial coordinating office, commission or committees)?**

Yes. Under the NSP/SDGs Committee, there are five sector committees. The MOCIA is the chair for the Social Development Sector, which address the following strategic areas: health; education; gender; children, youth and vulnerable groups; and community development. MOCIA is also the Secretariat for the HRC.

#### **34. Are there formal mechanisms in place for different stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?**

Stakeholders have been reporting on ministry objectives listed in the NSP which are linked to the SDGs. With the NSP being reviewed, its alignment to the SDGs has not yet been confirmed.

<b>Beijing Platform for Action Stakeholder</b>	<b>Sustainable Development Goals Stakeholder</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Civil Society Organization</li> <li>● Women’s rights organization</li> <li>● Academia and think tanks</li> <li>● Private Sector</li> <li>● Cabinet</li> <li>● Human Rights Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Women’s Organizations: WUTMI</li> <li>● Parliament: Minister in Assistant to the President</li> <li>● Private Sector: Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>● Other actors: Ministers, Agency Secretaries, and Assistant Secretaries.</li> </ul>

**35. Is gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls included as a key priority in the national plan/strategy for SDG implementation?**

Yes, gender equality and the advancement of women and girls is a national priority and is addressed in the Social Sector of the NSP. RMI is committed to creating an enabling environment that allows all women and men to develop their capacities and fulfill their aspirations.

## Section Four: Data and statistics

### **36. What are the top three areas in which your country has made most progress over the past five years when it comes to gender statistics at the national level?**

Progress	Comments/Summary
Produced knowledge products on gender statistics (e.g., user-friendly reports, policy briefs, research papers)	Produced the Gender Equality: Where do we stand? RMI; ADB (forthcoming); compilation of statistics for human rights reports – eg CEDAW, (Common Core document). Lessons learnt is that there are still a lot of data gaps to address in key sectors like Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce (NRC), Ministry of Justice (Public Safety for data on crime and justice), time use, gender-based violence, asset ownership, poverty, and disability.
Used more gender-sensitive data in the formulation of policy and implementation of programs and projects	Ministry of Health and Human Services (MOHHS), Public Service System (PSS, Ministry of Education) and Marshall Islands Social Security Services (MISSA) are some of the areas that have achieved this priority. The MOHHS conducted the Integrated Child Nutrition and Health Survey (ICNHS) which showed disparities between girls and boys that have been integrated into the program design. Lesson learnt is that Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning and knowledge management systems need to be strengthened to better inform the policy and reporting process in a timely manner.
Engaged in capacity building to strengthen the use of gender statistics (e.g., trainings, statistical appreciation seminars)	Lesson learned is that training has been most effective when linked to a specific result like the gender statistics publications; SDG Socialization with the Social Sector Committee – increased ownership of SDG targets with stakeholders; understanding of ‘evaluative’ nature of SDG reporting. changing analysis and interpretation in annual reports.

### **37. Out of the following which are your country’s top three priorities for strengthening national gender statistics over the next five years?**

Priorities	Comments/Summary
<p>Conduct of new surveys to produce national baseline information on specialized topics (e.g., time use, gender-based violence, asset ownership, poverty, disability)</p>	<p>This year the RMI is conducting the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) and the Census on Population and Housing will follow in 2021 and an Individual Deprivation Measure research for key data gaps on time use.</p>
<p>Use more gender-sensitive data in the formulation of policy and implementation of programmes and projects</p>	<p>There will be gender reviews of policies, projects and programs with gender audits in key sectors like fisheries/agriculture to support gender mainstreaming; work to improve administrative data sources in public safety and other Ministries/Agencies that are providing gender statistics in the government.</p>
<p>Statistical capacity building of users to increase statistical appreciation on and use of gender statistics (e.g., trainings, statistical appreciation seminars)</p>	<p>Having more trained people in gender statistics will enable better understanding and knowledge on reporting on gender statistics. Also will need capacity building on reporting gender statistics linked to the VNR.</p>

**38. Have you defined a national set of indicators for monitoring progress on the SDGs?**

At this time, RMI is in the process of identifying a national set of indicators based on the Pacific Headline Indicators.

**39. Has data collection and compilation on SDG 5 indicators and on gender-specific indicators under other SDGs begun?**

Yes. The Pacific Headline Indicators are the set of SDG indicators that the PIFs countries agreed to report on. RMI provided a report to PIFS last year. There are 125 SDG indicators and 5 Proxy indicators.

**40. Which of the following disaggregations is routinely provided by major surveys in your country?**

Major surveys in the RMI routinely disaggregate the following:

- Geographic location
- Income
- Sex
- Age
- Education
- Marital status
- Race/ethnicity

\* \* \*

## **Annex 1: Background information about the Republic of the Marshall Islands**

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is made up of 29 low-lying coral atolls and five islands with a total land area of 181.3 square kilometers located in the North Pacific, between 4 degrees and 14 degrees north and 160 degrees and 173 degrees east. The atolls and islands form two groups: the *Ratak* Chain and the *Ralik* Chain (meaning ‘sunrise’ and ‘sunset’). Most of the islands’ land mass is at sea level.

The people of the Marshall Islands are Micronesian descendants of seafarers from Southeast Asia who migrated to the islands 2,000 to 3,000 years ago. Since the first settlers arrived, the Marshall Islands has remained a highly homogeneous society. The 2011 census showed that of the total population of 53,158 people, 90 per cent are Marshallese with the remaining 10 per cent from the United States of America (U.S.A.), the Philippines, China, New Zealand, Australia, other Micronesian countries, Kiribati, Korea, and Fiji. Of the total population, 27,243 are males and 25,915 females. Children aged 0 to 17 years comprise 46 per cent of the population. Two-thirds of the nation’s population lives on Majuro (the capital) and Ebeye. The annual population growth rate is 0.4 percent due to high rates of outmigration rather than a decline in fertility.

Despite being under successive foreign control by Germany, Japan and the United States, the Marshallese people retain a strong sense of cultural identity. Marshallese continues to be the primary language of the country. The 2011 census documented a literacy rate of 95 per cent in the Marshallese language. English is taught as a second language in schools throughout the nation. Both Marshallese and English are used in official communications and in commerce, while English is used to a lesser extent on the outer islands.

The Marshallese custom is recognized and protected in the Constitution, specifically in relation to land tenure. However, as the social and economic context moved from a subsistence-based rural society to an urban, cash-based economy, traditional practices have eroded.

## **Political System**

The Marshall Islands has undergone successive foreign domination by Germany, Japan and the United States. These foreign Powers ruled the islands for such advantages as trade, religious propagation, and exploitation of resources, strategic considerations and maintenance of sea routes.

In 1885, after a 25-year period of commercial contact with other nations through the copra trade, the Marshall Islands formally became a protectorate of the German empire. The Germans were followed by the Japanese, who seized the islands from Germany in 1914. The Japanese administered the islands under a League of Nations mandate from 1920 to 1935 and were expelled by American forces during the Second World War.

Kwajalein and Enewetak in the Marshall Islands were major battlefields of the American island-hopping campaign. At the end of the war, the United States assumed responsibility for administering the Marshall Islands under a United Nations trusteeship agreement. In the years following the war, two northern Marshall Islands became testing ground for atomic and nuclear weapons. Between 1946 and 1958, the United States exploded 67 atomic and nuclear devices at Bikini and Enewetak Atolls. Kwajalein Atoll continues to be used by the United States for testing the weaponry of the Space Age.

On 1 May 1979, the RMI became self-governing and the U.S.A. Trusteeship administration of the Marshall Islands came to an end. On 21 October 1986, the Compact of Free Association between the U.S.A. Government and the Government of the Marshall Islands came into effect. Under free association, the Marshall Islands is self-governing under its own Constitution and conducts its own domestic and foreign affairs, while the United States Government has authority and responsibility for defence and security matters. The Compact, as Amended will remain in effect until 2023.

The Constitution of the Marshall Islands incorporates a blend of the British and American constitutional concepts and consists of legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The legislature is a bicameral institution consisting of the Council of *Irooj* (Chiefs) and the *Nitijelā* (Parliament). The main function of the Council of *Irooj*, which has a membership of 12, is to request consideration by the *Nitijelā* of bills affecting customary law, land

tenure, or any traditional practice. The *Nitijelā* is the law-making body and consists of 33 members who stand for election every four years. The *Nitijelā* also elects from its ranks a President and, on nomination by the President, other members of the *Nitijelā* to serve with the President as the Cabinet. The Cabinet is the executive branch of the Government and directs the actions of the Public Service. The Cabinet is answerable to the *Nitijelā* for its actions. The judicial branch consists of a supreme court, a high court, a traditional rights court, district courts, and community courts.

There are 24 local governments that govern the affairs of the atolls and islands. Each local government consists of an elected council (except Ebon Atoll which has a hereditary council), an elected mayor, appointed or elected local officials, and a local police force.

In February 2016, for the first time in RMI history and the history of the Pacific Islands, except Australia and New Zealand, the Government elected its first female President, H.E. President Hilda C. Heine. An increase of women in leadership is reflected by 3(three) current female members of *Nitijelā*. Prior to the election of 2015, there had been no more than one woman at a time in the *Nitijelā* since the start of the RMI Constitutional Government in 1979.

The RMI became a member of the United Nations in September 1991.

## Economic System

The remoteness of the RMI from major markets historically has had a negative impact on the economy. Furthermore, the economy is small in relative terms, with a narrow export base and limited production capacities. As such, it is vulnerable to external shocks. The economy remains dependent on donor funding. Funding from The Compact of Free Association, as Amended, provides approximately 27 per cent of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 budget (FY16 Ministry of Finance).

Employment data shows that the economy has generated several additional jobs amounting to 0.6 per cent per annum during the period of The Compact of Free Association, as Amended. Both the private and public sectors have grown, despite declines at the Kwajalein military base. However, the generation of additional jobs has been insufficient to provide gainful employment opportunities for those seeking work, and outward migration remains substantial, averaging 1.7 per cent annually since 2004. (USDA Graduate School 2012).

The RMI public sector continues to dominate the economy in terms of contribution to GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and overall employment. The primary commercial industries include:

- Wholesale/retail trade
- Construction
- Tourism
- Light manufacturing
- General business services
- Commercial fisheries

Table 1 Employment Data

	<b>Male s</b>	<b>Female s</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Labour Market Activities (People Employed)</b>	8,258	4,389	12,647

<b>Employment/Population Ratio</b>	51%	28%	39.6 %
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Source: 2011 RMI Census

Table 2 Paid versus Unpaid Workers

<b>Paid</b>	<b>Unpaid</b>
11,932	715

Source: 2011 RMI Census

Annual export values continue to increase primarily due to continued exports of tuna by locally based fishing operations. However, the RMI continues to rely heavily on imports and continues to run a negative balance of payments. The primary export products include:

- Frozen fish (tuna)
- Tropical fish
- Ornamental clams and corals
- Coconut oil and copra cake
- Crafts

### **Key Land Characteristics**

The total land area in RMI is 180.0 sq.km. Of this land area, a total of 130.0 sq.km is agricultural land. Just over forty percent (44.4%p) of RMI land area is permanent cropland. Arable land in the RMI totals 2000.0 hectares. This makes up 11.1% (percent) of the land area in the RMI.

## **Annex 2: Sources of Statistics and further reading**

Economic Policy, Planning and Statistics Office (EPPSO): <https://www.eppso.org/> or <http://rmi.prism.spc.int/>

Marshall Islands Social Security Administration: <http://www.rmimissa.org/>

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Republic of the Marshall Islands. 2011 Census report. SPC, Noumea, New Caledonia. ISBN 978-982-00-0564-8. Available from: <http://sdd.spc.int/en/resources/document-library>

RMI Courts <http://rmicourts.org>

Republic of the Marshall Islands, Public School System <http://pss.edu.mh/>

The Parliament of the Marshall Islands: <https://rmiparliament.org/cms/>