



# The Social Impacts of Seasonal Migration

Lessons from Australia's Seasonal Worker Programme for Pacific Islanders





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## Abstract

The Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) is a temporary migration scheme between Australia and selected Pacific Island Countries. It was introduced in 2012 and covers the agriculture, accommodation and tourism sectors. Extensive efforts have been made to evaluate the economic impacts of the scheme, but there is a lack of evidence on the social impacts emanating from the extended absences of key family members. Moreover, of the 17,320 workers who have participated in the programme since its inception, only 13.7 percent have been women. There are gaps in understanding around the gendered impact of the programme and the constraints that prevent women from accessing the SWP. Based on a focus on the two largest participating countries in the scheme, Tonga and Vanuatu, this paper aims to: (i) assess both positive and negative social impacts of seasonal migration and explore how negative consequences can be mitigated; and (ii) examine the experience of women in the programme, explore the barriers to access and put forward a set of recommendations to increase the female participation rate.

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## Abbreviations

DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
KII	Key Informant Interview
PIC	Pacific Island Country
PSWPS	Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme
RSE	Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme
SWP	Seasonal Worker Programme



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## The Social Impacts of Seasonal Migration

**The Australian Government established the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) in 2012 after a four-year pilot scheme.** The SWP continues to grow, with an increasing number of Pacific Islanders working in Australia's agriculture, tourism and accommodation sectors. Participating countries include Timor-Leste and the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) of Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Since its inception, the female participation rate has been increasing, but remains dwarfed by a higher proportion of males across all participating countries.

**Building upon earlier evaluative studies of the programme, The World Bank's Development Evaluation aims to capture the impact of seasonal migration on participating households and communities.** As part of this broader research effort, this report presents empirical evidence on the social impacts of the SWP on participating and nonparticipating households. It also highlights some of the factors underlying the gap in the male and female participation rate, and potential measures to reduce this gap.

**The analysis combines both quantitative and qualitative data that highlight the range of positive and negative social outcomes for participating individuals, households and communities, with a focus on the two largest participating countries in the scheme, Tonga and Vanuatu.** It does so by complementing household, community-survey and on-site survey data with insights from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). A total of 17 FGDs were conducted in Tonga separated by gender and age, as well as 18 FGDs in Vanuatu. In addition, nine in-depth interviews were conducted in Tonga and 18 in Vanuatu.

**Overall, seasonal work in Australia has not only benefited individual households through remittances, but also brought about positive social impacts for the participating and nonparticipating households and communities in the Pacific.** Beyond the short-term material benefits, participants across Tonga and Vanuatu have highlighted the "new skill sets" or "social remittances" (Levitt 1998) they have gained as part of their exposure to the scheme. Female seasonal workers highlighted positive changes emanating from gaining new skills and knowledge, including increased levels of financial literacy, English language proficiency, leadership and entrepreneurial skills. Because of this, women in Tonga and Vanuatu have generally improved their ability to control and manage household finances when they return. They have become better managers and there is better coordination between spouses on the way money is spent. Even when they are not participating in the SWP, women are gaining more control in the management of household finances as recipients of remittances.

**Through seasonal work opportunities, women in both Tonga and Vanuatu are now able to negotiate their traditional gender roles, but failing to bring about long-term changes affecting domestic power inequalities within a household.** Even though women and men's traditional roles in Tonga are narrowing with the increasing participation of women and men in seasonal work, traditional gendered power relations remain intact. Focus group discussions (FGDs) in Tonga revealed that when female workers are away, it was more common for the husband to get help and support from other female members of the household or extended family members than in Vanuatu. Community and household responses in this study suggest that it is now acceptable for men to help in domestic chores, including taking care of children and other family members when women participate in the SWP and manage the earnings from SWP.

**There are also some negative social impacts emanating from the absence of family members for extended periods.** The significant gap between the male and female participation rates in the SWP has meant that more men than women are away from their families for extended periods of time. The absence of men from their immediate families often leads to issues of neglect and failure on the part of men/husbands to provide regular financial support for the families back home. A common finding was that lack of communication has eroded trust and commitment between couples and led to negative impacts on families and intimate relationships, especially in Tonga. Qualitative discussions across communities and women's groups in Vanuatu could not, however, draw a direct causal link between women's and men's participation in SWP with increased gender-based violence. Further research and longitudinal data in the Pacific is needed to fill the evidence gaps on unintended consequences such as vulnerability to harm, violence and neglect as a result of women and men's participation in the SWP.

**Women are also faced with unequal opportunities to participate in the SWP, and their participation rate has remained low since its inception.** Low participation of women in the SWP depends on a number of factors, often linked to: (i) local selection processes; (ii) gendered biases of Approved Employers in Australia as well as local contracting agents; and (iii) gendered perceptions on the role of women and their participation in economic opportunities. Despite general acceptance at the household and community level for equal participation of women and men in the SWP, perceptions around traditional roles of women and men still persist, preventing many women from having equal access to seasonal work opportunities. The FGDs revealed that women in Tonga are faced with stricter gender norms than in Vanuatu that often restrict women's autonomy in decisions about mobility and migration for work.

**Participation in the SWP indicates that gender roles might be shifting temporarily depending on the seasonality of work, although not changing completely.** The temporary absence of women and men for seasonal work in such instances has led to shifts in gender roles, but their absence from home is not long enough to challenge traditional gendered relations within households or gender roles in society. Different role expectations and demands placed by participation of women and men in the SWP means change is slowly oc-

curing where gender norms on women's and men's traditional roles are being negotiated at the household level but there is still a stronger grip on traditional gender roles of women and men in Tonga than in Vanuatu. Given the seasonal nature of labor mobility programs that open employment opportunities for both women and men, the gendered roles of women and men in Tonga and Vanuatu may be bending and evolving but not necessarily "undoing gender" (Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007).

**This study offers several core recommendations to mitigate the negative social impacts and increase women's participation in the SWP and these are categorized into the following:**

**Standards for sending country authorities to meet:**

- Better preparing seasonal workers as part of pre-departure programs and trainings.
- Providing financial literacy training to both seasonal workers and their families.
- Improving social integration programs for returning workers, including family support services and counseling.
- Strengthening community-based and community-led support programs for SWP workers' wives and their families.
- Building support of husbands and extended family members in sending countries through awareness-raising programs on broader benefits for the community and family of women travelling for work.
- Implementing national-level plans and policies in sending countries that promote gender-inclusive employment opportunities in seasonal labor schemes.
- Promoting and encouraging positive role models of both female and male seasonal workers and the related benefits to households and communities, including the support role played by their spouses.

**Standards for Approved Employers and recruitment agents to put in place:**

- Improving support services for workers on remote and isolated farms in Australia.
- Promoting women's participation in the SWP amongst both those responsible for selection in sending countries and in Australia by opening opportunities for women in existing sectors (Approved Employers).
- Designing and offering gender-sensitive community awareness programs as part of recruitment programs for SWP workers, including awareness through media.
- Expanding awareness programs on seasonal work in remote and rural communities.

**Areas for further research:**

- This paper was aimed at assessing the negative social impacts of seasonal migration and barriers to women's participation in the SWP and explored how these can be mitigated. Further research needs to be conducted to better illustrate any causal link between seasonal labor mobility and gender-based violence in participating households.



**This section provides an overview of Australia's Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and sets out the background, objectives and methodology employed for this report.**

## 1.1 Overview of Australia's SWP

**The SWP was established by the Australian Government in 2012 after a four-year pilot scheme.** The Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme (PSWPS) was initially introduced in 2008 to fill domestic labor shortages in Australia's horticulture sector with relatively low participation of seasonal workers from four Pacific Island Countries (PICs), including Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Vanuatu (Gibson and McKenzie 2011).

**Since becoming a permanent scheme in 2012, the SWP has continued to grow, with an increasing number of Pacific Islanders now working in Australia's agriculture and accommodation sectors.** The introduction of a full-scale permanent programme for seasonal labor was not only marked by a stronger government commitment to improve on the pilot scheme, but changes to scale and structural reforms were also put in place to increase and expand the programme (Doyle and Sharma 2017). As part of the reforms by the government to address demand-side constraints (Doyle and Howe 2015; Hay and Howes 2012), major reforms in 2015 saw the introduction of new sectors such as accommodation and tourism and the uncapping of the programme (see also Doyle and Sharma 2017). The list of participating countries has also expanded to include Timor-Leste and the following PICs: Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The number of participants has increased fourfold since the SWP commenced, with a 37 percent growth rate from 2015-16 to 2016-17 (Howes and Sherrell 2016).

**Despite major reforms to the SWP, not all the PICs participate equally in the SWP, with Tonga and Vanuatu remaining the largest sending countries (World Bank 2014a; Sherrell 2017; Doyle and Sharma 2017).** Even though the numbers of participating workers in the Australian SWP is low in comparison to New Zealand's Recognized Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, the SWP has had a relatively high growth rate in recent years (Howes and Sherrell 2016). Financial years 2016 and 2017 has seen substantial growth, with the number of workers from the PICs increasing from 4,490 in 2016 to 6,166 in 2017 (Doyle and Sharma 2017). The removal of the cap for Pacific seasonal workers and the introduction of new sectors have underpinned the high growth in recent years.

**In terms of development impacts of Australia’s seasonal labor mobility schemes, three independent evaluations of the PSWPS were conducted in 2010 and 2011.** The first was a preliminary evaluation (TNS Social Research 2010), followed by a development impact evaluation (Gibson and McKenzie 2011), while the third was an overall evaluation of the pilot scheme (TNS Social Research 2011). Gibson and McKenzie (2011) noted that, despite the small size of the programme, the development impact evaluation of the SWP scheme revealed positive development impacts at the household level in both Tonga and Vanuatu.

**Evidence suggests that a higher number of male workers than females from the PICs are being nominated and ultimately selected by employers and recruitment agencies (Doyle and Howes 2015).** Sex-disaggregated data on Australia’s SWP indicate that female participation is, however, on the rise, with Tonga and Vanuatu sending the highest number of female workers. Even so, the SWP is still characterized by much higher male participation across all participating countries since 2012 (see Table 1.1). In 2015-16, the removal of the cap on the programme could have partly contributed to the participation of females increasing faster than males (42.8 percent and 36.5 percent respectively). As noted by Doyle and Sharma (2017: 19-20), however, the skewed participation in the SWP in favor of men is partly related to sending country selection processes as well as employer biases and preferences.

**Table 1.1: Female Workers Constitute a Small Minority of Workers Under the Programme**

Financial Year of Visa Grant	Female	Male	Not Specified	Total	% of Female Participants
2012-13	212	1,261	0	1,473	14.4
2013-14	249	1,765	0	2,014	12.4
2014-15	404	2,773	0	3,177	12.7
2015-16	623	3,866	<5	4,489	13.9
2016-17	890	5,275	<5	6,165	14.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,378</b>	<b>14,940</b>	<b>&lt;10</b>	<b>17,318</b>	<b>13.7</b>

Source: Department of Immigration and Border Protection, FY 2017.

**Since its inception in 2012, only 2,378 women have participated in the SWP programme, accounting for only 13.7 percent of SWP female workers participating in the scheme from 2012-2017.** This aligns with the 9.8 percent or 38 female workers who were selected in the survey samples (Doyle and Sharma 2017). In terms of the demographic profile, participating male workers tended to be slightly younger (32.2 years) with limited education levels, unemployed and mostly working in the services sector before joining the SWP (Doyle and Sharma 2017). In contrast, the average age of participating female workers is 34.2 years—they tend to have higher levels of proficiency in English language and are often employed as skilled workers in the accommodation and tourism sectors when they join the SWP scheme. In fact, most female workers (23.6 percent) surveyed in this evaluation had completed a university degree when compared to only 6.3 percent of male workers. The main evaluation report also highlighted (Doyle and Sharma 2017), that it was more common for married men (63.8 percent) to participate in the SWP than for married women (47.3 percent).

## 1.2 Background and Objectives of the Report

**Building upon earlier evaluative studies of Tonga and Vanuatu, The World Bank's SWP Development Evaluation aims to capture the impact of seasonal migration on participating households and communities.** A specific focus of The World Bank's Evaluation will be to fill the evidence gaps on the social impacts of SWP on the participating and nonparticipating households in the SWP, and to explore the underlying reasons for gender disparities in the participation rates of men and women (World Bank 2015). This report combines both quantitative and qualitative data in assessing a range of social outcomes for participating individuals, households and communities in the two largest sending countries for the programme, Tonga and Vanuatu. At the time of designing this impact evaluation study in 2014, Tonga and Vanuatu were the largest participating countries and the only two selected on the basis of sample size, rather than gender balance of female and male workers participating in the SWP.

**This report has been prepared at the request of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFaT) Pacific Integration, Labour Mobility and Security Cooperation Branch within the Pacific Division and the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program, with an aim to:**

- substantiate with quantitative and qualitative evidence the social impacts of the SWP on women, men, their household, and communities;
- understand the factors underpinning the positive impacts for women and men arising from their household participation in the scheme;
- characterize the demographics of women who migrate and those who are left behind;
- identify, measure and report on indicators that reveal significant gender differentials, such as attitudes to women participating in the scheme, the levels of remittances sent by men and women, and the control of new earnings by men and women;
- understand the causes, extent and experience of women's, men's and children's vulnerability to harm, violence or neglect arising from their household's participation in the SWP; and
- provide recommendations for protection measures for women and men and for further research (particularly in relation to knowledge and policy gaps affecting the impact of the SWP on women).

**The small sample size for participating female and male workers, coupled with unavailability of workers who had already departed for seasonal work as well as research team from the National Statistics Office to coincide with the return of the workers, has meant that this report was not able to elicit substantial evidence on at least three of the objectives noted above.** While the report presents some evidence on factors underpinning the positive impact for female and male workers and their households participating in the SWP, demographics of women who participate and those left behind, and vulnerability to harm, violence and neglect arising from household's participation in the SWP in particular, requires further research and analysis to inform targeted interventions that are needed to fill existing gaps in the literature on women's and children's vulnerability to harm and violence.

In hindsight, the rapid qualitative assessments like the one employed in this study, limited the scope for capturing all the factors that lead to long-term social impacts, including both intended and unintended consequences on participating individuals, families, households and communities. FGDs and key informant interviews (KIIs) were not able to elucidate any causal link between the SWP and vulnerability to harm and neglect and draw conclusions on the long-term social impacts of seasonal work of participating communities and households from the PICs.



## 1.3 Research and Methodology

**This report employs a mixed-methods design by combining quantitative and qualitative methods.**<sup>1</sup> The quantitative and qualitative data sets were combined to provide useful insights into the social impacts of seasonal labor mobility, as well as perceptions around women’s and men’s participation in the SWP. The methods of data collection were triangulated to not only cross-validate the findings, but also to pick up on the gendered nuances of the SWP impact (both positive and negative, social and economic), which was not covered in the household, community and on-site worker surveys. In particular, the qualitative research methods were employed to bring to the fore how the participation of women and men in the SWP contributes positively or negatively to the well-being of households and communities in Tonga and Vanuatu that were selected for this study.

**For the purposes of this report, only relevant quantitative data from the social impact-related questions of the household, community and on-site worker surveys in Tonga and Vanuatu were analyzed to inform the findings.** Coded responses from the gender module in the household and community surveys were analyzed with a focus on the social impacts of the SWP on marital relationships, community perceptions around SWP workers, gender roles, vulnerability to harm or neglect as a result of women and men participating in the SWP and perceptions and changes to household decision making and women’s agency regarding the control and management of household finances.

**Qualitative data collected from a range of participatory research methods, including the FGDs, in-depth interviews and also the Ladder of Power and Freedom<sup>2</sup> in each of the island groups in Tonga and Vanuatu, also informed this report (see Table 1.2).**<sup>3</sup> While the research participants were not consulted in the design of research tools, methodology, analysis and reporting of data, the conduct of the FGDs (including the Ladder of Power and Freedom) and in-depth interviews were participatory to elicit interpretive data, while being respectful to the local culture and knowledge in Tonga and Vanuatu. In particular, the context-specific qualitative data using participatory research methods helped us to understand how and why gender affects mobility decisions of women and men, their participation in the SWP and any unintended consequences on families and intimate partner relationships from participating communities.

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<sup>1</sup> The research methodology used in this report incorporates gender as a distinct “category of analysis” (Palmary et al. 2010; Piper 2008) to better understand the social impacts of seasonal labor mobility.

<sup>2</sup> The Ladder of Power and Freedom enabled the research team to look at a broader measure of development impact.

<sup>3</sup> The participatory research tools including some of the group exercises in the FGDs—for example, the Ladder of Power and Freedom research—have been adapted from Turk et al. 2010.

The FGDs in the selected islands across Tonga and Vanuatu were separated by gender and age to explore the gender relations and processes of decision making within the household and community around issues of the use and control of remittance income, gender division of labor and whether participation of women and men in the SWP has had any unintended consequences for different groups of women and men.<sup>4</sup> FGDs and KIIs with representatives from women’s groups were also conducted to not only get a sense of the gender profiles in Tonga and Vanuatu, but also to contextualize the research findings in terms of the social impacts (both positive and negative).

**Table 1.2: Overview of Participatory Research Methods by Activity**

Data Collection Method	Time Required	Research Participants in Tonga and Vanuatu
Activity 1: Youth FGD	2.5 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 FGD of 8 female youth (aged 18-24)</li> <li>• 1 FGD of 8 male youth (aged 18-24)</li> </ul>
Activity 2: Adult FGD	2.5 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 FGD of 8 female adults (aged 25-60)</li> <li>• 1 FGD of 8 male adults (aged 25-60)</li> </ul>
Activity 3: In-depth interview	1-2 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 in-depth interviews</li> </ul>
Activity 4: Key stakeholder FGD and informant interviews	2 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 FGD with women’s civil society groups</li> <li>• Informant interviews with selected gender stakeholders</li> </ul>

*Note:* In each of the island groups visited in both Tonga and Vanuatu, focus group discussions separated by gender and age were held with youths and adults, together with in-depth interviews with a male and female participant (see Table 0-3 for breakdown per country/island and participant numbers).

**Purposive sampling was used to select participants for the qualitative component of the evaluation.** The participants included some SWP workers and community members who had some knowledge and understanding of the SWP. Four FGDs consisting of eight participants separated by age and gender in each of the four selected islands in Tonga and five selected island groups in Vanuatu were conducted as part of the qualitative component of the impact evaluation. A total of 17 FGDs were conducted in Tonga separated by gender and age and 18 FGDs in Vanuatu, in addition to nine in-depth interviews in Tonga and 18 in-depth interviews in Vanuatu (see Table 1.3 below).<sup>5</sup> A total sample of 303 participants across Tonga and Vanuatu informed the qualitative component of this evaluation, with 158 male participants and 145 female participants.

<sup>4</sup> In presenting the qualitative data from the FGDs and in-depth interviews, only gender and country-level differences and similarities will be discussed. Where significant gender differences exist for different island groups in Tonga and Vanuatu then it will be highlighted in the findings.

<sup>5</sup> While an almost equal number of FGDs were held in Tonga and Vanuatu, the number of participants selected for the qualitative component of the impact evaluation in Vanuatu is slightly higher than Tonga because the FGDs in Vanuatu had a higher turnout of participants than in Tonga. In addition, many workers in Tonga had already left for seasonal work when the community consultations were held in July 2016.

**Table 1.3: Overview of Participatory Research Methods by Participant Numbers**

Country/ Island	FGDs Participant Numbers		In-depth Interviews' Participant Numbers		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Tonga					
'Eua	15	7	1	1	24
Vava'u	13	12	1	1	27
Ha'apai	10	10	1	0	21
Tongatapu	18	28	2	2	50
Subtotal	56	57	5	4	122
Vanuatu					
Ambae	15	15	0	0	30
Santo	18	18	4	1	41
Malekula	12	10	1	1	24
Tanna	21	20	4	0	45
Efate	18	16	4	3	41
Subtotal	84	79	13	5	181
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>303</b>

*Note:* Due to unavailability of participants, some of the FGDs in some of the islands had less than eight participants while in others there were more than eight. Similarly, for the in-depth interviews, in some of the islands in Vanuatu, we managed to interview more than two participants and in others one or nil.

## 1.4 Structure of the Report

The structure of the rest of the report is presented in four distinct sections:

**Section Two starts with a brief literature review by drawing on the global empirical evidence that illustrates the gendered social impacts of migration.** Although the literature focuses on global evidence, some parallels are drawn with evidence from the Pacific. The discussion then moves on to present some findings from Australia's SWP. The first set of findings highlights some of the positive social impacts of the SWP on women, families and communities in Tonga and Vanuatu and then moves on to present empirical evidence on the unintended negative impacts on families and intimate relationships.

**Section Three focuses on women's participation in the SWP.** The section begins with a discussion on the gender division of labor in the Pacific, including the defining characteristics of Pacific female migrants. The section then presents findings on the constraints and barriers to women's participation in the SWP, including community perceptions on gender norms and gendered roles of women and men in the Pacific as well as selection biases and preferences of Approved Employers in Australia. In addition, the paper presents some evidence on shifting gender roles of women and men as a result of participation in the SWP.

**Section Four draws some conclusions, while Section Five presents some of the recommendations with policy implications that can help mitigate negative social impacts and encourage more women to participate in the SWP.**



## 2. Social Impacts of Seasonal Migration

**This section of the report starts with a review of the literature on the social impacts of migration, then provides a snapshot of the existing evidence on the socioeconomic impacts of migration in the Pacific.** Study findings on the gender impacts of Australia's SWP are subsequently presented and discussed.

### 2.1 Global Evidence on the Social Impacts of Migration

**The past several decades have witnessed a burgeoning advancement in the theoretical and empirical discourses on migration, remittances and development.** These have emphasized the positive development impacts of migration in driving economic growth and poverty reduction in sending countries.

**There is currently substantial literature that emphasizes the beneficial impacts of women's migration in sending communities.**<sup>6</sup> Positive impacts on migrating women are found to be the result of: (i) improved self-worth and self-esteem through contributions to household finances (Temin et al. 2013); (ii) an increase in female entrepreneurship (Petrozziello 2013; Shaw 2005; UNFPA 2006; Fleury 2016); (iii) increased bargaining power of women in household decision making, including fertility choices and delaying marriage (Chattopadhyay et al. 2006; Ratha et al. 2011); and (iv) more female migrants owning land (Adhikari 2006).

**Other studies have also noted that migration of women has contributed positively to change or in negotiating gender norms promoting gender equality and women's rights upon returning home.** Several studies (de Haas 2007a; King et al. 2006; UNFPA 2006) note that shifts in perceptions towards girl's education have led to delayed marriage of young girls and that girls are now staying longer in school. Migrant women are becoming more aware of women's rights and less tolerant of gender-based violence within intimate partner relationships (Ferrant and Tuccio 2015). These studies have noted that migration not only offers women opportunities to exercise their autonomy in mobility decisions, but often challenges social norms to evolve and change (Fleury 2016).

<sup>6</sup> It is beyond the scope of this report to provide a comprehensive review of up-to-date global literature on social impacts of migration from a gender perspective. For the purposes of this report, the overview presented here is based on secondary sources and existing literature reviews on gender, migration and development (de Haas 2007a; Fleury 2016).



**In considering women who stay behind when their husbands migrate, several empirical studies across Asia, South America and Africa have noted that women tend to gain more autonomy and agency in household decision making.** This includes taking control and management of household finances, having a bank account, and acquiring ownership of land or property (see Afsar 2011; Chant 1992; Gammage 2004; Fleury 2016 for a comprehensive women and migration literature review). In Niger, a World Bank study (2014b) on gender, agency and economic development revealed that when husbands were away, women not only had a greater say in household decision making but also participated actively in community groups and activities, while also taking over men’s tasks in agriculture (Fleury 2016). The same study revealed changing gender roles for men as well, with husbands more accepting and willing to help their wives in household chores upon their return.

**While gender roles may be shifting with changing gender norms as more women and men migrate for work, gender inequalities persist with some degree of resistance to gender transformations or women and men reverting to their traditional gender roles upon return.** Empirical studies have suggested that women’s “newfound autonomy” (Fleury 2016) may be temporary and husbands and wives revert to their traditional roles when the migrant husbands return (King et al. 2006; Gamburd 2010). In other instances, temporary migration of men, has also resulted in a backlash and resistance to changing gender roles (Nyberg-Sorensen 2004; Taylor et al. 2006).

**There are also studies that have highlighted the negative social impacts and costs on families and relationships associated with men and women being away from their families and households for an extended period due to migration.** For instance, when women migrate, the burden of childcare and household chores falls disproportionately on remaining members of the household, including daughters, in a wide variety of countries such as Jordan (Azcona 2009), and Mexico (McKenzie and Rapoport 2006). In the Philippines, this burden also falls on grandmothers (Francisco and Tigno 2002). There is now growing literature on the negative sociopsychological impacts on the well-being of children in the absence of mothers (Graham and Jordan 2011; Ratha et al. 2011). On the other hand, when husbands migrate for work, women tend to have increased burdens and responsibilities, and this may not result in emancipation from restrictive gender roles (de Haas 2007b).

## 2.2 Evidence from the Pacific

**In the last ten years, there have been a number of empirically based policy reviews and evaluations of the Pacific labor mobility schemes, including Australia’s SWP and New Zealand’s RSE, that have documented the interaction between migration, remittances and development.**<sup>7</sup> This section provides a quick review of the literature on seasonal labor migration that has highlighted both positive and negative impacts of migration on individuals and households from sending communities.

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed literature review of the RSE Scheme and SWP program, see Underhill-Sem and Marsters (2017). This publication provides an extensive stocktake of relevant literature on the development impacts of the Pacific labor mobility schemes spanning the last decade.

**A common theme that runs through existing literature on seasonal labor mobility schemes in the Pacific is the positive development impact of remittances on participating individuals, their families and communities.** In particular, two seminal pieces of work by Gibson and McKenzie, one on New Zealand's RSE scheme (2010) and the other on Australia's Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme (2011) provide the benchmark for development impact evaluations of seasonal worker programs. These two studies have tracked the development impacts of seasonal workers through the analysis of remittance income earned and the net gain for the participating households (see also Gibson and McKenzie 2014). Migration scholars have also noted, however, that longitudinal data sets that measure longer term development impacts of seasonal work across main participating countries in the Pacific are still lacking (see also Underhill-Sem and Marsters 2017).

**On the other hand, recent research prompts us to look beyond economic development and towards 'social remittances' (Levitt 1998).** This research has explored broader impacts of seasonal labor migration, including negative sociocultural impacts on workers' families and communities (Reilly 2011), shifting gender roles in subsistence production with increasing workloads for women in agriculture-related tasks when men are away for seasonal work (Rohorua et al. 2009) and gendered understandings of the social impact of RSE workers on families and communities in Port Vila—in particular, young men's consumption spending patterns after having participated in seasonal work (Cummings 2016).

**Despite the richness of scholarly research on Pacific labor mobility schemes in recent years (see Underhill-Sem and Marsters 2017), there is limited empirical evidence on the gendered social impacts of seasonal work on the individual worker, their families and communities in Tonga and Vanuatu.** It is hoped that this report on the social impacts of Australia's SWP will contribute to the existing research and debate on the broader impacts of seasonal labor mobility schemes.

## 2.3 Setting the Context: Gender Norms and Roles

**For the purposes of this report, it was important to explore whether new economic opportunities such as seasonal work for women and men are bringing about shifts in traditional gender norms.** With new and changing economic roles of women and men, in particular, how do expectations of a good wife/husband change in the domestic sphere in relation to gendered division of labor. To explore the extent of traditional normative frameworks around gender roles and intrahousehold division of labor, FGDs in Tonga and Vanuatu documented participants' views of ideal gender roles and norms in their communities. In talking about the gender norms of a good wife and a good husband, participants across Tonga and Vanuatu described the qualities of a good wife/husband in the contemporaneous context of SWP and how these compared with that of a good wife/husband in the previous generation.



**Across both women’s and men’s focus groups, and across all island groups in Tonga and Vanuatu (both in urban and rural contexts), participants had a consistent view about a wife’s and husband’s roles in the household.** The normative frameworks around women’s and men’s ideal roles remain unchanged. For instance, participants in the FGDs described a good husband as the household head and the primary provider of the household, while a good wife manages domestic responsibilities with obedience and care and being respectful to her husband.

**Tonga is a patriarchal society where traditional gender norms continue to constrain women and men in their traditional roles.** Girls and boys are socialized quite early into their traditional gender roles, with men having the main responsibility to look after the women in the family. Men are expected to provide for the family and do all the physical work, while women/sisters/girls do light work inside the household. In fact, familial relations in Tongan society are guided by a traditional social system known as fahu where women continue to have a more privileged social status than men. While the father/household head has more authority over household finances and family decisions, women in the household run/manage the affairs of the household (see also JICA 2010; PHAMA 2016).

**Similarly, in Vanuatu, women’s and men’s status is still influenced by patriarchal customary laws.** Norms on customary gender roles of women and men continue to persist—often dictating gendered relations in the present day. Traditional gender norms still tie women to their domestic responsibilities where they are expected to maintain family and community relationships while men are expected to provide for the family through economic activities.

**In all FGDs across Tonga and Vanuatu, the role of husband and wife seemed to be quite similar and stable across the islands, however, there were signs suggesting relaxation of gender norms.** These FGDs revealed that traditional gender roles are now being challenged with ‘good wives’ required to be educated and earn a living while ‘good husbands’ are required to help in the household chores with cooking, cleaning and looking after the children. Participants also noted that gendered roles for women and men in terms of household cooperation and management are more wide ranging now than in the previous generation. For instance, both in Tonga and Vanuatu they felt that, while men are still seen as the breadwinner of the family, women are now expected to contribute to household income as well.

**Participants associated some of the drivers of change with education and women gaining employment outside the household.** FGDs revealed shifting views on gender roles to suggest that women have more rights, autonomy and some degree of agency—with greater acceptance of women doing paid work, managing affairs of the household, taking up leadership positions in the community and owning a business. Perceptions around ‘who does what’ in the household are also changing and it is acceptable for good husbands to help the wives in household chores such as cooking, cleaning, washing, and looking after the children. It was evident from the FGDs that the compartmentalized traditional gender roles of women and men in the previous generation are now giving way to “converging gender roles” (Marshall 2006) where good wives and good husbands are having more responsibilities attached to their traditional roles than ever before.

**It was also evident from the discussions with participants that migration—especially for seasonal work—is also changing the dynamics of family life.** As noted earlier, economic realities in the islands are pushing many women and men to participate in seasonal work. There is now increasing expectation for those who participate in seasonal work to fulfil their traditional roles back home. For instance, in Vanuatu, “a good husband participates in the SWP to help the family” and also in Tonga “a good wife participates in the SWP to improve family well-being” and “a good husband participates in the SWP and comes back to the family.” The analysis of findings in the next section will highlight how seasonal work not only provides opportunities for women and men but also offers space for norms associated with gender roles to be negotiated and modified.

## 2.4 Core Findings

**This section presents the core findings on social and gender impacts from the SWP Development Evaluation in Tonga and Vanuatu.** It highlights both the positive as well as negative social impacts of seasonal work for the participating household and its family members.

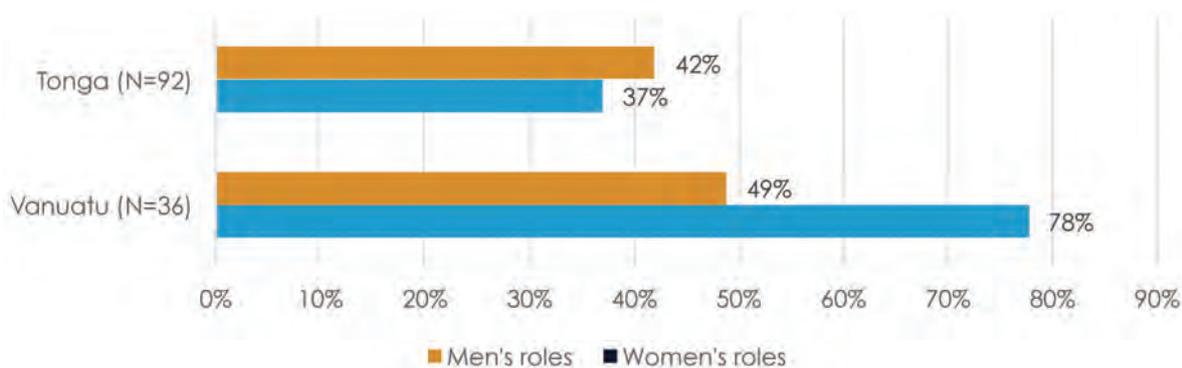
### 2.4.1 Positive social impacts of seasonal migration

**In understanding the factors underpinning the positive impacts of SWP on participating households, both qualitative and quantitative evidence will be presented and discussed to not only make inferences about the social impact on women, men, their households and the community, but also to note some of the reported experiences felt by communities and participating households.**

**Some of the reported experiences of SWP felt at the community level was about who, in the participating household, takes up the woman’s role when they participate in the SWP.** When women SWP workers leave for seasonal work, it is usually the head of the household, the spouse, or a relative of the female worker who takes on added responsibilities. For instance, in Vanuatu, about 38 percent of the communities reported that it was the head of the household who took on the added work responsibility of a departing female worker. On the other hand, 49 percent of Tongan communities reported that it was another relative (not necessarily the head of the household) who took on the added responsibility. Spouses of the departing workers also took up the extra work, reported by 32 percent of the communities in Tonga and 17 percent in Vanuatu.

**In the community surveys, respondents mostly community leaders reported change in the role of women and men after having participated in the SWP.** Community leaders in Vanuatu have reported more changes in the role of women (78 percent) than men (49 percent) after their participation in SWP. Community leaders (interviewed as part of the community surveys) in Tonga, however, reported greater resistance to change—with only 37 percent reporting changes to women’s role and 42 percent reporting changes to men’s role (Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1: Community Leaders Reporting a Change in Men’s and Women’s Role as a Result of Participation in the SWP (%)**



Source: World Bank Impact Evaluation community survey data, 2016.

On the other hand, household heads in Tonga and Vanuatu reported similar changes to both women and men’s roles as a result of participation in the SWP, with a more significant level of change in Vanuatu than in Tonga. As shown in Figure 2.2, a large majority of household heads in Vanuatu reported changes to men’s roles (88 percent) and women’s roles (85 percent). In Tonga, however, only 41 percent of household heads noted changes to men’s roles, while significantly more (67 percent) felt that women’s roles in Tonga have changed more than men’s role as a result of participation in the SWP.

**Figure 2.2: Household Heads Reporting a Change in Men’s and Women’s Role as a Result of Participation in the SWP (%)**

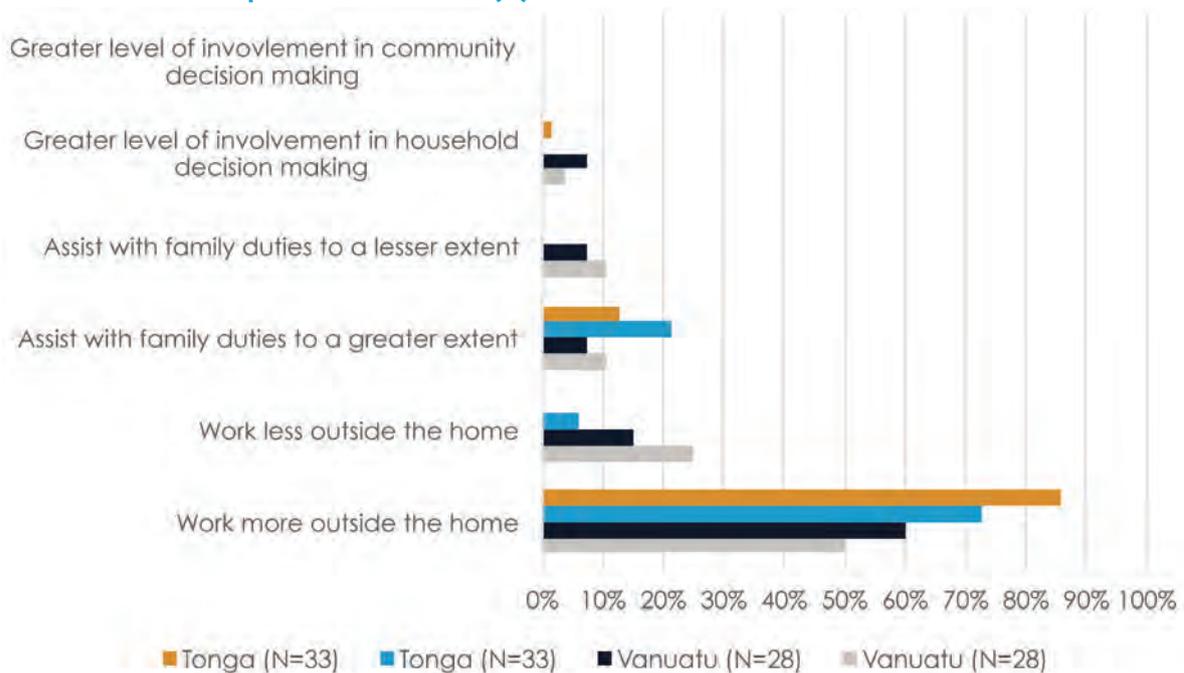


Source: World Bank Impact Evaluation household survey data, 2016.

Through seasonal work opportunities, women in both Tonga and Vanuatu, are now able to negotiate their traditional gender roles, but are failing to bring about long-term changes affecting domestic power inequalities within a household. Community-level responses noted above suggest that even though women and men’s traditional roles in Tonga are narrowing with the increasing participation of women and men in seasonal work, traditional gendered power relations remain intact. FGDs in Tonga revealed that when female workers are away, it was quite common for the husband to get help and support from other female members of the household or extended family members than in Vanuatu. Community and household responses in this study suggest that it is now acceptable for men to help in domestic chores, including taking care of children and other family members when women participate in the SWP and manage the earnings from SWP (as discussed below).

For the purposes of this report, it was important to understand the factors that are bringing about such changes to both women and men’s roles in Tonga and Vanuatu after participation in the SWP. Households in Vanuatu reported: (i) men work more outside the home (60 percent); (ii) men assist with family duties to a greater extent (less than 10 percent); (iii) men assist with family duties to a lesser extent (less than 10 percent); (iv) men’s greater involvement in household decisions (less than 10 percent); and (v) men work less outside the home (close to 15 percent) (Figure 2.3). In contrast, some of the common ways in which men’s roles in Tonga have changed include: (i) men now work more outside the home (86 percent); and (ii) men assisting with family duties to a greater extent (13 percent). While the women in Tonga are now taking up new roles and responsibilities outside the home by crossing boundaries of their traditional role when they take up seasonal work, men’s roles mostly remain unchanged.

**Figure 2.3: Households Reporting Certain Changes in Women’s and Men’s Roles Following Participation in the SWP (%)**



Source: World Bank Impact Evaluation household survey data, 2016.

**A significant proportion of participating households also reported change that has come through adjustments in the role of women after having participated in the SWP.** When asked in what ways the roles of women have changed, 50 percent of the households in Vanuatu and 73 percent of the households in Tonga reported women now tend to work more outside the home. It is important to highlight, however, that when a female worker is away, men and women staying behind often end up doing tasks not related to their traditional gender roles by taking new roles and responsibilities (see Section 3.2).

**Traditional gender roles of women and men tend to “bend, relax, evolve and change ... with modifications in the normative frameworks associated with gender” (Munoz Boudet et al. 2012) when women and men participate in the SWP.** Given the seasonal nature of labor mobility programmes, however, the changing gendered roles of women and men in Tonga and Vanuatu are not necessarily “undoing gender” (Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007). Different role expectations and demands placed by participation of women and men in SWP means change is slowly occurring where gender norms on women’s and men’s traditional roles are being negotiated at the household level but there is still a stronger grip on traditional gender roles of women and men in Tonga than in Vanuatu.

**Seasonal work also brought about changes to gender norms relating to intrahousehold decision-making processes relating to control and management of household finances.** Household decision-making processes around finances and spending were explored in the community consultations as well as the community and household surveys across Tonga and Vanuatu. In particular, participants in the FGDs and respondents in the household/community surveys were asked whether women are in control and are better managers of household finances as a result of participating in the SWP.

**In the community surveys in Tonga, 53 percent of respondents thought males, rather than females, were generally in control of household finances.** Probing in the FGDs across the islands in Tonga revealed, however, that while the husband is the boss/head of the family, wife and husband jointly take control of the financial needs of the family by trusting each other when it comes to managing household finances. Male participants in Tonga did not shy away in saying: “women are better managers of household finances and, therefore, it is important for husband to discuss with the wife how to spend and save.” The pattern of shared decision making when it comes to control and management of household finances was also evident in the responses from the household surveys. Some 48 percent of respondents in the household surveys in Tonga stated that control of finances is often mixed and shared. For instance, it was noted in a male discussion group from ‘Eua (Tonga) that:

*“In Tonga women should be trusted to control the money, but husbands are not trusted with money, because they spend it very quickly.”*

Nevertheless, lack of trust between the couples about the control and spending of money often triggers conflict and disagreements in Tongan households (see Section 2.4.2).

**In Vanuatu as well, there was consensus on ‘shared control of household finances’—with both husbands and wives cooperating and trusting each other with finance-related decisions within the household.** For example, 65 percent of respondents in the community survey and 50 percent of respondents in the household survey confirmed that the control and management of household finances is often a “shared decision-making” process between a couple. FGDs across the islands in Vanuatu revealed very similar trends. Even though the husbands are seen as the breadwinners of the family—bringing money into the household—decision making around the control, management and better use of household finances often rests with the wives: “women are far better managers of money in the house”; “men hand over their income to women because they are better managers of household finances”; and “women must decide with men on what to spend otherwise men spend all the money on kava and cigarettes.” The female discussion group from Efate (Vanuatu) stressed that:

*“Husband and wife must tok-tok and come to some arrangement because husband is the head of the household. When he talks, wife should listen. But women are always better managers.”*

These findings reveal that men often welcome women’s cooperation and shared decision making when it comes to household finances and women have a greater responsibility to be self-sacrificing while guaranteeing the well-being of the family.

**These findings from both Tonga and Vanuatu suggest that decision making on household finances is often a shared one, reflecting joint processes of cooperation and compromise between a husband and a wife even though the husband may be the only person bringing money into the house.** The empirical evidence from Tonga and Vanuatu suggests that, while men might still have more control of household finances, women do exercise some level of agency when it comes to decision making on the management of household finances. As reiterated in a male discussion group from Tongatapu:

*“Everything that husband and wife do, they should do it together – no matter what. They should plan everything together and it is always better for the wife to ask permission from the husband. They should agree together for everything.”*

**It is important to recognize, however, the fact that women in these communities in both Tonga and Vanuatu always had some degree of autonomy and recognition as better managers of money even before participation of women in the SWP.** Those who did participate in the SWP are, however, experiencing greater autonomy and are more likely to assume a greater leadership role in managing household finances. A significant majority of the respondents in the community surveys (78 percent) as well as in the household surveys (56 percent) in Tonga have stated women assume a greater role in managing household finances after having participated in the SWP. FGDs with participants across the islands in Tonga highlighted that women’s contribution to household income through SWP work has meant that women now have more control and management of household finances. A female discussion group from Vava’u (Tonga) highlighted that:

*“When women participate in the SWP, they save more money to control and use it wisely. Women go overseas and they think of large sums of money to pay for obligations to church and family. Going overseas they work really hard for what the family needs. For some it’s because of the poverty, so they just want to earn more money.”*

**Male and female participants in Tonga reflected similar views on how improved financial literacy skills through SWP has led women to have better knowledge of their spending patterns and how to use money wisely.** Some 83 percent of respondents in the community survey in Tonga noted that women now have even greater control and management of household finances because of the contributions to household earnings from the SWP and the remaining 17 percent of respondents stated improved financial literacy as a result of their participation in the SWP.

**Irrespective of whether or not they had participated in SWP, both men and women in the FGDs in Tonga noted that men generally tend to waste their earnings on personal expenditures such as alcohol and other women while women are still seen as better managers of household finances.** Both women and men in the community discussions reported that most men do spend their SWP earnings on unnecessary expenses such as alcohol, without even discussing this with their wives. Further probing with women and men in the FGDs across the islands in Tonga also revealed that men generally appreciate and welcome shared decision making regarding earnings from SWP to maintain family harmony. The consensus amongst male participants from Vava’u was that:

*“Men should send the money to the wife because the wives use the money wisely and sometimes the men waste money. Even though the husband is the head of the household and should keep all the money earned, but the wife plans and uses the money wisely.”*

**Tonga is still, however, a patriarchal society and men are often seen to have a final say in household decisions as household heads.** For those who said women are not gaining autonomy in managing household finances as a result of their participation in SWP, 85 percent of community respondents in Tonga reported that this was because of cultural reasons and 15 percent of respondents noted resistance from male household members.

**In Vanuatu, 81 percent of respondents in the community surveys and 83 percent of respondents in the household surveys mentioned that, after having participated in the SWP, women now have a greater role in managing household finances.** For instance, the community consultations in Vanuatu revealed that, after participating in the SWP, women could apply their financial management skills in the households and, therefore, have become “good managers of money”. Some 57 percent of respondents in community surveys reported that women are assuming leadership in the management of household finances as a result of contributions to household earnings from SWP, while 36 percent mentioned this was because of improved financial literacy from SWP.

**Participants also reiterated that, while the men may still be head of the household, women’s participation in the SWP has helped them to take control of household finances: “women can tok strong now”.** Men’s and women’s groups in the community also reported women’s trustworthiness in the use and management of household finances after having participated in the SWP, with women now exercising some degree of control over men’s private spending such as kava, cigarettes, alcohol or gambling. For example, young men from Tanna (Vanuatu) highlighted:

*“Some women don’t trust their men with money, so men give the money to the wife, because men always drink kava and smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol and go to the casino in Port Vila... wives are trusted to be better managers of money.”*

Similar views were reiterated in a female focus group from Efate (Vanuatu):

*“Women’s participation in the SWP helped them to take control of household finances – women can tok strong now. Because they worked hard for the money earned and not to waste the money on kava. Women have become better managers by saving to make something for the house.”*

**Even though women are gaining control in the management of household finances in Vanuatu, there is still some degree of resistance from men.** Some 29 percent of community respondents noted that women are not assuming leadership in the management of household finances because of cultural norms and about 14 percent of respondents stated resistance from male household members. In an interview with a wife of an SWP worker from Malekula (Vanuatu), it was highlighted that:

*“When my husband gets paid he sends half of his money home to me and the kids to buy basic needs, such as food, school fees and daily family needs. But most of the time, he sends instructions for how the money should be spent and some money to be given to his parents and some kept for savings. But one time, I used the money to buy clothes for my children and myself and the husband got very mad. There was some disagreement between us about the money.”*

**Community FGDs with women and men in Vanuatu revealed that generally women continue to be better managers of household finances with some husbands giving away their income to wives to manage and plan wisely.** For instance, young men from Tanna Island (Vanuatu) stated that, while men are still seen as the head of the household, when it comes to management of household income and finances, “they hand over the money to women because they are seen as better managers”.

**The above findings indicate that the participation of women in the SWP from Tonga and Vanuatu has generally improved their ability to control and manage the household finances when they return home.** Women now “have become better managers” and there is “better planning between couples” and they even “work together to agree on how to spend the money”, with increasing levels of “equality in having a say in household finances.”

**Across all the communities visited in Tonga and Vanuatu, the prevailing attitude to control and management of household income is that, while men are still seen as the breadwinners of the household, women (both as SWP or non-SWP workers) exercise authority when it comes to the control and management of household finances.** While women’s participation in the SWP is still low, evidence suggests that women’s agency is now recognized in the migratory process as the “protagonists” (Petrozziello 2013) who play an active role as managers of household income and finance as well as caretakers of family well-being. In fact, the participation of women in the SWP has meant that they are, not only gaining more control of household finances but also, exercising their agency or ‘having a say’ when it comes to intrahousehold decision making on spending, savings and investments of household finances.

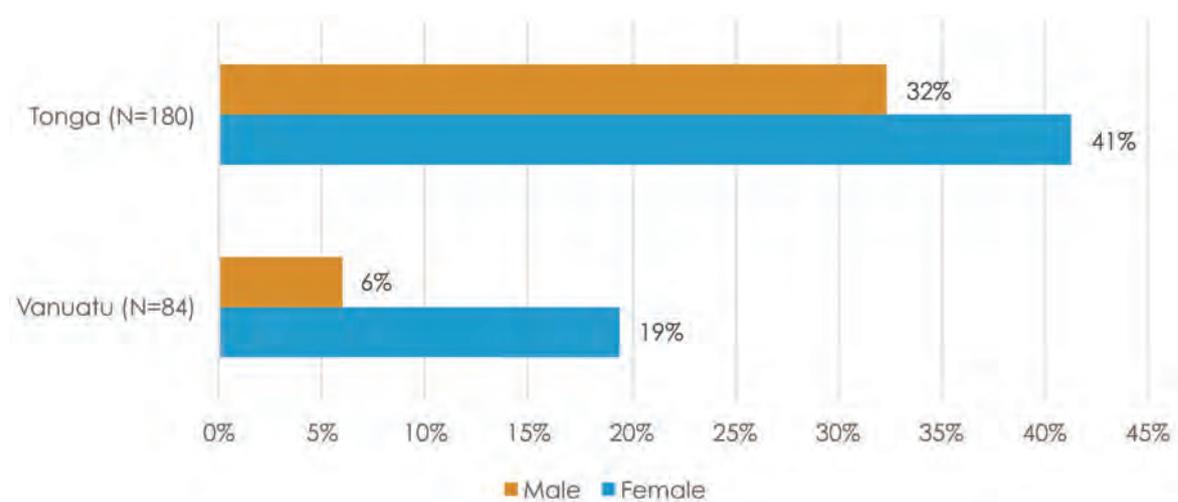
**It is important to note, however, that even though economic circumstances of participating households are now changing—with more women and men participating in the SWP—gendered norms around intra-household decision making still persist.** A few women participating in the SWP and becoming economically independent with SWP earnings does change the dynamics of intra-household relations and dynamics of negotiation around control and management of household finances, as it does when men participate in the SWP. Even when women’s economic opportunities change and they are gaining economic empowerment through their participation or husband’s participation in the SWP, however, the normative frameworks on gendered relations at the community/society level are slow to change. Women are still expected to stay home and look after the children and manage household affairs while men participate in SWP (see section 3.2 below). Gendered norms still persist even though Pacific communities are now embracing new economic opportunities offered through SWP.

#### 2.4.2 Negative social impacts of seasonal migration

**Theoretical discourses on domestic violence often focus on an “interplay amongst personal, situation, socio cultural factors” (Heise 2011: 7 cited in Muñoz Boudet et al. 2013 Klugman et al. 2014) rather than isolating one factor to explain the occurrence of violence in intimate relationships. The FGDs generated some discussion and conversations with men and women across different islands in Tonga and Vanuatu on the negative impacts of SWP on intimate partner relationships.** Given the sensitive nature of the topic, however, more face-to-face interviews with a number of women and men who have participated in the SWP would have probably provided greater insights into the experiences of family members’ vulnerability to harm, violence or neglect arising from their household’s participation in the SWP. In this study, there was limited evidence to suggest whether a household’s participation in the SWP is a contributing factor towards an increase in domestic violence as a result of changing economic roles of women and men in Tonga and Vanuatu creating not only imbalances in domestic power relationships but also causing harm.

The research did, however, reveal certain negative impacts from seasonal work—primarily on intimate partner relationships (Figure 2.4). Negative impact on intimate partner relationship arising out of female participation was more frequently reported by communities in both Tonga (41 percent) and Vanuatu (19 percent) than for male participants (32 percent and 6 percent respectively). Communities reporting negative impact of male and female participation in the SWP were higher in Tonga than Vanuatu (as discussed below). In fact, almost 61 percent of community respondents in Vanuatu and only 12 percent in Tonga reported positive impact on intimate relationships when females participate in SWP, with 19 percent and 47 percent noting no change for Vanuatu and Tonga respectively. Similarly, for male participation in the SWP, the positive impact on intimate relationships is significantly higher in Vanuatu (46 percent) than in Tonga (15 percent). A significant majority in both Vanuatu (48 percent) and Tonga (52 percent) stressing “unchanged” impact of male participation in the SWP on intimate relationships.

**Figure 2.4: Community Leaders Reporting a Negative Impact of Male and Female SWP Participation on Intimate Partner Relationships (%)**



Source: World Bank Impact Evaluation community survey data, 2016.

**Negative impacts on family and intimate relationships also came out quite strongly in the FGDs.** Participants highlighted a number of issues including: (i) mistrust between the couple due to lack of communication; (ii) misunderstanding and negative perceptions about husband/wife extramarital affairs while in Australia; (iii) disagreements on level of earnings from SWP; and (iv) disagreements on spending of remittances on alcohol and other “sin” goods that impacted family life. FGDs and KIs with women’s civil society groups revealed that the negative impact on intimate relationships, including marriage breakdowns, was caused by two types of men: (i) those who go to work in the SWP and never return; and (ii) those who go, but come back without the expected earnings.

**Marital tensions relating to jealousy, lack of trust, being unfaithful to the marriage, miscommunication and misunderstanding are often some of the major triggers of domestic violence in intimate relationships.** In talking about marital tensions, a higher percentage of community respondents in Tonga attributed this to spouses being unfaithful to their

partners when they participate in the SWP. For example, a significant majority of community respondents in Tonga cited two reasons for the negative impact of SWP participation on marriage and intimate relationships: (i) women being more susceptible to extramarital relationships abroad (57 percent); and (ii) lack of communication while abroad (32 percent). The corresponding figures for men were: (i) susceptibility to extramarital relations (46 percent); and (ii) lack of communication (30 percent). Anecdotal evidence of several families breaking down in communities was also shared by women's organizations in Tonga. It was also highlighted that, because of the gendered disparity in the participation rates of women and men in the SWP, more men than women are away from their families for extended periods of time.

**The absence of men from their immediate families often leads to issues of neglect and failure on the part of men/husbands to provide financial support for the families back home.** A common thread running through the discussions across communities and women's groups was that a lack of communication, trust and commitment between couples, especially when the husband participates in the SWP, has contributed to the negative impacts on families and intimate relationships in Tonga. One of the key informants in Tonga-tapu (Tonga) mentioned that:

*“Tongan men/ boys abuse the opportunity because they can't save up – over there they earn lots of money and then waste it on drinks and other women.”*

**Participating households in the SWP also reported negative impacts of both male and female participation in the SWP on intimate partner relationships.** For instance, in Tonga a higher percentage of participating households stated negative impact on intimate relationships with female participation (33 percent) in the SWP than male participation (21 percent). As was the case with the community surveys, lack of communication while abroad (58 percent) and greater susceptibility to extramarital relations (42 percent) came out strongly in the household responses for the negative impact of male participation in SWP on intimate relationships in Tonga. In a male discussion group from 'Eua (Tonga) it was highlighted that:

*“Common family problems relating to SWP are fighting between couples, having affairs and money spent on alcohol, not spending money wisely and spending on wasteful items.”*

**As discussed in the previous section, while gender roles for women and men are now being negotiated with participation of more women and men in the SWP, traditional gender norms continue to persist more strongly in Tonga than in Vanuatu.** Evidence in both community and household surveys confirms that more participating households in Tonga than in Vanuatu are fraught with negative impacts on intimate relationships—causing much marital stress.

**A significant majority of community respondents in Vanuatu had negative perceptions about women’s participation in the SWP.** Some 47 percent (for female participation) and 43 percent (for male participation) noted women getting more empowered and confident as one of the main reasons for the negative impact on intimate relationships. Qualitative discussions across communities and women’s groups in Vanuatu could not, however, make a direct causal link between women’s and men’s participation in SWP with increased gender-based violence and whether or not women’s participation or men’s participation in the SWP contributes to relationship problems in participating households.

**FGDs across Vanuatu revealed some unintended negative impacts on sending families caused by communication breakdown, mistrust issues between the couple and conflicts/disagreements relating to remittance spending.** Irregular flow of remittances from husbands also added to strains on intimate relationships. It seems that the negative impact of male participation in the SWP on participating households in Vanuatu is slightly higher than the negative impact of female participation in the SWP. For instance, a key informant interview in Tonga revealed that “some men were not faithful to their wives even before they participated in the SWP, so when they participate in SWP, it gets worse.” When compared to Tonga, a much lower percentage of community and household respondents in Vanuatu have noted negative impact of women and men’s participation on marriage and family relationships. For instance, the wife of an SWP worker revealed how her very controlling husband changed completely after having participated in the SWP and how he had developed more trust in the relationship. An interview with the wife of an SWP worker from Efate (Vanuatu) revealed that:

*“When my husband came back from the SWP, he had changed in his attitude. He is now more trusting of me and I can now visit my family and friends and go to church. Before he went for the SWP, he was very controlling and would even stop me from visiting my aunty in the nearby village. Now my husband has totally changed. Before if I went to see my aunty, my husband would come and scream at me and also swear. Not anymore.”*

**There was, however, limited or no evidence in both the community and household surveys and FGDs to suggest a spike in domestic violence driven by women’s and men’s participation in the SWP.** As noted in the previous section, one of the positive impacts on intimate relationships is that women participating in the SWP are certainly getting empowered with increased levels of agency and voice in the control and management of household finances and also as recipients of SWP remittances from their husbands. There was limited evidence to suggest a negative association between the participation of women and men in temporary labor mobility schemes with a spike in domestic violence and marital discord. Studies elsewhere clearly reveal the negative impacts of seasonal work on domestic power relations and especially on marital relationships with some degree of resistance and backlash from men towards changing power relations (see Fleury 2016). Further research and longitudinal data in the Pacific is, therefore, needed to fill the evidence gaps on unintended consequences such as vulnerability to harm, violence and neglect as a result of women and men’s participation in the SWP.





## 3. Women's Participation in the SWP

**This section of the report commences by defining the characteristics of Pacific migrant women, followed by an outline of women's participation in the SWP.** It also presents evidence on both the constraints and opportunities for women's participation in the SWP and discusses the barriers to women's participation and community perceptions of participating women. It presents some evidence on earnings and remittances and shifting gender roles as a result of participation in this programme.

### 3.1 Defining Characteristics of Pacific Migrant Women

**Cangiano and Torre (2016) have noted that it was not until the 2000s that Pacific scholars started researching and writing about emerging and growing trends of feminized migration—with increasing numbers of women from PICs making autonomous choices to take up opportunities for work and study overseas (see also Chandra 2004; Rokoduru 2006; Voigt-Graf 2003).** Skilled Pacific women began migrating for work as teachers and nurses (Connell 2010; Rokoduru 2006; Voigt-Graf 2003, 2008; Voigt-Graf et al. 2007). Other research has looked at the family/social networks of transnational communities in the Samoan context to explain gendered migration choices within the household and related trends of movement (Liki 2001).

**In the context of seasonal labor migration, participants in this evaluation noted that, like men, women are also motivated to join the seasonal work flow because of higher wages.** Women's decision to join the SWP is more likely to be driven by the need “to help the family” and “make life better for the children”. In characterizing the Pacific seasonal worker women, participants across the islands in Tonga and Vanuatu came out very strongly to depict the ideal representation of a Pacific migrant woman.

**As discussed in the previous section, gender stereotypes often dictate socially constructed gendered roles of women and men in the Pacific.** When women start participating in seasonal work, their characterization often reflects the gendered stereotypes around ideal images of a good wife and a mother who is always self-sacrificing, hardworking, a primary carer of children and elderly, household coordinator and manager, spends remittances wisely, has the support of her husband and the community and, while participating in seasonal work, is always grounded and focused on the well-being of family back home. One such example of an ideal Pacific migrant woman was mentioned in Tonga:

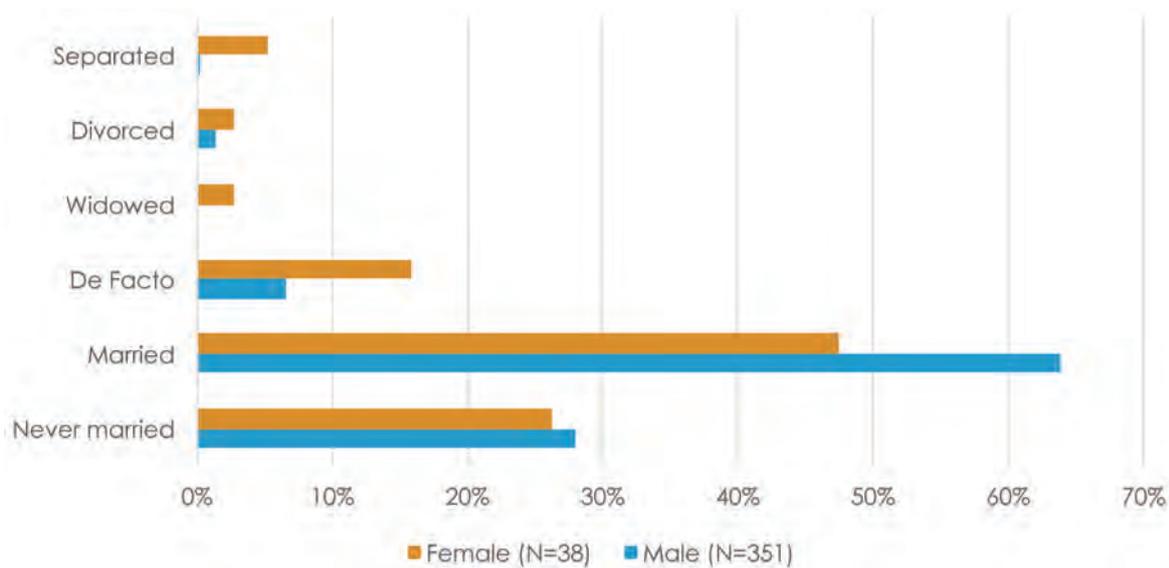
*“For women like Kuipita it was important to have the support of her husband and other relatives who looked after the children and took care of other household chores whilst she was away. If children are grown up, then it is often much easier for women to leave for seasonal work. Or if they are not married and without any responsibilities of the household, children and family.”*



Discussions with participants across Tonga and Vanuatu also suggest that women’s life stage and carer responsibilities at home not only determine their entry/participation in the SWP but also limit women’s opportunities for economic empowerment. A few like Kuipita, had a chance to participate in the SWP and shared a successful story of positive change about her newly acquired autonomy. Some 72 percent of respondents in the on-site worker survey also reported that women have assumed leadership roles on the property where they worked. Many participants across Tonga and Vanuatu highlighted that to be economically independent, they needed the support of their husbands. More importantly, women SWP workers were often reminded of their responsibility as a mother and “a good wife” who never abandons their families back home and avoids being responsible for family/marriage breakups. Decisions about participation of women and men in the SWP are contextual and often depend on mobility choices of women and men and how their participation in the SWP is perceived in the local community and society.

As discussed earlier, the clear majority of workers in the SWP remain male. The data collected on individual workers through the evaluation approximates the gender disparity evident in the Department of Immigration and Border Protection’s administrative data. Across the programme for Financial Year 2016-17, 14.4 percent of arrivals were women while, for the evaluation, 9.8 percent of workers sampled were women. Just under two-thirds of male workers were currently married, while less than one-half of female workers were married (Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1: Marital Status of Male and Female Pacific Seasonal Workers (%)**

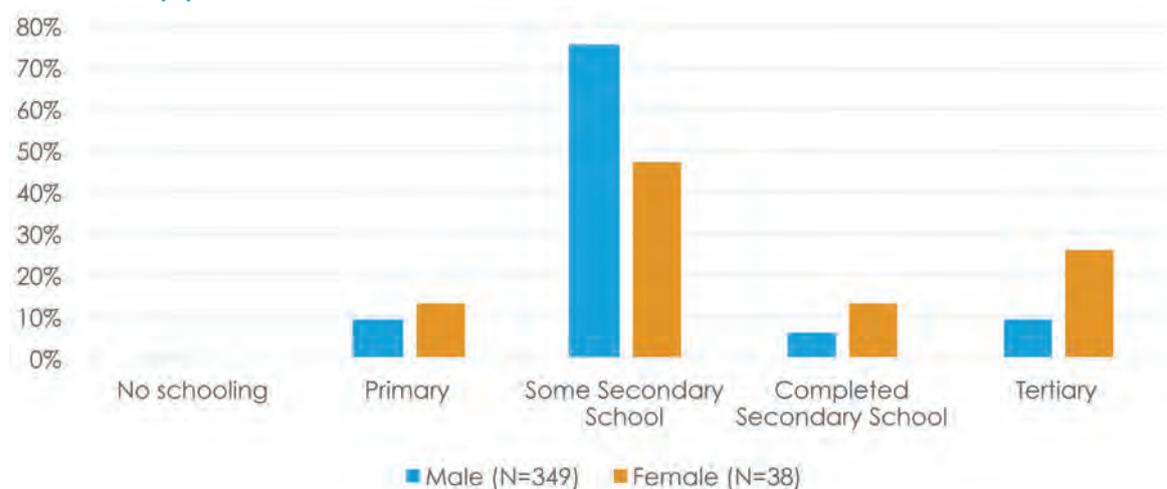


Source: World Bank Impact Evaluation On-site Worker Survey data, 2016.

**Education levels vary considerably across male and female workers.** While a significant majority of male workers (75 percent) have some secondary school education, more female workers (26 percent) than male workers (less than 10 percent) seem to have tertiary qualifications (Figure 3.2). Female labor force participation rates are still lower than male labor force participation rates across the Pacific Islands, often linked to women’s unpaid domestic and childcare responsibilities with women taking an active role in the subsistence and informal sectors. As discussed in section 3.2 of this report, while women and men have equal opportunities to participate in the SWP, traditional division of labor stemming from gendered norms around women and men’s traditional roles often restrict women’s active participation in economic activities.

**The FGDs in Tonga and Vanuatu revealed that women’s education levels play an enabling factor in their decisions to participate in the SWP because not all women are free to decide to leave home and start working.** Household circumstances and gender roles often come into play when it comes to a woman’s decision to participate in the SWP (see discussion in the next section). It was quite common for unmarried educated women without many domestic responsibilities to be economically independent by taking up job opportunities through seasonal work. For instance, while youth, maturity, and work ethic were the key characteristics that community looks for in selecting SWP workers in both Tonga and Vanuatu, education (6 percent) and English proficiency (11 percent) were also noted by a handful of community respondents in Vanuatu.

**Figure 3.2: Highest Level of Education Completed for Male and Female Seasonal Workers (%)**



Source: World Bank Impact Evaluation On-site Worker Survey data, 2016.

**Most workers, male and female, intend to participate in the SWP over the longer term.**

More than 90 percent of the male workers indicated their intention to continue working as seasonal workers for “as many years as possible”. A somewhat lower proportion of women (75 percent) indicated a similar intention. Only one worker had the intention of working for just one season.

**There is considerable variation between men and women with respect to their planned activity in between seasonal work in Australia.**

While almost one-half of the men (45 percent) indicated that they would not engage in any activity and “live off SWP earnings” when they return home during the off-season, only 17 percent of women held this view. A significant number of women (41 percent) indicated that they would take up a new job in their home country in between seasonal work periods in Australia. Preference for permanently migrating to Australia also differs across male and female workers. While one-half of male workers indicated a preference to move permanently to Australia if this was feasible, only one-quarter of women indicated such an intention.

**The main evaluation report (Doyle and Sharma 2017) highlights that there are often wide-ranging motivations and drivers of participation in the SWP for both women and men.**

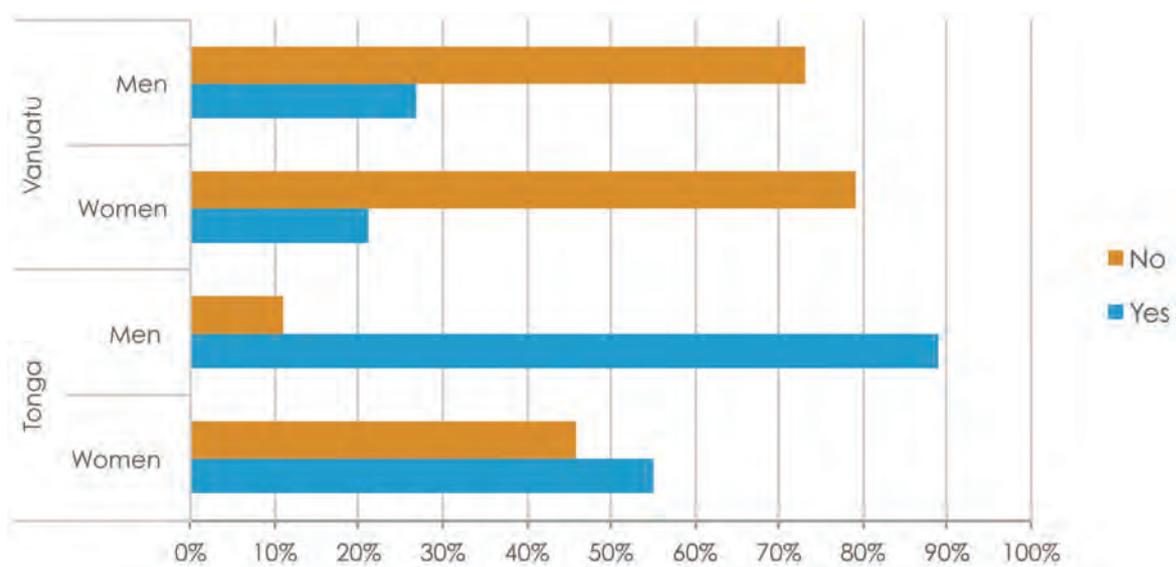
As stated above, it was more common for married men to participate than for married women. It is clear that younger and unmarried women, widowed women or those without children are more likely to participate in the SWP than women with child bearing and caring responsibilities. The need for cash to pay for debts relating to children’s education, construction of a house or contributions to the church were often the main motivations for both women and men. In both Tonga and Vanuatu, the FGDs also revealed that competition and motivation to build a house, start a small business or purchase a vehicle often drive youths to participate in the SWP. It was also noted that in Vanuatu youths are motivated by three main goals of family, church/community and entrepreneurship when it comes to their participation in the SWP. While some local women in Tonga and Vanuatu have always been working outside the household in paid employment, the SWP has definitely opened up job opportunities for all women. Not all women have equal access to economic opportunities provided through the SWP, however, and women continue to face greater barriers to their participation than men (as discussed below).

## 3.2 Factors Underpinning Women’s Low Participation Rate

Low participation of women in the SWP depends on a number of factors, often linked to: (i) local selection processes; (ii) gendered biases of Approved Employers in Australia as well as local contracting agents; and (iii) gendered perceptions on the role of women and their participation in economic opportunities.

Firstly, the participation rates of women and men in the SWP depend, among other things, on whether women and men have a voice in the selection for the SWP at the community level (Figure 3.3). A significant majority of the respondents in the community surveys conducted in Tonga and Vanuatu indicated the extent to which gender played a part in the selection process for SWP.

Figure 3.3: Community Leaders Reporting Male and Female Voices in the Selection Process (%)



Source: World Bank Impact Evaluation Community survey data, 2016.

This was confirmed in the FGDs with participants who noted that this local selection process tends to work in favor of men rather than women. Men in both countries generally tend to be better connected to the local agents and contractors of seasonal work and there is some degree of information asymmetry between women and men about the knowledge of seasonal worker programs. A majority of the respondents (mostly males) in the on-site worker survey reported getting information about the SWP through friends (45 percent), family (24 percent), media (22 percent), and community leaders (4 percent).

**In addition, men still tend to be better connected to SWP workers, friends and family, thereby increasing their chances of selection.** For example, a majority of workers in the on-site worker survey confirmed that their selection into the SWP was either through friends (26 percent), employer (23 percent), family (19 percent) or community leaders (13 percent). In Tonga, the selection processes still rest with the Town and District Officers<sup>8</sup> and they often make the initial screening at the village level—with more men than women making it onto the shortlist. The SWP workers themselves (39 percent), Village Chief (12 percent), counselor to Village Chief (12 percent), and church leaders (12 percent) were amongst the commonly noted members of the community in Tonga who were involved in the selection process for the SWP. Women on the other hand, tend to have weaker social networks and lesser information about the SWP which often act as a barrier against women being selected. As mentioned in a male discussion group from ‘Eua (Tonga):

*“Lesser participation of women depends on the contractor or what the farmer needs and wants. If the farmer already gives out the placements for men, then only a certain number of men get selected for these places. So often the demand is not there for women to join.”*

**Local selection processes also tend to be skewed in favor of men rather than women because of community members biases against women and their perceived role as caregivers.** In the FGDs, participants in Tonga also noted that women generally have a lower chance of being selected because town officers are reluctant to send their women away because of their caring roles at home. This was confirmed in a male discussion group from Vava’u (Tonga), noting that: “Women should stay home, look after the family and take care of responsibilities at home.” Similarly, in Vanuatu, traditional caregiving roles of women often affect participation and selection of women in the SWP. FGDs across the communities in Vanuatu revealed that the traditional roles of women as mothers, wives, and caregivers in the families and communities often prevent and deter many women from participating in the SWP. For example, a male discussion group from Tanna (Vanuatu) reported that:

*“In Tanna, men depend on their wives to look after the children so that they can go in the SWP. Here, men don’t like to do women’s jobs and depend on women to do the household chores, so that they can do the men’s jobs, like go in the SWP. Also seasonal work on the farms is too heavy for women – it demands heavy tasks.”*

<sup>8</sup> Town and District Officers are mostly men. The first two females were elected as a District Officer in ‘Eua Motu’a District and Town Officer in Haveluloto in 2016 local elections.

**In fact, caring responsibilities of women seem to put an additional constraint on their ability to move internally and improve their chances of being selected in the SWP.** Women often find it difficult to travel to Port Vila to get the selection/recruitment paperwork completed because of their caring responsibilities. For instance, 24 percent of SWP male workers from Vanuatu in the on-site survey reported having to migrate internally to improve their selection chances. Overall, a significant majority of workers (69 percent) in the on-site survey felt migrating internally would improve their chances of being selected to a large extent. A female discussion group from Santo (Vanuatu) highlighted these difficulties for women:

*“It is difficult for women to be away from the home because they have to look after the children and other family commitments.”*

**The local selection processes at the community level were also discriminatory against certain groups of people on the basis of age, gender, location and physical disability.** For instance, community respondents in Vanuatu highlighted that selection processes discriminate against age (10 percent), and favor the more educated (10 percent), and workers close to the capital city (10 percent). More than one-half of the community respondents (56 percent) in Vanuatu stated that certain groups in the community were particularly disadvantaged in the selection process, including women (33 percent) and people with disability (22 percent). Similarly, in Tonga, community respondents noted that the most disadvantaged groups included young workers (38 percent), older workers (19 percent), people with disability (31 percent) and women (6 percent).

**In the household surveys, significantly more respondents in Vanuatu (52 percent) came out strongly against local selection processes that discriminate against women than in Tonga (7 percent).** In Tonga, however, it was more common for participating households in the SWP (almost 50 percent) to note that one of the underlying reasons for low female participation is because women do not want to work in the SWP. Local selection processes still tend to discriminate against women. For instance, 24 percent of on-site workers reported that local selection processes often work against women—so affecting their low participation rate in the SWP.

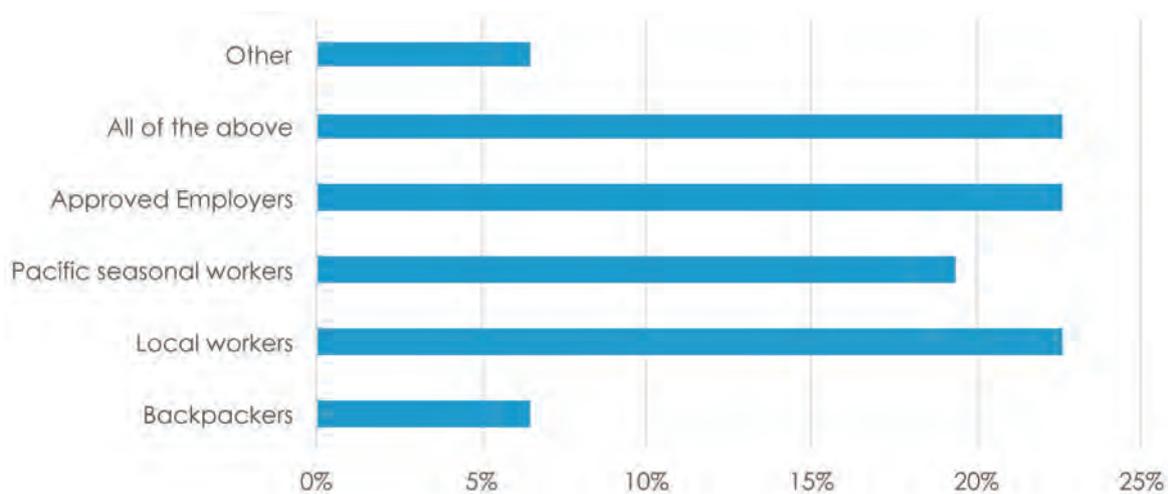
**Another important factor that not only affects selection of women but also their participation in the SWP is the preference of Approved Employers’ in Australia for workers of certain age and gender.** A small percentage of community respondents in Vanuatu (5 percent) and Tonga (25 percent) reported that Australian employers discriminate against women when it comes to women’s participation in the SWP. On-site workers expressed similar views—with 16 percent of respondents stating that Australian employers discriminate against women, affecting their lower participation rates in the SWP. Some 53 percent of the workers in the on-site worker survey mentioned, however, that other workers on the property generally perceive women who participate in the SWP positively.



**Preferences of Approved Employers in Australia also influences the selection processes of contracting agents who often have fixed employer placements for women and men, with limited number of positions for women.** Demand-driven constraints from the employer mean that men have a much better chance of being selected and recruited for the agricultural sector that requires heavy and physical labor (see also Ball et al. 2015). Women are being recruited by some employers for lighter horticultural tasks, such as picking fruit (mostly strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, and cherries) and vegetables (broccoli and tomatoes) or to work in the packing sheds.

**Once selected, only about 21 percent of workers in the on-site survey noted that women seasonal workers generally face discrimination.** The groups that were mentioned as discriminating against women included Pacific seasonal workers, local workers, Approved Employers and, to a lesser extent, backpackers (Figure 3.4). A significant majority of community respondents in both Tonga (98 percent) and Vanuatu (86 percent) noted, however, that women have not been coerced into participating in the SWP against their will. In fact, the FGDs in Tonga and Vanuatu at the community level did not reveal any discrimination relating to their safety, security and isolation that impacted negatively on their experiences of seasonal work in Australia or their motivation to participate again and encourage other women to participate as well.

**Figure 3.4: Groups That Were Reported by On-Site Workers as Discriminating Against Female Seasonal Workers (%)**

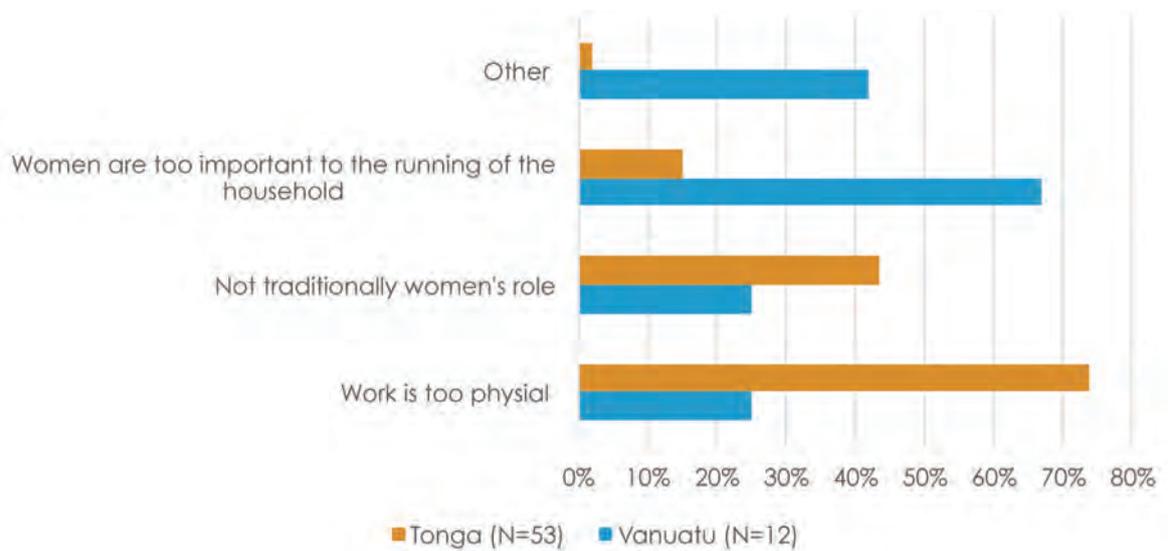


Source: World Bank Impact Evaluation On-Site Workers survey data, 2016.

**Finally, traditional gender norms surrounding women’s role still dictate whether or not women in Tonga and Vanuatu participate in the SWP.** Respondents in the household survey from Tonga felt that women should not equally participate in the SWP like men because work is too physical (74 percent of respondents), not traditionally women’s role (43 percent) and women are too important to the family (15 percent) (Figure 3.5). FGDs across Tonga revealed that community acceptance for women’s participation in seasonal work is slow to change: “women should not leave their families behind because they have to look after young children and other family members” or “the wife has to stay with the family at home”. Gender norms around women’s traditional roles still persist and are resistant to change: “in Tongan traditional way of life home is for women and it’s not proper for women to leave the husband with the family”; or “traditionally women have always stayed home and men go out and work.”

**On the other hand, only 25 percent of respondents from Vanuatu in the household surveys reported work is too physical and SWP work is traditionally not women’s role (Figure 3.5).** A significant majority of respondents (67 percent) felt that women in Vanuatu should not be equally represented in the SWP because they are too important to the family.

**Figure 3.5: Main Reasons Cited by Households Who Suggested Women Were Not Suited for the SWP (%)**

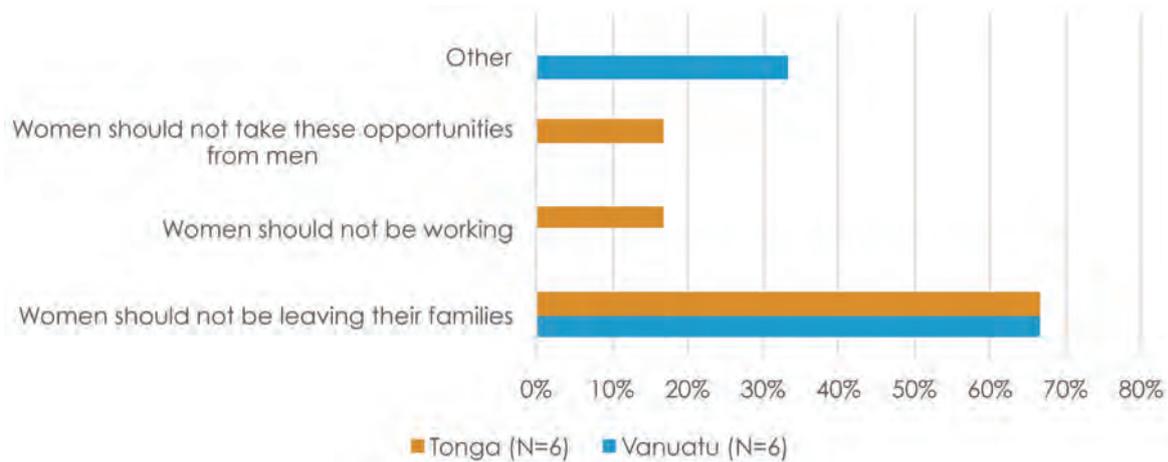


Source: World Bank Impact Evaluation household survey data, 2016.

**Furthermore, gender stereotypes on women and men’s work prevail more strongly in Tonga than in Vanuatu.** Restrictive cultural taboos on the physical nature of seasonal work often discriminate against women in Tonga and inhibit their chances of being recruited: “women cannot climb up the steps to pick the fruits because women lose their tradition if they climb up the steps”; “seasonal work is only fit for men”; “women should only join to pick fruits on the ground and not climb the ladder to pick fruits”; “picking tomatoes, fruits and grapes fit for women but apple is suitable for men only because you need a ladder to pick the fruits”; or “traditionally speaking you won’t see a woman climb a tree and carry heavy bags because physical tasks are only fit for men.” In Vanuatu, a SWP worker stated that “women only work in the pack houses but men on the farms because the sun is very hot for women. Only boys from Vanuatu go in the farm to pick mangoes in the hot sun”. Similar cultural taboos are found in other Melanesian contexts that prohibit women from doing certain tasks (see Ball et al. 2015).

**While women’s participation in the SWP is slowly increasing, negative perceptions of women’s participation in the SWP in Tonga and Vanuatu prevail at the community level.** Negative community perceptions centered on why women should not leave their families and why women should stay home and look after the family so that the men can participate in the SWP. In the community surveys in Tonga, negative perceptions centered around: women should not leave their families (67 percent), women should not be working (17 percent) and women should not take these opportunities from men (17 percent) (Figure 3.6). A significant majority of respondents (67 percent) in the Vanuatu community survey felt that women should not leave their families to participate in the SWP.

**Figure 3.6: Main Reasons Cited by Community Leaders Who Felt Women Were Not Suited for the SWP (%)**



Source: World Bank Impact Evaluation Community survey data, 2016.

**While there is limited evidence in the household surveys in Tonga, negative perceptions about women's participation in the SWP feature strongly in Vanuatu households.** For instance, negative perceptions of respondents in the Vanuatu household survey included: women should not leave their families (69 percent), women should not be working (31 percent) and women should not take these opportunities from men (23 percent). Women's role as the primary carers of children and men's as primary economic providers of the family continue to reinforce traditional gender norms and act as barriers to women's equal participation in the SWP.

**Despite these gendered perceptions and stereotypes regarding women's participation in the SWP noted above, community-wide views on equal participation of women and men is generally quite positive.** In both the community and household surveys in Vanuatu, a high percentage of respondents (87 and 82 percent respectively) stated that there should be equal participation of men and women. This was confirmed in the FGDs where community perceptions on equal participation of women and men in the SWP were quite positive and widespread: "women and men should have equal rights to participate in the SWP—it's all about gender equality". Participants also noted that women should equally participate in the SWP because it offers them an opportunity to become financially independent, increase their autonomy as "better managers of household finances", and contribute to improving the well-being of the families and communities. Even in the on-site worker surveys, 74 percent of workers reported that SWP work is equally suited to both women and men (Figure 3-7). For instance, a female FGD from Malekula was of a strong view why women should participate in the SWP:

*"Yes women should also participate in the SWP because women can finance and manage home well, but only men have been participating in the SWP from this village."*

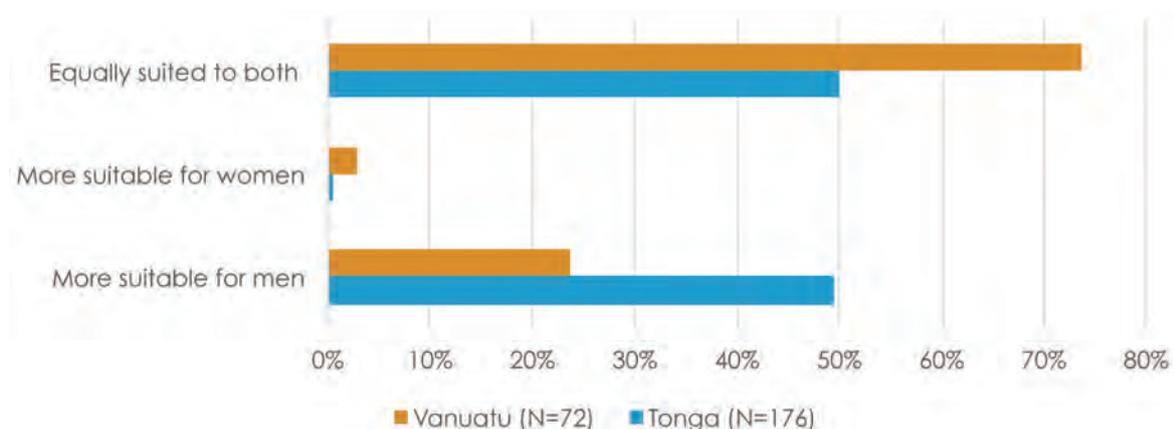
**In the community and household surveys in Tonga as well, a significant majority of respondents (76 percent and 61 percent respectively) stated that both women and men should be equally represented in the SWP.** For instance, a male FGD from Vava'u (Tonga) noted that:

*"Hardworking women and men are not different from each other and if they work hard they should equally participate."*

In fact, 50 percent of Tongan workers in the on-site survey mentioned that the SWP is equally suited for both women and men (Figure 3.7). The women's FGD from Vava'u (Tonga) also stressed the importance of equal participation in the SWP for family well-being:

*"Nowadays women are trusted and feel more love for the family so they join the SWP. Many men don't think and care for the family when they join the SWP. So more women should have chances to join the SWP like the men."*

**Figure 3.7: Seasonal Workers' Perceptions on the Suitability of the Work for Men and Women (%)**



Source: World Bank Impact Evaluation On-Site Survey data, 2016.

**Despite general acceptance at the household and community level for equal participation of women and men in the SWP, perceptions around traditional roles of women and men still persist, preventing many women from having equal access to seasonal work opportunities.** The FGDs revealed that women in Tonga are faced with stricter gender norms than in Vanuatu that often restrict women’s autonomy in decisions about mobility and migration for work. For instance, gender-specific constraints such as restrictive community perceptions that “seasonal work is not traditionally women’s role” and “women are too important to the family” were reiterated in FGDs across all the islands visited in Tonga.

### 3.3 Earnings, Costs, Remittances and Savings

**The average male worker in the programme stands to earn slightly more than the average female worker (Table 3.1).** It is likely that these differences arise because of the division of labor while in Australia. For those working in the agriculture sector, men are often given jobs picking (which are paid using a piece rate), while women are often allocated jobs sorting fruit and vegetables (which are paid an hourly rate). The predeparture expenses incurred by females are slightly higher, but these are primarily due to higher internal travel costs. The females surveyed were largely from Vanuatu, so it is likely that this reflects country differences rather than gender differences.

**The ongoing expenses for female workers in Australia were approximately the same as for males, except for the weekly amount spent on communication.** Female workers spent an average of A\$28 per week communicating with their families compared to A\$23 for men. Female workers were, on average, likely to remit more, but save less than their male counterparts as their net earnings are less than male seasonal workers (Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1: Earnings, Costs, Remittances and Savings Over a Six-month Period in Australia (A\$)**

Earnings, Costs, Remittances, and Savings (A\$)	Male Seasonal Workers	Female Seasonal Workers
Total earnings net of taxes in 6 months	\$18,918	\$17,479
Predeparture expenses	\$1,205	\$1,536
Total expenses in Australia in 6 months	\$8,827	\$8,735
Net earnings less total expenses	\$8,886	\$7,208
<b>Remittances and Savings</b>		
Household members	\$2,082	\$2,136
Nonhousehold members	\$142	\$144
Savings	\$6,662	\$4,928

*Note:* World Bank staff calculations.

**While remittances contribute mainly to the household-level socioeconomic well-being of participating households, there are gendered patterns in terms of how the remittance money is spent and who benefits most from the remittance spending.** The qualitative FGDs revealed that the most common medium through which households in Tonga and Vanuatu receive money is Western Union because it is cheaper.

**It was highlighted by participants that women make up the majority of remittance recipients because women’s participation in the SWP is comparatively lower than men’s.** It is mostly women who take on the role of “household finance manager” when it comes to managing household resources. Most of the male SWP workers remit the earnings to their wives or mothers, while the women SWP workers remit to their husbands or mothers. Even when women do not participate in the SWP, they are often seen as better managers of household finances received through remittances.

**The majority of discussion participants claimed that households often use the remittances for their basic needs, including food, clothing, and purchases of consumer durables such as electrical cooking appliances and communication gadgets.** In addition to daily household expenses, participants noted having to rely on remittances to pay for children’s school fees, books, uniforms, other school needs and medical expenses for household members.

**The FGDs across Tonga and Vanuatu revealed that, as recipients of remittances, women often play a significant role in the intrahousehold allocation of remittances.** As discussed earlier, a husband’s participation in the SWP has meant that women are now assuming additional responsibilities with some degree of autonomy in the management of household finances and earnings from remittances. There was, however, limited evidence in the community consultations to draw out differences in the level of remittances between women and men.

**Discussions across Tonga and Vanuatu did reveal gendered spending patterns.** Qualitative discussions with participants highlighted that women tend to spend the remittances on immediate family needs, children’s school fees, customary obligations or to start a small business, while men spend a lot of money on hardware supplies for building better houses, water tanks, solar panels or a generator for electricity as well as community, village obligations and leisure activities.

**While male SWP workers tend to earn slightly more than female workers as well as save substantially more than women (see Table 3.1 above), it was also noted in the FGDs that men were more likely to spend the remittances on their personal expenses such as alcohol, kava and other pleasures.** For instance, a farm supervisor and local recruiter from Vanuatu highlighted that “here in the islands, what you earn is enough for the family, but when you participate in SWP, more wages mean more spending on good and bad things when exposed to new things and outside life. Some men want to enjoy life by spending money on casino, drinks and other women.” On the other hand, participants highlighted that women were more self-sacrificing and often “acting as a sort of insurance policy or shock absorbers in time of crisis” in the family. For instance, FGDs with women’s groups in Tonga revealed that, in households where men participate in the SWP, women do not work and often the households rely heavily on the remittances sent by the husbands to meet the daily needs of the family. It was further highlighted in the discussion that when the husband ceases to send the remittances the wives are then faced with extreme financial difficulties and they struggle to meet the financial needs of the household.

**While most of the women are direct and indirect recipients of remittances, there was only one instance in Vanuatu where one male SWP worker sent explicit instructions on how the remittances should be spent and on what items.** There was, however, limited evidence to indicate whether men regularly monitor and control their wives use of remittance money. It is, therefore, important to unravel the long-term impact of seasonal work and remittances on participating households, in particular, whether or not women’s autonomy in the management of remittances is challenging normative frameworks on gendered relations within the household and, and ultimately, bringing about changes to traditional gender roles of women and men.

### 3.4 Shifting Gender Roles as a Result of Participation

**This section presents findings on jobs and tasks that women and men used to do before they joined the SWP and how the responsibilities of the SWP worker are distributed or shared within the household when he/she is away for a period of six to seven months.** The discussion also focuses on whether traditional gendered roles of women and men in Tonga and Vanuatu are changing or shifting with more men than women now participating in the SWP.

**Before joining the SWP, most women in Tonga and Vanuatu were responsible for household chores and unpaid care work, while men worked in the gardens and were primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture.** As with most PICs, women shoulder the bulk of household chores such as cleaning, cooking, washing and caring for the children and elderly while the men work in the gardens and carry out community work. To explore the relationship between the division of labor in the household and gendered burden of responsibility, respondents in the community and household surveys were asked how the additional responsibility of the SWP worker was divided and shared amongst remaining members of the household.

**Results in both the community and household surveys indicate that when women in Tonga are away for seasonal work, the burden of women's work in the household falls on the spouse, household head, other relatives, and parents.** In qualitative discussions across the islands, participants mentioned that when women in Tonga participate in seasonal work, the burden of the household chores for male relatives or the husband increase, but household chores and unpaid work often remain the main responsibility of other relatives, mostly women, who stay behind.

**In Vanuatu, respondents in both surveys reported that when a female SWP worker is away, the burden of additional work is felt more by the household head and the spouse (husband) and, at times, by their own/adopted child and other relatives including parents.** Although men might be participating more in domestic duties when the women are away for seasonal work, the gendered division of labor within the household persists: “female family members always help papa with the kids when the wife participates in the SWP”.

**In the case of male SWP workers, it was mostly the spouse (wives) who took on the additional responsibilities of the husband in both Vanuatu and Tonga.** The burden of the male SWP member of the household was often shared amongst children, other relatives and parents. For instance, FGDs across the islands in Tonga confirmed that, even though other family members help the wives when the husband is away, women's time burden increases with longer hours of work around the home and gardens. Similarly, in Vanuatu, while it was very common for other family members and relatives to help the wives with all the household chores, ultimately “wives who are left behind are involved in all other tasks that the husbands might have been doing before they leave.”



**It was quite common in Vanuatu for women to get assistance from other men in the community, often arranged by the male SWP worker before he left, to help women make a new garden.** For other obligations of a male SWP worker (husband) in the community and church, females (wives) take on the additional responsibilities of their husbands when they leave for SWP. Women in both Tonga and Vanuatu, therefore, end up not only shouldering a bigger burden of household duties but also performing the traditional chores and communal commitments of the husband when he is away for SWP work.

**When it comes to changing gender roles, a significant majority of the respondents in Vanuatu and Tonga stated that gender roles for women change after participation in the SWP with implied short-term impact.** The shifts in gender roles was confirmed in the FGDs across the islands in Vanuatu where participants mentioned that, as more men take up the opportunities for seasonal work, women end up taking on the roles of men when they are away with longer hours of work. Women now must look after the gardens, prepare food, cut firewood and take care of the children. Norms governing gendered roles of women and men may not, however, be changing simultaneously with the changing expectations on women's roles when men participate in the SWP.

**Participants in Vanuatu noted that women now take up the responsibilities for everyone, that is, “wife, husband, mother, father and it’s hard life for women when husband is away”.** Both male and female participants in Vanuatu expressed concern towards daily time burdens for women, longer working hours and having to manage and execute men's tasks in their absence. The changing roles of women are reflected in an FGD with young men and women from Santo (Vanuatu):

*“Before joining the SWP, men are mostly farmers and gardeners, but when they are away, the women have more hours of work because they now have to clean the kava garden, clear the garden for copra, and take care of children. If the husband is not around then it is too much work for women, looking after kids, preparing food, cutting firewood, and so the traditional way of doing things is changing.”*

Though gender roles for women are changing or shifting temporarily, with more men being absent because of seasonal work, normative frameworks on gender roles and expectations stay intact. When females are away for SWP work, husbands do take on the role of their wives but with assistance from other female members and relatives.

**In Tonga, a significant majority of the respondents noted that both men's and women's roles are changing as more and more men participate in the SWP work.** For instance, participants across all the islands in Tonga stated that women who remain behind end up managing the family and the plantations, while also being mindful of all the community obligations as well: “women ring the church bells for several months of the year because the able-bodied men are away”.

**Community consultations across the islands in Tonga revealed that wives of SWP workers often carry a heavy emotional burden that comes with additional responsibilities of looking after the family when the husband is away.** The FGDs with participants confirmed that women were often stressed about carrying the burden of men’s traditional tasks in the household when they were away: “women in Tongan society do not work in the gardens, it’s always the men who look after the garden”. For instance, group discussion with females from Tongatapu (Tonga) revealed that:

*“Wives look after the jobs of men in the home but before leaving they have to organize with someone to look after the family when he is gone. In terms of the working hours of women, families are always there to help in the home. But when husband is away on SWP, wife has more work to be done. Some husbands also pay someone to work in the gardens when they are away.”*

**Although gender roles might be shifting temporarily, depending on the seasonality of work, they may not be changing permanently.** When the male SWP worker is away for six months per season, this not only increases the considerable demand on women’s time for unpaid domestic work such as child rearing, preparing the gardens, looking after live-stock and meeting all other communal/village obligations but also limits their availability for other economic activities and opportunities for work.

**The temporary absence of women and men for seasonal work has led to shifts in gender roles, but their absence from home is not long enough to challenge traditional gendered relations and gender roles of women and men within the households.** In addition, although husbands increase their participation in household chores when their wives participate in the SWP, both revert to their traditional gender roles when they return from seasonal work. Evidence presented in this report indicates that such shifts in gender roles are only temporary and, therefore, women and men’s participation in seasonal work does not translate into lasting changes to the normative frameworks around traditional roles of women and men in Pacific societies.





**An increasing number of women and men from the PICs are now participating in the SWP.**

Against this backdrop, the objective of this report has been to better inform and shape key policy dialogues and strategies around minimizing the negative social impacts and making the scheme more inclusive. The report provides a comprehensive gender analysis of the SWP by understanding the complexities of interconnected gender relations and the social impacts and vulnerabilities from seasonal migration. The findings in this report present the nexus between gender and the participation of women and men in the SWP with an aim to effectively inform future interventions on seasonal labor mobility.

**Empirical evidence suggests that more women and men from the Pacific are now driven by economic motives to participate in the SWP, given limited economic opportunities and rising unemployment rates in sending countries.**

The report highlights that labor mobility has not only benefited individual families through remittances, but also brought about positive social impacts for the participating households and communities. Sending communities have witnessed significant positive impacts in the well-being and living standards of both the participating and nonparticipating households (see also Doyle and Sharma 2017).

**Empirical evidence across community consultations in Tonga and Vanuatu speaks to wide-ranging socioeconomic multiplier effects brought about by women's and men's participation in the SWP.**

More women are now assuming a greater role in managing household finances and having a say in economic decision making after having participated in the SWP. The shifting views on gender roles suggest that women have some degree of autonomy and agency in managing the affairs of the household. Perceptions around 'who does what' in the household are now changing and it is acceptable for good husbands to help the wives in household chores such as cooking, cleaning, washing and looking after the children when the wife participates in the SWP. Although gender roles for women are changing or shifting temporarily, with more men being absent because of seasonal work, normative frameworks on gender roles and expectations stay intact. When females are away for SWP work, husbands do take on the role of their wives but with assistance from other female members and relatives. Norms governing gendered roles of women and men may not, however, be changing simultaneously with the changing expectations on women's roles when women and men participate in the SWP.

**Although participation of Pacific workers in the SWP has been beneficial to individuals, households and communities, there have been some notable negative social impacts on families and relationships.** Gendered disparity in the participation rates of women and men in the SWP has meant that more men than women are away from their families for extended periods of time. The absence of men from their immediate families often leads to issues of neglect and failure on the part of men/husbands to provide regular financial support for the families back home. A common thread running through the discussions across communities in Tonga and Vanuatu was that the lack of communication, trust and commitment between couples has largely contributed to the negative impacts on families and intimate relationships in both Tonga and Vanuatu.

**The increasing participation of men and women has further entrenched gender inequalities, with women staying behind having to carry a heavier work burden.** The disparity in the participation of women and men in the SWP suggests that women tend to have a higher burden of responsibilities when the male SWP worker is away for six to seven months a year. Long absences of a male SWP worker from the household means that women's unpaid domestic responsibilities in the household increase twofold. For many women, the gendered impediments and constraints to participate in the seasonal labor programme leave them dependent on the primary breadwinner of the household and increase their susceptibility to neglect. The temporary absence of women and men for seasonal work in some cases has led to shifts in gender roles, but their absence from home is not long enough to challenge traditional gendered relations within the household.

**Women are continually faced with specific constraints and barriers to participate equally in the labor mobility program.** In many instances, labor market constraints together with traditional gender norms and expectations prevent women from taking full advantage of the economic opportunities offered through seasonal work. Gender stereotypes and occupational segregation relating to seasonal work further limit women's access and equal participation in the SWP. This came out quite strongly in the community perceptions and attitudes about the nature of work in the horticulture sector and why it is culturally not acceptable for women to participate in the SWP.

**The report ends with a list of recommendations that are aimed at both minimizing the negative social impacts of the scheme, as well as increasing opportunities for women to participate.** These include better preparation and training of workers and their families, as well as their communities, and additional reintegration/support services. Meanwhile, there are several steps participating countries can take to both increase the rate of female participation and improve outcomes for that set of workers. This includes reviewing the existing selection processes and rolling out awareness programs that can help shift perceptions on the role of women in the workplace.

## 5. Recommendations

**Beyond increasing the participation of women in the SWP, it is important to put in place adequate measures that not only increase positive development outcomes in participating countries, but that also mitigate the negative social impacts of the SWP with protection measures in place.** This section outlines some recommendations that have been organized into standards: (i) that sending country authorities should try to meet in mitigating the negative social impacts of seasonal migration, increasing women's participation and improving the outcomes for participating women; (ii) for Approved Employers and recruiting agents; and (iii) areas for further research to address knowledge and policy gaps.<sup>9</sup>

### 5.1 Standards for Sending Country Authorities to Meet

- **Better prepare seasonal workers as a part of predeparture programs and training.** This should include greater awareness on how to keep and maintain regular contacts with immediate family members back home using 3G/4G communication devices to make communication easier via social media tools such as Facebook, Viber and Skype. Given that workers are away from home often up to a period of six months, communication is important in mitigating the negative consequences on intimate partner relationships as highlighted in the FGDs (see section 2.4.2). The main evaluation report (Doyle and Sharma 2017) also noted that seasonal workers mostly communicate with their families at least once a month using telephone. Lack of Internet access, connectivity and speed in home countries often limit the use of Skype or email by the seasonal workers (Doyle and Sharma 2017).
- **Provide financial literacy training to both seasonal workers and their families.** Given that more men participate in the SWP than women, and women are mostly the recipients of remittances, it is important to provide tailored financial literacy training to both seasonal workers and other beneficiaries to help mitigate disagreements between couples on the use and misuse of earnings from the seasonal work and its negative impacts on the participating households (see sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2). Key stakeholders in Tonga and Vanuatu have also highlighted that financial literacy training for seasonal workers would improve their financial management skills to become more responsible about their financial commitments to their families back home. Women's groups in Tonga and

<sup>9</sup> This list of recommendations is informed by the FGDs at the community level, interviews with participating women and men, KIIs with a number of stakeholders who were consulted as part of the fieldwork for the qualitative component of the SWP Development Impact Evaluation study. In-country key stakeholders included, directors of Women's Ministry, focal points for SWPs at the Department of Employment, SWP focal points at Australian embassies, representatives from women's civil society groups, including women's crisis centers in Tonga and Vanuatu.



Vanuatu have noted that financial literacy training for the beneficiaries (mostly wives of seasonal workers) would enable them to be accountable for the remittances sent home and improve their financial planning. Part of the predeparture financial literacy training could also include orientation and awareness on banking, remittances, and options for sending and receiving remittances and financial literacy training and support. This would not only increase informal safety nets of women but may also encourage women's small-medium enterprises at the village and community level.

- **Better prepare seasonal workers for reintegration into their families and communities.** Additional support to returning workers should be provided after they come back from seasonal work, including gender-sensitive training on family and intimate relationships and information sessions on small and medium enterprises promoting self-employment or entrepreneurial opportunities amongst returning workers. As noted in the FGDs at the community level in Tonga and Vanuatu, returning SWP workers are often suspected of being unfaithful to their marriage and relationships back home, so reintegration programs should also be aimed at mitigating further risks to families and marriages, such as family disintegration and marriage break-ups (see also section 2.4.2).
- **Strengthen community-based and community-led support programs for SWP workers' wives and their families.** More efforts need to be placed to ensure that women staying behind have support mechanisms either through local church, faith-based organizations, and community groups to mitigate against negative consequences and potential risks on intimate relationships and families of participating households. FGDs with women's civil society groups in Tonga and Vanuatu stressed that having such community-led support and protection measures in place would not only strengthen community approaches to mitigate against potential unintended outcomes but also improve women's informal safety nets should their husbands abandon them after having participated in seasonal work.
- **Build support of husbands and extended family members in sending communities through additional awareness-raising programs on broader benefits for the community and family of women travelling for work.** FGDs in Tonga and Vanuatu revealed that for women to be economically independent they often need the support of their husbands (see section 3.1). Awareness-raising programs should, therefore, include the positive impact of women's participation in the SWP pertaining to women's autonomy and economic empowerment using case studies and 'stories of change'. This equally applies to building similar support networks of wives of SWP male workers and their families and promoting positive role models of male seasonal workers through advocacy campaigns and programs. Measures should include working in partnership with community leaders and husbands/wives to profile positive role models of SWP workers and their spouses in changing community perceptions and attitudes towards participating women in the SWP.

- **Establish national-level plans and policies in sending countries that adopt and promote gender-inclusive employment opportunities for women and men in seasonal labor schemes ensuing there are no gender wage gaps and job segregation (see section 3.2).** As noted in the KIs with key stakeholders in Tonga and Vanuatu, there is a need to work closely, and in coordination, with relevant stakeholders such as the ministries with responsibility for employment, women, youth and culture; DFAT; employers; embassies; and civil society groups at the country level to review and adopt targeted measures aimed at reducing job segregation and employer biases, such as quotas to increase women’s participation in the labor mobility schemes.

## 5.2 Standards to Establish for Approved Employers and Recruitment Agents

- **Improve support services for workers on remote and isolated farms in Australia.** FGDs with women’s groups in Tonga and Vanuatu revealed that workers are often away from home for a long period of four to six months and for some of them it is the first time they are away from their home, family, community and country. Many Pacific Island seasonal workers are also from nonEnglish speaking, and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and, therefore, may end up in living in remote farms for extended periods of time—sometimes in isolation from neighboring Pacific communities in Australia. Being away from their families and loved ones often contribute to workers feeling lonely or in distress in host farms and countries. Host employers should provide culturally and linguistically sensitive support services by connecting workers to the neighboring Pacific Islander communities.
- **Promote women’s equal access to the SWP, including increased chances of selection for women in work opportunities that are culturally sensitive to Pacific societies (see also Ball et al. 2015).** As highlighted by FGDs with communities across Tonga and Vanuatu, more measures need to be put in place to encourage nondiscriminatory access to seasonal work opportunities for women from the Pacific. Such measures need to consider gender-specific constraints and related gender stereotypes in certain sectors of the SWP program (see section 3.2). This should also include offering relevant skills development and training opportunities for women to be selected in different sectors of the SWP scheme, thus increasing the chances for women’s selection and recruitment.
- **Design and offer gender-sensitive community awareness programs as part of recruitment programs for SWP workers, including awareness through media.** It should be mandatory for local recruitment agents to have these community-awareness and information-sharing programs with women and men as part of their recruitment processes in the islands, including in rural and remote locations. Women’s civil society groups in Tonga and Vanuatu noted that culturally and gender-sensitive training programs should become a mandatory requirement for local recruitment agents and agencies, as well as relevant stakeholders involved in selection and recruitment of seasonal workers in the country. In particular, women’s civil society groups should be invited to contribute to such gender-sensitive training at the community level.

- **Provide additional awareness programs on seasonal work to reach out to remote, outer and rural communities.** As part of recruitment programs at the local level, FGDs in the communities across Tonga and Vanuatu stressed the importance of having increased community awareness programs and efforts promoting not only positive perceptions of women’s and men’s participation in the SWP but also helping to mitigate potential vulnerabilities and risks of seasonal work on families and relationships of sending households.

### 5.3 Areas for Further Research

**This paper was aimed at assessing the negative social impacts of seasonal migration and explored how these can be mitigated, although there are existing gaps in literature.** The research also examined the experiences of women in the programme and offered insights into how gender norms and perceptions often act as barriers to access. In addition, the paper outlines putting in place a set of recommendations to increase women’s participation in the SWP. Given the low numbers of women participating in the SWP and limited time and scope for fieldwork, there are some areas of impact relating to unintended negative consequences on intimate partner relationships that still require further research. To address existing knowledge gaps on how to reduce vulnerabilities and risks associated with seasonal labor programs, more research needs to be conducted using a longitudinal evidence base to illustrate any causal link between seasonal labor mobility and gender-based violence in domestic relationships.

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