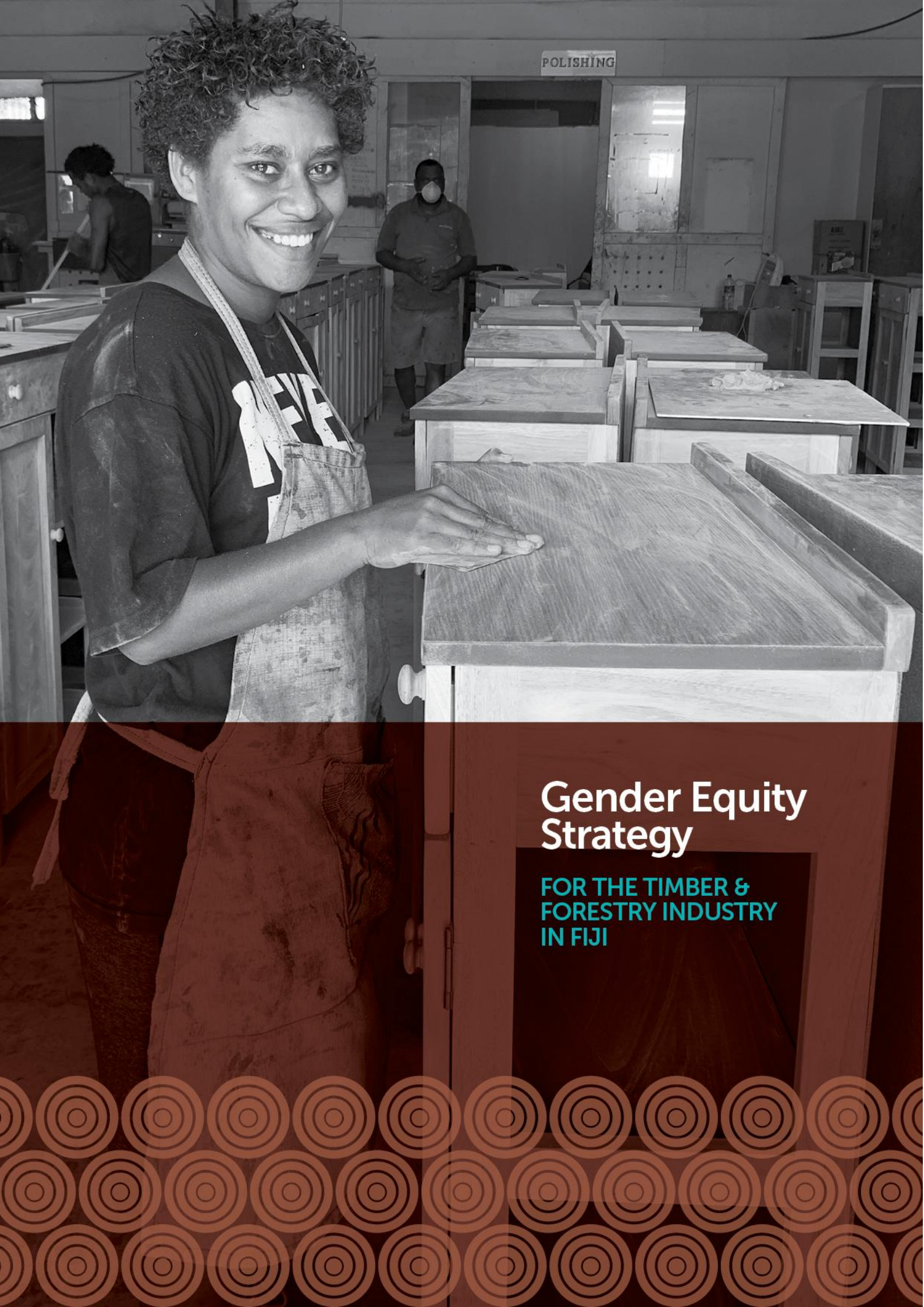


# Gender Equity Strategy

## FOR THE TIMBER & FORESTRY INDUSTRY IN FIJI

**This strategy has been written as part of a larger Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) project 'Coconut and other non-traditional forest resources for the manufacture of Engineered Wood Products' (FST/2019/128).**

I gratefully acknowledge the contributions that many individuals have made in contributing to this Gender Equity Strategy for women in the timber and forestry industry in Fiji. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of those who reviewed the strategy and provided valuable feedback.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Gender Equity Strategy outlines an approach for fostering equality and inclusivity within the timber and forestry sector in Fiji. While women continue to play an important role within the sector, their involvement within traditionally male-dominated roles continues to be limited. To overcome this issue and increase opportunities for women to engage in formal employment, this strategy identifies key barriers which limit women's participation and identifies actions to address them.

The aim of the document is to create new pathways for increasing participation of women in the timber and forestry industry, whilst cultivating a culture of inclusivity whereby women feel accepted, valued and respected.

The strategy reflects the Fiji Government's aspirations for advancing gender equality and supporting the empowerment of women and girls nationally as enshrined within numerous laws, policies, programs and international commitments. It is a document that is intended to bridge the gap between legislated aims and ambitions, and on-the-ground workplace realities. Male-dominated workplaces provide a unique opportunity for advancing gender equality, recognising that to achieve social change in Fiji it essential that women and men work together, not separately – the Pacific way (Masta et al., 2023).

**Key issues to be addressed within the industry to enhance gender diversity include:**

- Promoting a gender-inclusive workplace culture;
- Addressing limiting gender norms and stereotypes; and
- Implementing support systems that enable women's participation and career advancement.

Actions to address each of these key areas are outlined and have been designed according to input received from employees and managers currently working within the timber and forestry sector, as well as other stakeholders with an interest in advancing gender equity in the industry and nation more broadly.
The strategy is designed to foster inclusivity through a collaborative approach, recognising that different stakeholders – companies, Government and education providers - have different roles, resources and expertise that can be combined to advance gender equality. To foster a collaborative approach, it is recommended that a peer-to-peer network be established to provide a formalised structure where women can support each other.

**To advance gender equity across the timber and forestry sector in Fiji, this over-arching strategy document concludes with the following:**

**RECOMMENDATION 1:**

**Organisations to develop and implement a Gender Equity Strategy** tailored to their own specific needs and aspirations of their organisation (for those who do not currently have a plan in place).

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**

**Promote an inclusive workplace culture** throughout the timber and forestry sector by prioritising gender awareness and anti-harassment training across the industry.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:**

**Hold outreach events** to make women visible working in male-dominated roles in timber and forestry to challenge gender norms and stereotypes in the wider community.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

**Implement mentorship programs** to support women entering male-dominated roles and workplaces throughout the sector.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:**

**Implement flexible work arrangements** that support women workers in balancing formal employment and domestic duties.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:**

**Build a peer-to-peer network** to support women workers in the timber and forestry industry.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:**

**Identify and upskill visible senior leaders/champions** who can progress meaningful change in women's leadership, representation and decision making.

## GENDER EQUALITY IN THE PACIFIC

### Working towards gender equality in the Pacific is a key policy issue for both Governments and civil society organisations throughout the region.

While progress has been made in many areas, significantly more needs to be done to achieve gender commitments and aspirations. Women and girls continue to face barriers in accessing education, healthcare, and economic resources, which hinders their ability to contribute to society fully. By addressing gender disparities, the region can unlock untapped potential, increase productivity, and promote inclusive growth. Furthermore, gender equality leads to better governance, as diverse perspectives and experiences are essential for shaping policies that cater to the needs of all citizens. It also helps reduce violence and discrimination, fostering safer and more cohesive societies. Embracing gender equality is recognised as not only a moral obligation, but also a strategic priority that contributes to the long- term prosperity and well-being of Pacific nations.

It is important to acknowledge however, that for many throughout the region, 'gender equality' may be viewed as a divisive or foreign concept that has been imposed on the region by outsiders (Masta and Jackson, 2024). Masta et al., (2023) highlight that gender interventions need to be discussed and implemented in ways that do not alienate men. Interventions need to resonate with both women and men, and show alignment with core Pacific values around relationships and cooperation.


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## GENDER EQUALITY AND FIJI'S COMMITMENT TO NATIONAL AND GLOBAL AMBITIONS

Promoting gender equality in the Pacific is about building on people's strengths which are grounded in harmony, loving and caring for one another (Masta and Jackson, 2024). It is also about men and women "working together to make change" (Masta et al., 2023, p. 9).

Within Fiji, women and girls continue to experience discrimination which severely limits their own life opportunities and also constrains the social, political and economic development of the nation more broadly. Gender inequality is deeply entrenched within traditional norms, customs and decision-making structures. At a Government level, a number of policies, programs and initiatives have been implemented to address inequality on a national scale. The Fiji National Gender Policy is a key instrument for achieving this ambition. It's key intent is "to promote gender equality in all aspects of Fiji's development, and to eradicate or modify institutional and social barriers to such equality" (Fiji Government, 2014, p. 2). Within this policy, gender equality is recognised as a human right, meaning everyone regardless of their gender are entitled to the same rights, opportunities and treatment; principles which are enshrined within international human rights law, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. Despite these commitments discrimination continues to persist within Fiji and on a global-scale, with evidence showing significant inequalities experienced by women in terms of education outcomes, employment, access to decision making, leadership and political representation, as well as impacts of domestic violence and sexual harassment (United Nations, 2024). In terms of employment, evidence shows that the labour force participation rate of women in Fiji is 39% compared to 77% for men[1]. Furthermore, women are more likely than men to engage in informal employment. Informal employment means workers have less job security and protections compared to those engaging in formal employment. The World Economic Forum (2023) assessed gender parity across 146 countries by measuring differences between women and men according to four key metrics: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, as well as political empowerment. Findings show that within the Asia Pacific region, Fiji ranks among the lowest countries in achieving gender parity. The results also show that the country recorded the highest decline overtime along with Myanmar and Timor-Leste (World Economic Forum, 2023). The study concludes that due to the slow progress being made, "it will take 189 years for the region to reach gender parity" (World Economic Forum, 2023p, 21). These findings show that significantly more needs to be done to meet national and international aspirations.

[1] The labour force participation rate represents the proportion of the population aged 15 and older that is economically active.

A key principle underpinning the Fiji National Gender Policy is that sustainable development is predicated on addressing gender discrimination experienced throughout the country. Development pathways that strengthen women's rights and enable women to more fully participate within all aspects of society, including economic and political spheres, is important for ethical and practical reasons. From an ethical perspective, development by definition means 'a changing situation', and therefore involves modifications (small or large) being made which are intended to lead to some type of improvement, including livelihood and/or wellbeing.

These changes, however, can result in trade- offs whereby some sectors of society benefit while others lose – typically those already marginalised from decision making processes, particularly women. Sustainable development thus involves balancing economic growth with social inclusion – including gender – and environmental protection. Initiatives which exacerbate inequalities can be highly detrimental in terms of increasing poverty, impacting quality of life and creating conflict, and therefore carry ethical implications on a societal scale.

From a practical point of view, addressing gender discrimination and sustainable development in an integrated manner better enables achievement of a range of sustainable development objectives as evidenced by the United Nations Women (2018). These objectives are recognised as globally shared ambitions and are captured within the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which provide a blueprint for achieving human prosperity. They include, for example, no poverty, no hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, as well as clean water and sanitation, among others. While gender equality (SDG 5) is recognised as a sustainable development goal in its own right, it is also identified as a cross-cutting issue that is important for achieving all goals and targets (United Nations Women, 2018).

Despite several policies and laws implemented at the national level to address gender inequality, a global assessment shows that Fiji continues to lag in closing the gender gap between women and men across economic, educational, health and political outcomes (World Economic Forum, 2022). The following laws, policies and plans comprise the legislative framework for addressing gender equality in Fiji, including within the workplace:

- **Fiji's National Development Plan (NDP) 2025 - 2029:** Provides a roadmap for sustainable development in Fiji. Gender equality is identified as a cross-cutting issue that needs to be considered in relation to all development processes, policies and strategies to ensure initiatives address existing inequalities. In terms of gender equality within the workplace, a key goal is to strengthen workplace compliance and performance by addressing "gender-based discrimination and violence in the workplace", while also "addressing gender biases in recruitment and compensation practises" (Fiji Government, 2024c, p. 133 - 134).
- **National Gender Policy:** Designed to promote gender equity, equality, social justice and sustainable development. It is aimed at improving "the quality of life of men, women, boys and girls, at all levels of society through the promotion of gender equity and equality", while also removing "all forms of gender discrimination" (Fiji Government, 2014, p. 2).
- **Employment Relations Act 2007:** Prohibits discrimination in the workplace based on gender and protects against sexual harassment in the workplace.
- **Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan (2025–2030):** Aims to address barriers to women's economic participation by promoting gender equality, enhancing women's access to economic opportunities, and ensuring their full participation in the workforce and decision-making processes.

- **National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls (2023– 2028):** This plan informs and guides Fiji's efforts in promoting and advancing the "economic empowerment of Fijian women and girls in all their diversity" by identifying key barriers and actions to address them.

Fiji has also made commitments at an international level to promote gender equality. Most notably, these include:

- **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPA):** Endorsed by Fiji in 1995, the BDPA provides a comprehensive global agenda for advancing gender equality, and recently renewed its commitment within the 30-year review.
- **Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):** Fiji ratified this convention in 1995 and is recognised as a key moment that instigated gender equality action on a national scale. It is an international treaty that brings attention to the human rights violations experienced by women and provides an agenda for action.
- **The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS):** Fiji signed on to the SDGs in 2015 when the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was developed. The key objective of the plan is to achieve "peace and prosperity for people and the planet", with gender equality a key focus.

Despite these policies, plans and international commitments, women in Fiji continue to experience discrimination and inequalities in many ways, demanding systemic change to meaningfully advance gender equality in the long term. An important pathway for addressing gender equality involves promoting women's 'economic empowerment', defined as a transformative, collective process through which economic systems become just, equitable, and prosperous (United Nations Women, N.D). While economic empowerment can come from individuals, achieving transformational change requires conducive conditions to be set at a cultural, societal and institutional level. The formal workplace is an important site where these changes can be facilitated and supported to create an enabling environment for transformational shifts to occur. Male-dominated workplaces in particular create unique opportunities for shared leadership in advancing gender equality where women and men can work to together to bring about positive social change.

## ADVANCING WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THE WORKFORCE IN FIJI

Increasing labour force participation and building inclusive workplaces are key priorities stated within the Women's Economic Empowerment National Action Plan of Fiji. While it is recognised that improvements have been made in increasing women's participation in the labour force generally – an 18% increase from 2015 to 2019 – job segregation and formal employment opportunities are two priority issues that need to be addressed (Fiji Government, 2024a).

### JOB SEGREGATION:

Women are "clustered in lower-paying jobs and industries that are traditionally seen as female-dominated" (Fiji Government, 2024a), and are largely excluded from those that are male-dominated, including certain roles within the timber and forestry industry. The skilled trades sector is one of the most highly gender segregated employment areas (Bridges et al., 2020). Overcoming job segregation can deliver social and economic benefits. In terms of social benefits, female-dominated job roles have a lower perceived value which translates into lower wages and is reflected in the gender pay gap evident in many countries throughout the world, including Fiji (Council on Federal Financial Relations, 2023). Occupational segregation can be discriminatory and have a negative impact on workplace culture whereby negative attitudes may be directed towards the opposite gender (Council on Federal Financial Relations, 2023). Job segregation also limits distribution of available labour to where it is most needed, whilst a limited labour pool constrains hiring talented workers and limits diversity which can curb innovation and economic growth. This creates labour rigidity and economic inefficiencies (Maira-Vidal, 2018).

### FORMAL EMPLOYMENT:

Promoting women's participation within the 'formal' employment sector is also a key priority for women's empowerment in Fiji. Formal work is characterised as work that is regularly renumerated by a wage or salary and other benefits (Reddy, 2008). Informal employment, on the other hand, is characterised as lacking job security, irregular income and no social protection. While employment rates have increased in recent years, this has largely increased within informal roles, particularly for rural women with seven out of 10 women (aged 25+) on average working informally (Fiji Government, 2023). It is important to note that this form of work is more desirable for many women throughout Fiji and Melanesia who need to balance caring and domestic responsibilities with employment. Workers have less legal protections, however, and are more vulnerable to economic shocks as they have less access to social security. According to the Fiji Government (2023, p. 9-E), "In 2015, 61% of Fijian women were not in the labour force, with seven out of 10 citing housework as the reason. Among men, only 22% were not in the labour force and, of them, only 5% cited housework as the reason".

Advancing women's empowerment therefore involves not only supporting women to enter the informal employment sector, but also removing barriers and creating opportunities in the formal employment sector for those choosing to work in those roles. Key barriers identified which limit women's participation in waged work include social norms reflected in stereotypes which limit the types of roles women can perform, expectations placed on women in relation to fulfilling household and caring responsibilities, as well as high prevalence of workplace harassment, particularly within male-dominated industries. Women's economic empowerment not only contributes to gender equality, it also reduces poverty and drives economic growth: aspirations that are important at an individual, community and national scale within Fiji.

Fiji currently has a high demand for skilled labour due to many workers taking up working visas in Australia and New Zealand. This demand, coupled with Fiji's commitment to upholding human rights and advancing an inclusive sustainable development agenda, provides the impetus for promoting formal employment opportunities for women in the timber and forestry industry. Furthermore, it is evidenced that diverse perspectives and experiences - including that deriving from gender and ethnic diversity – can drive innovation and financial performance within the workplace (Hunt et al., 2020).

To advance Government led aspirations of upholding human rights and promoting inclusive economic growth that empowers women within the timber and forestry industry specifically, a dedicated strategy is needed to create an enabling environment that attracts and retains women workers into diverse roles, including male-dominated roles.

## PATHWAYS TO GENDER EQUITY IN MALE DOMINATED INDUSTRIES

Gender equity is the process for achieving gender equality. It recognises that women and men are at different starting points in achieving shared societal ambitions whereby everyone is given the same privileges and opportunities, regardless of their gender.

Gender equity, therefore, means being fair to women and men by accounting for historical and social disadvantages so that gender equality can be achieved in the longer-term. Gender equity is thus not about treating men and women the same, it is about implementing actions and strategies that assist women to overcome the discriminatory barriers they face in the workplace so that they can enjoy the same opportunities and benefits as men.

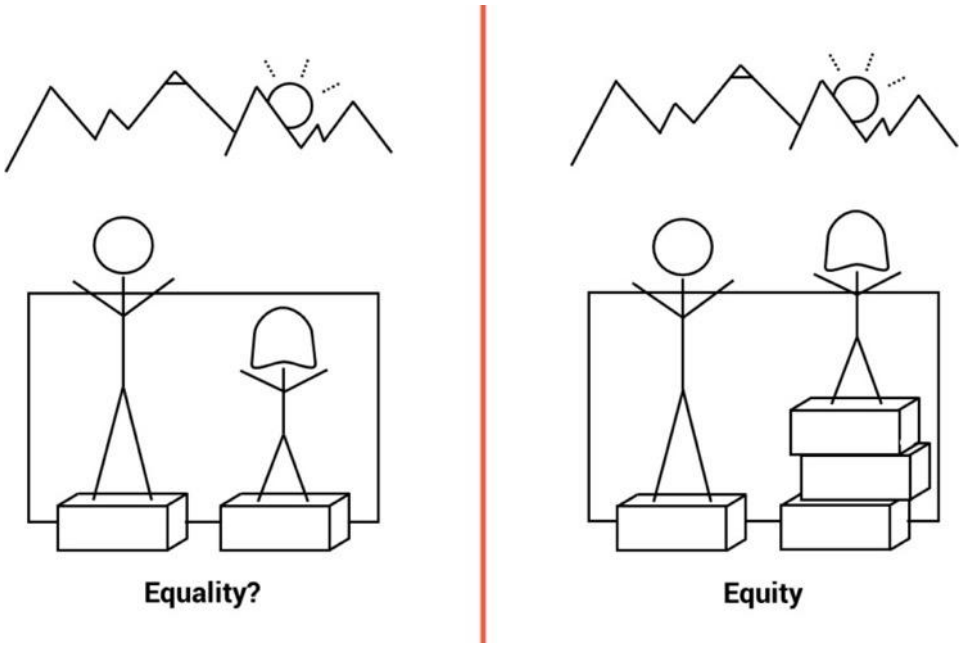



**FIGURE 1:** Gender equality means treating people the same, while gender equity involves providing fair treatment by recognising social and historical injustices that continue to limit women's opportunities and outcomes in life (cited in Donor Committee for Enterprise Development, 2024).

Gender equity is a widely shared objective within many workplaces throughout the world, including Fiji. Actions and pathways for achieving such ambitions within male-dominated industries, differ to those sectors that that have greater representation of women. A number of key issues need to be addressed to create an enabling environment whereby women feel welcomed, valued and respected. These issues include:

- **Harmful workplace culture:** Male-dominated industries typically have masculine cultures that can often be unwelcoming of women and even hostile. Maira-Vidal (2018, p. 174) explains how women entering a male-dominated sphere can "experience estrangement, voids, indifference, questioning, mocking, insults, and in the worst of all cases, harassment". Similarly, a number of authors link hyper masculine workplaces with women experiencing discrimination and violence (Bridges et al., 2020, Jenkins et al., 2018).
- **Recognition of women's needs in balancing work and domestic responsibilities:** Male-dominated workplaces may lack recognition of women's needs in terms of fulfilling domestic and caring responsibilities, as well as women's health. Some organisation can thus be inflexible in accommodating such needs (Bridges et al., 2020). This is particularly important in the Fijian context whereby women carry a disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities which constrains their engagement in the formal economy.
- **Gender norms and stereotypes:** Views and beliefs held by individuals and wider-society about the types of tasks women should and ought to perform, and the types of tasks they are perceived capable of, are key factors limiting women's participation in male-dominated industries.
- **Lack of women role models and mentors:** Limited involvement of women in certain industries results in limited opportunities for receiving mentoring and support.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES FOR ADVANCING GENDER EQUITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Taking a systems perspective, a gender transformational approach focuses on changing gender norms, power dynamics and system structures that discriminate against women. This involves making visible the underlying conditions that create inequalities; conditions that must be addressed at the individual, family, community and societal level (Pacific Women, 2021). The approach challenges socially constructed gender norms which limit women's opportunities by imposing expectations upon the types of roles they should engage in and behaviours they should perform.

Power structures are also challenged by identifying opportunities to change power dynamics that privilege, and conversely discriminate against, certain genders in specific contexts. Another key aspect of a gender transformational approach is its focus on systemic and structural change, rather than changing individual behaviours and 'fixing women' (Ryan, 2023). Finally, a one-size-fits-all perspective is avoided, recognizing that people's identity is multi-dimensional and that discrimination is not only associated with gender, but also race, ethnicity, class, disability and sexual orientation. Gender equity strategies must therefore take into account the wide variety of women's experiences and diverse ways in which they may be marginalised (Ryan, 2023) and experience harassment.

A gender transformational approach and its orientation towards system and structural change is predicated upon collaboration, recognising that changes need to be made at different levels throughout society, and need to involve both women and men to be effective.

## A GENDER EQUITY STRATEGY FOR THE FORESTRY AND TIMBER INDUSTRY

This gender equity strategy has been designed to guide the process of working towards gender equality within the forestry and timber industry. This industry is largely male-dominated, and while there is strong representation of women in office-based and management roles, there is limited employment of women within outdoor and physical roles, including low-skill entry level jobs and work involving use of machinery.

In recent years, with a greater number of women completing forestry degrees at university, there has been an increase in women employed within technical roles, including mapping work. It is reported, however, that women graduates often face difficulties entering the workforce within the forestry and timber sector, with many opting to enrol in postgraduate studies as a result.

This gender equity strategy aims to promote participation of women within all job roles across the industry, with an emphasis on actions to increase opportunities for women in male-dominated roles. This includes within companies, Government and education institutions. The strategy has been designed by drawing upon the experiences of men and women currently working in timber and forestry in Fiji. These lived experiences are integrated with relevant actions codified within existing gender equity strategies adopted within other industries and countries, recognising there are strong commonalities in the barriers and discrimination faced by women globally.

Following the granting of ethics approval from the University of Queensland (2022/HE002275) to conduct the research, data used to inform this strategy was collected in two phases:

### PHASE ONE

A qualitative approach involving semi-structured interviews was used to explore the employment roles of women and men involved in different activities throughout the existing wood product value chain in Fiji, from production through to manufacturing and retail. A total of 71 people were interviewed, including both employees and managers: 26 women and 45 men.

Topics discussed in the interviews included:

- The employee's role and responsibilities, including their pathway for gaining employment in the industry.
- Similarities and differences in women's and men's roles within the workplace.
- Opportunities and challenges experienced within the workplace, including how these differ according to gender.
- Job satisfaction and future aspirations.

### PHASE TWO

Open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from organisations that have an interest and/or role to play in advancing women's formal employment opportunities. For some organisations, this interest is specifically within the timber and forestry sector. Organisations represented included Government Ministries, a commerce and employment support agency, as well as an education and training provider. A total of eight in-depth interviews (5 females and 3 males) were conducted in Suva, Fiji. Topics covered in the interviews included: perceived benefits and challenges of women participating in male-dominated roles and industries, knowledge of actions and policies for supporting and advancing participation of women in male-dominated roles and industries, including views on their effectiveness.

The collected data was analysed by drawing out key themes and was used to guide the development of the strategy. Based on the findings of the research and a review of existing literature, the strategy is built on three key foundational areas:

### 1. PROMOTING A GENDER-INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

Promoting a positive and inclusive workplace culture in the timber and forestry industry is important for women to feel welcomed, valued and respected. Broadly speaking, workplace culture refers to the shared values, beliefs and perceptions held by employees within an organisation. A culture that is gender inclusive, therefore, promotes values, beliefs and perceptions that align with a gender equity agenda whereby individuals are treated fairly and justly, while acknowledging past discrimination. A positive workplace needs buy-in from both men and women as well as from senior leaders within the organisation.

### 2. ADDRESSING LIMITING AND HARMFUL GENDER NORMS

Gender norms are social rules that determine what types of roles, responsibilities and behaviour are deemed appropriate for women and men. Gender norms therefore dictate the types of jobs women should and should not perform in the workplace. They are reflected in stereotypes that lead to assumptions being made about people and what they are capable of; assumptions which can be unfair, harmful and discriminatory. While gender stereotypes can and do shift over time, according to Likki (2018) it is difficult for individuals to get rid of the stereotypes they carry within their mind as they are often unaware they hold them. An effective way of overcoming the power of stereotypes and biases therefore is to target 'systems' rather than attempt to change the minds of individuals. For example, how can hiring systems be set up to eliminate biases within a workplace?

In the timber and forestry industry in Fiji (as in many other countries throughout the world), pervasive gender norms that define women's work as essentially office-based and involving 'light duties' severely limits opportunities for women to engage in tasks that are physical, outdoor and/or technical (Jones and Masau, 2024). While shifts are evident in some workplaces whereby women are increasingly engaging in traditionally male-dominated roles, harmful gender norms persist resulting in discriminatory practices that deny women formal work opportunities and career progression.

Harmful gender norms and social rules that define and limit the types of jobs women can perform are not only held by those hiring workers, but are also held by women themselves, their families and the wider community. To promote gender equity in the timber and forestry industry an effective strategy must also address gender stereotypes and biases that exist beyond the workplace, and include actions to involve family and the wider community.

## 3. IMPLEMENTING SUPPORT SYSTEMS THAT ENABLE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Advancing gender equity involves responding to women and men's gendered needs to achieve gender equality. Two key issues that limit women entering and remaining within the workforce in Fiji include caring responsibilities and experiences of domestic violence, among others.

In terms of caring responsibilities, Pacific Island women are recognised as the primary household caregiver. Research shows that Pacific women dedicate more than three hours per day on unpaid care work compared to men (Pacific Women, 2020), with Oxfam (2020) reporting that globally speaking, a greater disparity typically exists in rural areas. In Fiji, domestic work is cited as the primary reason for not participating in the formal labour force, and is reflected in the high underemployment rate for women (Boccuzzi, 2021). Women are largely responsible for taking care of children, the elderly, and other members of the community requiring care including the disabled; work that is typically unpaid and undervalued. This reality is strongly linked to gender norms and stereotypes within Pacific Island nations. Support is required to enable women to better balance work-life responsibilities and reduce the overall burden of domestic responsibilities.

Another key issue limiting women's participation in the labour market is gender-based violence (GBV). Domestic violence in particular is not unique to Fiji or the Pacific: it is prevalent throughout the world and has a highly detrimental impact on mental and physical wellbeing. This issue is strongly linked to societal norms within Fiji. Evidence shows that nearly two thirds (64%) of women in Fiji have experienced intimate partner violence and 31% of Fijian women have experienced physical

and/or sexual non-partner violence (Fiji Government, 2024b). The Fiji Government (2024b, p. 1) reports that "Efforts to promote women's economic empowerment sometimes inadvertently leads to further domestic violence as men resist changes to traditional gender roles. Survivors of GBV often face reduced productivity, job loss, and financial instability due to physical and psychological trauma, absenteeism, and decreased confidence". For the timber and forestry industry to contribute to Fiji's national priority of gender equality and women's empowerment, the sector has an important role to play in implementing support systems dedicated to addressing GBV in the workplace.

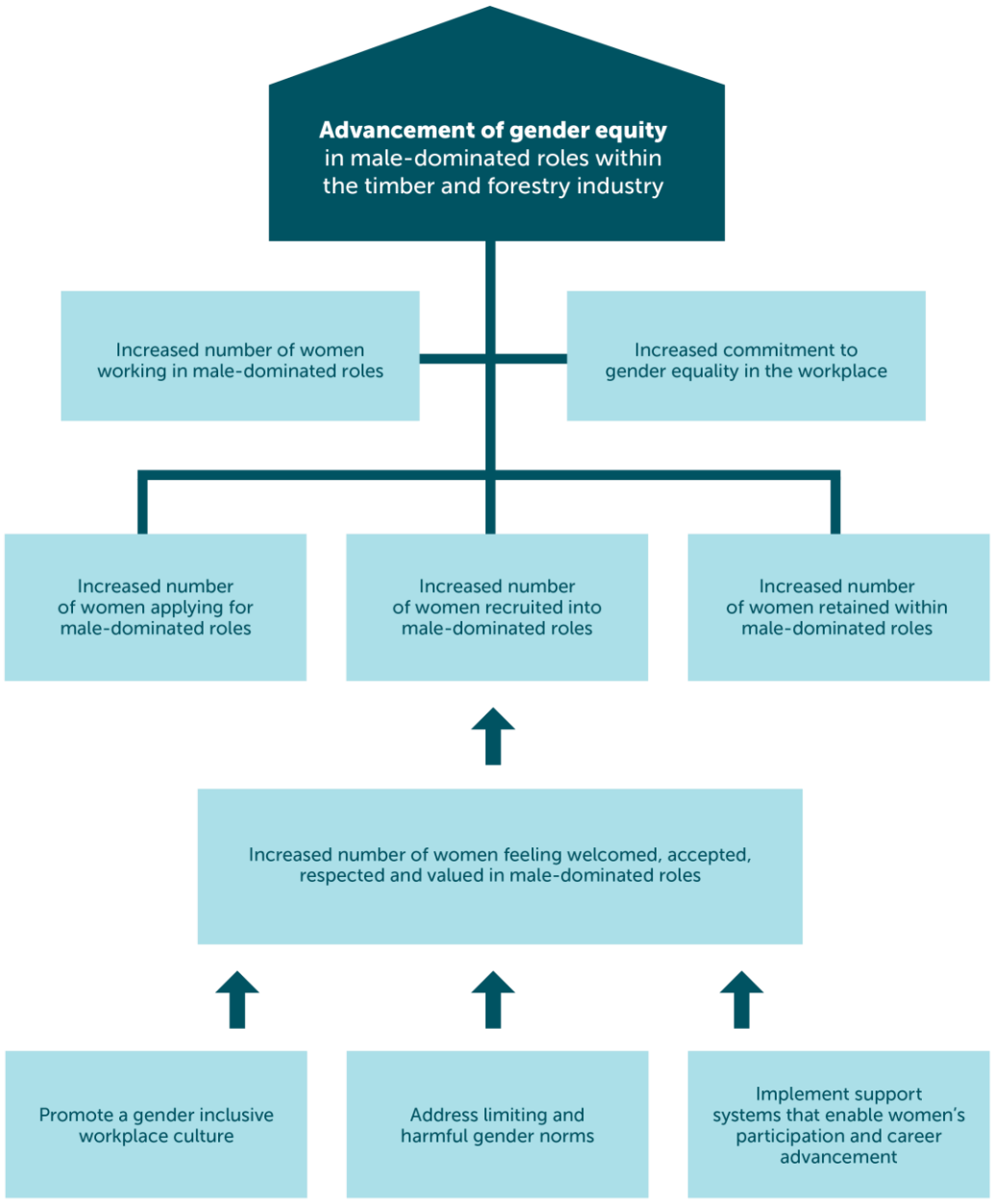
## THEORY OF CHANGE

The theory of change underpinning the gender equity strategy for the timber and forestry industry is depicted in figure 2. It is built upon addressing the three interrelated issues discussed above which can promote women's participation in the formal workforce in Fiji. A number of actions have been designed to pave the way for promoting a positive experience for women by responding to their specific needs and lived realities, to ultimately increase the number of women working in traditionally male-dominated roles in the long-term.

A recent study exploring women's and men's employment within the timber product value chain also identified a number of opportunities for leveraging greater participation of women. While gender norms and stereotypes were found to significantly limit women's opportunities, interviews with workers and managers throughout the industry reveal there was also significant support for advancing gender equality aspirations within the sector. A number of individuals interviewed, including managers, were actively involved in championing women's empowerment by creating new opportunities and supporting women in male-dominated roles. This has led to a range of observed benefits including improved motivation among workers, a wider labour pool, as well as new ideas and perspectives (Jones and Masau, 2024).

A number of key stakeholders have been identified as having an important role to play in advancing gender equity within the sector, namely companies, Government and education providers. As such, specific actions are outlined for each stakeholder, recognising that advancing gender equality demands a collaborative approach.

**Figure 2:**
Theory of change for advancing gender equity in male-dominated roles within the timber and forestry industry.



## ACTIONS FOR COMPANIES WITHIN THE TIMBER AND FORESTRY INDUSTRY

In Fiji, it is illegal to discriminate against individuals based on various characteristics, including gender, race, age, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, and more. This legal protection is designed to promote fairness, dignity, and respect, creating an inclusive environment where everyone has equal access to rights, opportunities, and justice, regardless of their background or personal attributes, including within the workplace.

In addition to abiding by legislation, evidence shows that advancing gender equity within workplaces can enhance the financial performance of a company. Research shows that gender-diverse companies are more likely to perform better than those companies lacking diversity (United Nations Development Program, 2024), with claims of reduced absenteeism, enhanced decision making and innovation, lower staff turnover, stronger company reputation and a larger and more talented labour pool to draw on to fill vacancies (Charlesworth et al., 2005). A global study carried out by Hunt et al., (2020, p. 47), involving 1,039 companies across 15 countries, concluded that "greater diversity, in terms of both gender and ethnicity, is correlated with significantly greater likelihood of outperformance". With many companies and businesses within the timber and forestry industry in Fiji having difficulties filling positions due to a labour shortage, increasing female participation within traditionally male-dominated roles can be highly advantageous.

Furthermore, companies within the timber and forestry industry can play an important part in national aspirations to advance gender equity in Fiji. The industry has traditionally been male-dominated, particularly in roles involving physical and outdoor work. As such, companies have an immense opportunity to lead the way in challenging harmful gender norms and stereotypes that severely constrain women's formal employment options.

### ACTIONS FOR PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

Companies are on the frontline in making sure workplaces are inclusive: places where all employees feel they belong, valued and respected, and where harassment and discrimination are not tolerated. Male-dominated workplaces, or sections within a workplace, can have a highly masculinised culture which may not only be challenging, but also mentally and/or physically unsafe for women to work.

Women are more likely to experience sexual and gender-based harassment in male-dominated workplaces. It is therefore critical to implement gender training to ensure all employees are aware of what behaviour is acceptable and unacceptable. Fijian workplaces typically involve banter between employees, which can sometimes cross the line. This presents a key challenge for many workplaces. However, a workplace culture that has no tolerance for discrimination, harassment and/or violence is crucial to ensure workplaces provide a safe environment for all. Creating an inclusive workplace means addressing the overall culture of a company or organisation, rather than placing a narrow focus on building the capacity of women through self-development initiatives (Ryan, 2023). It is also important that women receive training on how to protect themselves in the workplace and build confidence to call out and report anti-social behaviour when needed.

Formal rules and policies are important for creating and maintaining a safe workplace, this includes implementing a diversity, equity and inclusion policy, and/or a non-discrimination policy. These policies set the ground rules and guidelines for acceptable behaviour, and should be made available to all employees in the form of a written document and through information sessions. It is critical that these rules and policies are strongly supported and enforced by the organisation's leaders, including male champions (Duchek et al., 2020). It is also important that policy outcomes are monitored and measured to ensure they are working as

intended. For policies designed specifically to increase participation of women in the industry, success should not be determined by simply counting the number of women employed. Women's experiences need to be understood, through regular Talanoa sessions for example, to effectively measure success (Ryan, 2023). Better understanding these experiences (positive and negative) will ensure policies and practices work to advance gender equality. A strong commitment to implementing and monitoring actions to promote a positive workplace culture for both women and men is critical to avoid 'gender washing' whereby any attempt to address gender equity is tokenistic and thus ineffective.

It is also critical that work areas that have been historically male-dominated provide facilities and amenities for women (including bathrooms and menstrual disposal units), as well as appropriate safety gear which may differ in size and design to that provided for men.

### ACTIONS FOR CREATING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

- Senior leaders within a company or organisation play an important role in endorsing and promoting inclusive workplaces and should thus be visibly seen doing so.
- Leaders and managers should receive dedicated training to enable them to support all employees in building an inclusive workplace culture that is free from discrimination and harassment. All employees should also participate in on-going training (not one off) to develop their own capacity for promoting an inclusive culture.
- Create committees to directly support an inclusive workplace culture. These committees will also play a role in seeking to understand the experiences of workers, including through Talanoa sessions, and help tackle problems that arise.
- Conduct exit interviews with women choosing to resign from a workplace to gain an understanding of their experiences of working within traditionally male-dominated work roles in the company.
- Implement processes for reporting gender discrimination, harassment and violence. These processes should be easy to use and direct so that issues can be dealt with as soon as possible. Creating a dedicated WhattsApp channel for example, can ensure complaints and concerns are dealt with promptly. This can send a strong message that unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated.

(Queensland Government, N.D)

## ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING LIMITING AND HARMFUL GENDER NORMS

Two key areas where workplaces can address limiting and harmful gender norms to increase participation of women in male-dominated roles are:

(i) attracting women to apply for these roles; and

(ii) recruitment processes.

### Attracting women to apply for male-dominated roles

A key barrier to women applying for traditionally male-dominated work is the belief that they are not fit for the role, would not be considered, or do not belong in the role. A study exploring the roles of men and women throughout the timber product value chain in Fiji showed that very few women are employed in physical and outdoor roles (Jones and Masau, 2024). A key explanation given by representatives from different companies was that women do not apply for those roles. Despite a number of companies explaining that there is a labour shortage within Fiji, rather than implementing ways to attract women into these roles, men are hired from overseas. Drawing on the female labour pool within Fiji instead, can build resilience into the workforce.

One action that can attract women to consider and apply for traditionally male-dominated roles is to create job advertisements that resonate with women and make them feel 'welcome' in putting forth an application.

**DESIGN JOB ADVERSTISEMENTS THAT ATTRACT WOMEN TO APPLY FOR MALE-DOMINATED ROLES**

- Include gender-diverse images of women as well as men, and use inclusive language.
- Position advertisements in areas where women will be able to view them, including within social media and distributed via women's groups.
- Make advertisements available to key figures within the community who are influential in the lives of women, including village chiefs, church leaders, mothers, teachers, as well as instructors from tertiary and vocational institutions.
- For audio- and video-based advertisements, include women's voices to communicate that women are welcome to apply.
- Provide a female contact for women to feel comfortable in asking questions about the role.

(Queensland Government, N.D)

Another important action is to ensure that public relations materials communicate that women are valued and respected within the company, this includes communicating that women and men are paid the same when they do the same work, updating annual reports and websites with images of women as well as men in traditionally male-dominated roles, using gender inclusive language and including statements about the company's gender equity policies and practices. This can also include profiling women already working in such roles and including their stories and experiences in publicly available communications. For larger organisations, visiting local high schools, as well as other education and training providers, and communicating that the company is committed to hiring and supporting women in male-dominated roles can raise awareness among local women of the diverse opportunities available to them.

It is common practice in Fiji for a company representative to contact the headman or chief of local villages and recruit workers living nearby. Companies can be explicit in communicating that both women and men are encouraged to apply for positions on offer, including traditionally male-dominated and entry level roles where previous experience or qualifications may not be needed as training can be provided on the job.

Certain job advertisements stipulate that applicants are required to have certain qualifications or licenses, such as a driver licence or forklift licence. This can dissuade job seekers, particularly women, who do not hold these qualifications to apply. If possible, stating within the advertisement that these can be gained on the job, once the candidate is recruited, may encourage more women to apply for positions on offer.

### Recruiting women into male-dominated roles

Gender norms can also present a significant barrier in the recruitment process. A number of actions can be implemented to reduce gender biases and promote merit-based recruitment whereby applicants are hired according to their ability to perform the task. For example, draw upon gender balanced recruitment teams, made up of diverse ages and experiences. Provide these teams with training to raise awareness of the biases (gender, race, age etc) individuals bring to decision making process, as well strategies that can be used to address them. It is important for senior leadership - including male leaders and champions - to show support for these initiatives.

Providing candidates with the opportunity to carry out practical tasks that relate to the position on offer gives women a chance to show they can perform physical work and/or use machinery as per the instructions provided or previous training, recognising that many women have acquired these skills through their forestry and timber studies. A number of Government Ministries within Fiji have adopted Open Merit Recruitment and Selection Guidelines, which can also be used by companies to support gender equity in the timber and forestry sector. This approach uses an open and transparent process that is designed to select the most suitable person/s for the job based on knowledge, experience, skills and abilities required for the position, whilst aiming to eliminate discrimination.

From the perspective of women applicants, it is important for companies to communicate the policies they have in place to support women working in male-dominated roles and within a male-dominated industry. This may include opportunities for career progression, flexibility, mentorship and equal pay to ensure women feel valued and respected.

## ACTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING SUPPORT SYSTEMS THAT ENABLE WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN MALE DOMINATED ROLES

Implementing actions that address known barriers and support women to enter and remain within male-dominated roles are highly important.

A dedicated support system within a workplace may thus include the following components:

### Flexibility and support to fulfill caring responsibilities

Gender norms within Fiji typically see women fulfilling primary caregiving roles within the family and wider community; taking on responsibility to care for the young, elderly and disabled. This has a significant effect on the choices women make in regard to engaging in formal and informal work, including the hours they work and location of their work. While Government and communities can play a role in supporting offsite childcare, where possible workplaces can explore opportunities to provide on-site childcare facilities or child-friendly spaces for children that may need to accompany their parents to work on occasion or after school (International Finance Corporation, 2021). These arrangements should be developed in close cooperation with women workers to ensure that they meet their needs and do not create a new burden of fulfilling formal work and caring responsibilities simultaneously.

Providing flexibility to enable women to better balance work and domestic commitments is also beneficial in promoting gender equality. This can include variable start and finish times, flexible working hours, split shifts and job sharing opportunities (International Finance Corporation, 2021).

Importantly, workplaces can take part in information campaigns that address biases regarding women's domestic roles in Fijian society more broadly to promote attitudes that support a greater sharing of household and caring responsibilities between men and women. Implementing paternity leave policies and encouraging men to support their family with childcare and domestic responsibilities is also beneficial for women. Workplaces can also play an important role in supporting women who experience domestic gender-based violence, particularly as this violence may in some circumstances be in response to women engaging in formal work. According to the International Finance Corporation (2019), Fiji has one of the highest domestic violence rates in the world, with two out of five women experiencing sexual violence within their lifetime. A set of actions should be included within such a policy, including identifying individuals within the organisation who are trained to provide support to those affected by domestic violence, prevent workplace gossip and provide financial literary training to assist with managing domestic affairs (International Finance Corporation, 2019). Women's groups, particularly those within rural areas, can play a leading role in running these awareness campaigns within workplaces.

### Mentorship

Mentors are important for overcoming a sense of isolation which many women experience when entering into male-dominated roles (Bridges et al., 2023). Workplaces can implement dedicated mentorship programs, with research showing the importance of women role models in acting as 'agents for change' (Simon et al., 2016). Men can also be important mentors by providing assistance and positive encouragement, particularly in situations involving on the job training (Byrne et al., 2005). Mentors can provide important guidance and advice to women within the workplace, as well as offsite visits to schools, training colleges and universities to mentor future women employees.

## ACTIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

The Fiji Government plays a key role in addressing discrimination and dismantling the structural barriers that limit women in gaining formal employment, including within male dominated roles in the timber and forestry industry. This is achieved through (i) implementing a robust regulatory framework to create an enabling environment that advances gender equality in the workplace and society more broadly, and (ii) acting as a positive role model to demonstrate what an inclusive workplace is in the Fiji context.

Regulatory framework for advancing gender equality in the workplace and society: International commitments and national policies, plans and legislation (as outlined earlier) are important mechanisms for protecting women's rights, promoting equal access to opportunities, and providing support to balance work and family responsibilities. These Government mechanisms play a key role in re-orienting structures and systems that continue to limit women's formal employment opportunities by legislating women's rights, particularly within the workplace.

The Fiji Government has implemented a number of laws which lay the structural foundations upon which gender equality can further build. These laws and policies, guided by international standards (set by the International Labour Organisation, for example) essentially govern what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and treatment within a workplace, and help establish an enabling environment for all women to engage in formal work.

**SUMMARY OF EXISTING GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND PLANS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE IN FIJI**

**Employment Relations Act 2007:** Prohibits gender-discrimination in the workplace.

**National Gender Policy 2014:** Aims to promote gender equity and equality, and to improve the quality of life for all in Fiji.

**National Policy on Sexual Harassment 2008:** Aims to eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace and promote a culture of inclusivity.

**The Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) 2023-2028:** Strategies for addressing and preventing the root causes of violence against women and girls.

**Gender Equity & Social Inclusion Policy 2021-2024:** Ministry of Economy takes a whole-of-Ministry approach to identifying and advancing gender equity and social inclusion.

**National Early Childhood Care Services Policy and Regulatory Framework:** A taskforce has been initiated to develop a childcare policy to support working parents in gaining access to quality and affordable childcare services.

**In the forestry sector specifically:**

**Ministry of Forestry Strategic Development Plan (SDP) 2017-2030:** Advances gender equality awareness and training throughout the forestry sector.

The success of this legislative framework to advance gender equality in the timber and forestry industry is dependant on collaboration across a number of Ministries. It is also important that adequate resourcing is made available to achieve the stated gender-focused aims and objectives. This is mandated within the Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting approach implemented by the Fiji Government.

Within the forestry and timber sector, the Ministry of Forestry's current Strategic Plan 2017 – 2030 includes aspirations to advance gender equality outcomes, particularly in terms of increasing economic and employment opportunities for women in the sector, as well as increasing participation of women in training programs. For example, the Government works with rural women in setting up projects such as nurseries, to increase their income. As demonstrated within other sectors, such as fisheries, collaborating with established civil society organisations can help achieve these stated aims by grounding Government plans in local women's lived realities and avoiding a one size fits all approach.

### Modelling gender equity in the workplace:

Government also has an important role to play in modelling what gender equity looks like in an organisation. This includes implementing dedicated organisational policies and programs within Government Ministries to advance women's meaningful participation within their own workplaces which are reflective of the morals, ethics and values underpinning a rights-based approach to gender equality though not captured within top-down laws and policies per se. For example, ensuring gender balanced leadership teams, paid parental leave, flexible work, fair promotion practices, and prioritising workplace gender equality training. The number of women employed within the Ministry of Forestry has been increasing over the past decades, with a greater number of women also holding senior positions, including the Conservator of Forests. Women from the Ministry of Forestry are also increasingly leading training sessions to teach skills that are typically associated with men, such as chainsawing. This is important for modelling gender equity in the workplace but also challenging gender norms among audience members from the wider community, particularly within rural areas.

While positive strides continue to be made by the Fijian Government, further work is needed to establish an enabling environment for attracting and retaining women in male dominated roles in timber and forestry.

## ACTIONS FOR PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

In addition to the legislative framework that is in place to prevent workplace discrimination and harassment, the Government can play an important role in implementing information and awareness campaigns to educate employees and managers throughout the industry of the issues prevalent in male-dominated workplaces specifically where women face unique challenges. This may involve Government officers implementing the training directly or funding a third-party to run the program, such as local women's groups or the Fiji Human Resources Institute. Training sessions and materials can also be provided to workplaces to ensure workers are educated on what types of behaviours constitute discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

For the Ministry of Forestry specifically, it is important to continue to model to other organisations within the timber and forestry sector what a gender-inclusive workplace looks like. This includes making visible gender metrics for Ministry employees and leadership teams. The Ministry of Forestry has an excellent opportunity to show the strong representation of women, including within the executive levels, and make women role models visible to inspire other women. It is important to have male champions of gender equity within the Ministry to advocate and support women working in male dominated roles throughout the sector, and not just within the Ministry where significant ground continues to be made.

## ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING LIMITING AND HARMFUL GENDER NORMS

In addition to the policies and programs already in place, Government Ministries, can continue to play an important role in funding dedicated community information and awareness raising campaigns on the burden women carry in performing unpaid work and the impact this has on them in gaining formal employment. The benefits that women's employment can provide to themselves, their family and the wider community also needs to be communicated. It is important to note that family responsibilities and expectations can present a key barrier for many women gaining employment within male-dominated roles and industries and therefor community wide campaigns, led by the Ministry of Civil Service or Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, are a key element of advancing gender equity in Fiji. Faith-based leaders and community leaders also play a central role in orchestrating effective community campaigns aimed at shifting social norms. Women's organisations throughout Fiji are active in leading and implementing gender awareness campaigns that can continue to be resourced by the Government where possible.

Dedicated engagement programs with school children also provides an important pathway for challenging gender norms and stereotypes which are shaped at a young age and reinforced throughout one's life. Women working in timber and forestry can talk about their experiences of working in the industry, communicating that women as well as men can work with machinery and in technical roles.

These campaigns should draw on data and evidence that demonstrate the different ways women are limited by gender norms based on their ethnicity, age and region (particularly rural compared to urban areas). These campaigns can be delivered via a range of communication mediums (such as television, radio, theatre, community-based information sessions and social media) and target a range of audiences, including villages, schools, workplaces and churches.

### CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTING AND EMPOWERING WOMEN IN FIJI

**Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC):** https://www.fijiwomen.com/about/our-history/

**Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM):** https://www.fwrm.org.fj/

**Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises 'N' Development (FRIEND):** http://friendfiji.com/about-us/

**femLINKpacific:** https://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/

**Women's Action for Change (WAC):** https://wacfiji.yolasite.com/

**Soqosoqo Vakamaramahttps:** https://womensfundfiji.org/grants/grantees/soqosoqo-vakamarama-itaukei-kadavu/

*Please note that this list is not exhaustive and there are many other civil society organisations working to empower women in Fiji and the Pacific region more broadly.*

## ACTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING SUPPORT SYSTEMS THAT ENABLE WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN MALE DOMINATED ROLES

The Fiji Government continues to provide important social support services to strengthen women's empowerment. This includes funding organisations, such as the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), to provide counselling and practical support for those experiencing or have experienced domestic violence. Improving the availability of these services for rural women is important as many services are more prevalent in urban areas. As with shifting gender norms, the Fiji Government can continue play an important role in funding information and awareness raising programs that aim to shift societal attitudes around violence, which many civil society organisations are already involved in.

Continuing the development of the Fiji Government's National Early Childhood Care Services Policy and Regulatory Framework (currently underway) will be critical to support women in balancing caring responsibilities and formal employment.

For women graduates seeking to gain employment within the Ministry of Forestry specifically, it is important that their domestic responsibilities are recognised. Often men have more flexibility and opportunity to take on volunteer work which can typically lead to a full-time position. Women can be constrained in their ability to participate in volunteering work due to their family commitments and obligations. More data is required to understand the extent to which women take up volunteer roles compared to men, and the extent to which these roles, including internships, lead to paid employment. Findings can be used create pathways for both women and men to equitably share in jobs opportunities that stem from volunteering and internships within the Ministry.

## ACTIONS FOR EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Evidence shows that men engage in higher income earning activities in the forestry sector (engaging in timber harvesting and production of high revenue forest items) with women participating to a greater extent in lower paid roles, such as harvesting of plants for consumption, medicinal purposes, crafts and ceremonies. However, women (particularly I-Taukei women) have higher representation within forestry degrees at both the Fiji National University (57%) and the University of the South Pacific (64%).

While university participation in forestry programs is high for women, low levels of recruitment compared to men into technical roles and jobs involving outdoor and physical work persist; a situation also observed within the field of agriculture. A lack of success in finding employment prompts many women graduates to undertake postgraduate studies, contributing to the high level of enrolment observed among women in recent years. While this is a positive outcome in many respects, the fact that many women graduates have fewer work opportunities compared to their male counterparts is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Tertiary institutions involved in the training of women can play an important role in building the capacity of students they educate - both women and men - to bridge the gender divide within the timber and forestry industry.

### ACTIONS FOR PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

Both female and male students can take part in courses that provide awareness on gender rights in the workplace and build an understanding of what an inclusive workplace means and why it is important in the Fiji context. This would involve educating students on what types of behaviour are considered harassment and bullying, and communicating effective strategies for dealing with these issues. Involving men in these forms of training is critical as gender equality involves active long-term effort from both men and women to achieve social change.

The education and institutions providers themselves also play an important role in modelling what an inclusive social environment looks like. Having teaching staff also take part in gender awareness training would also be valuable.

### ACTIONS FOR ADDRESSING LIMITING AND HARMFUL GENDER NORMS

Education providers can play an important role in equipping women studying forestry to deal with the pervasive limiting gender norms and stereotyping that exist within the timber and forestry sector. Women's empowerment training can be integrated into courses to build the capacity of women to deal with unique barriers they may face when working in a male dominated industry. The mindset of women themselves, particularly in terms of whether they feel they belong or can succeed within a given role or industry, can be a key barrier which limits their potential. Gender stereotypes that play out in field-based activities within forestry programs can be addressed through dedicated awareness raising activities that are integrated into teaching plans. While some teachers and educators may take the initiative to encourage women to take part in traditionally male-dominated activities, others may overlook the issue to reinforce gender stereotypes. Challenging harmful stereotypes that limit women's participation and thus skill development directly through dedicated lessons within education and training programs presents a key role for education and training providers to play in advancing gender equity in the timber and forestry sector.

Inviting industries to open-days at the education facility can also provide an opportunity to challenge gender norms and stereotypes. Women can be given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities alongside men in performing typically male-dominated jobs. Similarly, education and training providers can invite women guest speakers who already work in the sector to talk to students and act as a role model for women. Students' families and the wider community can observe women performing skilled and technical roles to broaden their perspectives on gendered employment. It is also important to make visible at these open-days the male champions who are also working to promote gender equity in the sector.

### ACTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING SUPPORT SYSTEMS THAT ENABLE WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN MALE DOMINATED ROLES

Education and training organisations can play a key role in facilitating mentoring relationships between women studying timber and forestry and women working in the industry. A well-structured mentorship program can deliver significant benefit to both mentors and mentees and play an important role in advancing participation of women. Mentors can share their experience, knowledge and insights to build the capacity of women students to succeed within male-dominated fields of employment. Mentors benefit from having the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and by extending their own network among graduates.

For those organisations that are actively seeking to increase participation of women working in timber and forestry, education and training providers are well placed to act as a conduit to link new graduates and employers. Opportunity exists for education providers to work more directly with international companies specifically, who are required to meet international standards on promoting gender equity.

## COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING

Achieving transformative social change, particularly in relation to gender, is a complex and challenging task. Collaboration between organisations can be highly beneficial in building a supportive enabling environment. This is particularly important when taking a gender transformation approach which aims to actively challenge gender norms at different scales within a given sector. Combining resources, skills and expertise which different organisations bring to the table is also valuable for building momentum to achieve change.

An initial step in taking a collaborative approach involves identifying shared goals and objectives among stakeholders, including Government, companies, women's groups, training and education providers, NGOs (national and international), as well as representative organisations, such as the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation. Joint action plans can then be developed to clarify specific roles and responsibilities for each party. Implementation of these plans can be monitored, with key learnings shared. Symposiums and workshop can be implemented to build relationships, identify mutual objectives and create pathways for achieving them. Partnering with other male-dominated industries working to advance participation of women can also be highly beneficial to stimulate learning across sectors to achieve greater impact. Key Government Ministries that can play a key role include:

- Ministry of Forestry
- Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection
- I-Taukei Affairs
- Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport
- Ministry of Civel Service


## PEER-TO-PEER NETWORK

Networking is a valuable means through which women can support each other and thrive within male-dominated roles and industries, particularly as many feel a sense of social isolation. Peer-to-peer networks can be formally established to provide a mechanism through which women can connect, share experiences, knowledge and resources. These networks can open new opportunities and enable women to find support, including mentorship and career guidance. Peer-to-peer networks can host events and facilitate workshops to not only deliver direct benefits to women, but also have a positive influence on the culture of the industry more broadly. This gender equity strategy can be used as a guiding document for the network in implementing actions that drive momentum around advancing gender equality.

A strong peer-to-peer women's network can build upon existing networks spanning Government, companies and/or education and training organisations. Key steps involved in formalising a network include:

- Identify shared goals and objectives for participants within the peer-to-peer network;
- Identify a stakeholder to take the lead in establishing, building and maintaining the network;
- Implement a set of rules that will govern how it should operate;
- Gain support from key stakeholders, including Government, companies and training and education providers, including seed funding to establish the network;
- Set criteria for membership;

- Identify and fill roles;
- Implement an internal communication strategy as well as an external strategy to give the network visibility throughout the sector; and
- Implement a plan for funding the network, such as partnering with Government and/or setting a membership fee, to ensure growth.

Women within the timber and forestry sector can look to other industries where similar networks have been established to support women, such as the within the maritime industry in Fiji. It is important that the peer-to-peer network fosters a sense of belonging and community among members to build momentum and drive transformation from the bottom-up.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# RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOMMENDATION 1:**

## Organisations to develop and implement a Gender Equity Strategy tailored to their own specific needs and aspirations of their organisation (for those who do not currently have a plan in place).

A gender equity strategy which includes a detailed action plan provides a blueprint for companies to combat gender bias, promote an inclusive workplace culture and implement support systems that make women feel accepted and valued (see appendix 1). While many templates exist, key elements of a gender equity strategy include the following:

- A vision statement to define a company's commitment to gender equality;
- An action plan including specific initiatives and strategies to address key issues constraining gender equality;
- A monitoring approach to evaluate success.

This strategy can be led by a Gender Technical Working Group, made up of both men and women employees, who are tasked to design the strategy with input sought from workers throughout the organisation, including Human Resource personnel.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**

## Promote an inclusive workplace culture throughout the timber and forestry sector by prioritising gender awareness and anti-harassment training across the industry.

Key stakeholders - companies, Government Ministries and education providers - can collaborate to identify shared goals and mission alignment in relation to advancing gender equity within the industry through awareness-raising campaigns. Shared goals can form the foundation for driving collective action through implementing these campaigns to challenge limiting gender norms and stereotypes and create an inclusive culture across the sector whereby women feel accepted and valued. Collaboration opportunities should also be explored with Women's Organisations and NGOs working to advance gender equality in Fiji.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:**

### Hold outreach events to make women visible working in male-dominated roles in timber and forestry to challenge gender norms and stereotypes in the wider community.

Create opportunities for women working in male-dominated roles to attend speaking events at primary schools, high schools, universities, vocational training institutions and community events. Have male champions and community-leaders, including faith-based leaders, also take part in these events to show support for women working in male-dominated roles.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**

### Implement mentorship programs to support women entering male-dominated roles and workplaces throughout the sector.

Women models are important for overcoming a sense of isolation many women feel when working in male-dominated areas. Stakeholders within the timber and forestry industry can partner in implementing mentorship programs to achieve mutually beneficial aims in advancing gender equity.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:**

### Implement flexible work arrangements that support women workers in balancing formal employment and domestic duties.

Women's domestic and caring responsibilities present a key barrier for engaging in formal employment in Fiji. Implementing and championing flexible work arrangements where possible, such as flexible work-times and job sharing, can provide important supports for women to engage in waged work.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:**

### Build a peer-to-peer network to support women workers in the timber and forestry industry.

Hold discussions with key stakeholders to identify opportunities for establishing a peer-to-peer network to support women working in the timber and forestry industry.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:**

### Identify and upskill visible senior leaders/champions who can progress meaningful change in women's leadership, representation and decision making.

Create opportunities to make women who are already leading or working within the industry more visible to others. Increased visibility not only challenges persistent stereotypes that frame forestry as "men's work" but also provides vital role models for aspiring women and girls.

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# APPENDIX 1:
# GENDER EQUITY STRATEGY TEMPLATE (EXAMPLE)

This template (based on that designed by the Queensland Government, Australia). provides an example of a gender equity strategy that can be used by companies, training and education institution, as well as Government Ministries. The focus areas and priorities included in the template are based on those discussed within this report which have been identified as key issues within timber and forestry companies in Fiji. These can be adapted to meet the needs of specific organisations.

### COMMITMENT TO GENDER EQUITY

*State your organisation's commitment to gender equity in the timber and forestry industry by providing a statement that explains what your organisation hopes to achieve in relation to gender equity and how it relates to core organisational objectives. This statement should be developed in consultation with both women and men employees working at different scales within the organisation. Example statement:*

At [Company Name], we are dedicated to advancing gender equity in the timber and forestry industry. We recognize the importance of creating an inclusive and diverse workplace where all employees, regardless of gender, have equal access to opportunities for growth, leadership, and contribution. We are committed to fostering a culture of respect, fairness, and empowerment. By advancing gender equity, we aim to build a stronger, more sustainable future for our business, industry and our communities in Fiji.

## FOCUS AREAS

Identify and explain your organisation's focus areas for advancing gender equity in the timber and forestry industry. Examples are provided which are based upon key barriers discussed within this report.

| 1. Promote a gender-inclusive workplace culture | 2. Address limiting and harmful gender norms that limit women's participation | 3. Implement support systems that enable women to participate in male-dominated roles |
|---|---|---|
| Foster an environment where all employees, regardless of gender, feel valued, respected, safe and are provided with opportunities to thrive. | Actively promote and support women's participation in traditionally male-dominated roles, ensuring equitable opportunities for recruitment, advancement and empowerment. | Implement support systems, such as mentorship, training, and flexible work arrangements, that empower women to confidently pursue and succeed in male-dominated roles. |

## KEY PRIORITIES FOR EACH FOCUS AREA

Identify and explain your organisation's priorities within each focus area to advance gender equity. Examples are provided based on identified barriers outlined in this over-arching strategy report.

| Focus Area | Priorities |
|---|---|
| **1 Promote a gender-inclusive workplace culture** | 1.1 Implement gender awareness training across the organisation.<br>1.2 Review and revise existing policies and programs to ensure they align with a gender-inclusive agenda.<br>1.3 Review and update amenities and facilities in all work areas to ensure they meet the needs of women as well as men. |
| **2 Address limiting and harmful gender norms that limit women's participation** | 2.1 Implement practices that encourage women to apply for male-dominated roles.<br>2.2 Implement practices that align with merit-based recruitment whereby applicants are hired according to their ability to perform the task. |
| **3 Implement support systems that enable women to participate in male-dominated roles** | 3.1 Establish flexible work practices that support women workers, particularly in meeting caring responsibilities.<br>3.2 Create opportunities for women working in male-dominated roles to gain mentorship (internally or externally) to enhance their growth in the industry. |

## ACTIVITIES FOR ACHIEVING EACH PRIORITY LISTED

Identify and explain your organisations key focus areas for advancing gender equity in the timber and forestry industry. Example are provided.

| Activities | Follow-up | Success measures | Person/ Department |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Priority 1.1:** Implement gender awareness training across the organisation. | | | |
| Implement gender awareness training for all employees within the organisation. | Review the training to ensure it remains relevant and effective as societal norms and workplace needs evolve. | Increased number of employees who have undertaken gender awareness training.<br>Report on employees' experiences in terms of feeling respected and a sense of satisfaction within the workplace. | |
| **Priority 1.2:** Review and revise existing policies and programs to ensure they align with a gender-inclusive agenda. | | | |
| Review existing policies and programs to identify how they support or detract from building a gender-inclusive workplace.<br>Review best practice policies and programs to promote an inclusive workplace culture (e.g., a robust procedure for reporting harassment and discrimination).<br>Revise and update policies and programs as required.<br>Gain support from senior leadership and male champions in promoting inclusive policies and programs. | Undertake review of updated policies and programs aimed at promoting a gender-inclusive workplace.<br>Further revise and update as required.<br>Continue to build support from senior leadership and male champions. | Report on effectiveness of policies and programs for promoting an inclusive workplace culture.<br>Increased visibility of senior leadership and male champions supporting a gender-inclusive workplace agenda. | |
| **Priority 1.3:** Review and update amenities and facilities to ensure they meet the needs of women as well as men. | | | |
| Review amenities and facilities within the workplace in consultation with women. Include a review of best practice standards.<br>Design and implement a plan to ensure amenities and facilities meet the needs of women. | Gather feedback from employees to ensure that improvements are effective. | Assess availability of amenities and facilities against best practice standards. | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Priority 2.1:** Implement practices that encourage women to apply for male-dominated roles. | | | |
| Audit number of women applying for job roles, including traditionally male-dominated roles.<br>Review current practices for advertising male-dominated roles to identify new opportunities for attracting women applicants.<br>Identify and adopt best practice for creating unbiased, gender-inclusive job advertisements. | On-going audit of the number of women applying for different job roles.<br>Collect data from applicants to determine how and where they heard about the role.<br>Use results to design advertisements further increase the proportion of women applying for male-dominated roles. | Proportion of women applying for male-dominated roles increases. | |
| **Priority 2.2:** Implement practices that align with merit-based recruitment whereby applicants are hired according to their ability to perform the task. | | | |
| Provide gender awareness training to members on recruitment panels to address gender bias in hiring practices.<br>Ensure recruitment teams are gender-balanced.<br>Identify and implement best practice procedures to reduce bias and discrimination, such as merit-based recruitment. | On-going audit of (i) number of women and men interviewed for different job roles, and (ii) number of women successful in securing employment.<br>Undertake review of effectiveness of recruitment procedures.<br>Adjust procedures according to findings, as needed. | Increase in number of staff involved in recruitment participate in gender awareness training.<br>Improved gender-balance in recruitment teams.<br>Report on effectiveness of recruitment procedures for attracting high-quality candidates and increasing gender diversity within traditionally male-dominated roles. | |
| **Priority 3.1:** Establish flexible work practices that support women workers, particularly in terms of meeting caring responsibilities. | | | |
| In consultation with women workers, evaluate existing flexible work policies and practices (e.g., part-time options, flexible hours) to identify gaps.<br>Conduct a review of best practice standards.<br>Revise and implement new initiatives to support women workers in balancing work and caring responsibilities. | Gather feedback from employees to ensure that improvements are effective. | Report on effectiveness of initiatives to support flexibility. | |
| **Priority 3.2:** Create opportunities for women working in male-dominated roles to gain mentorship (internally or externally) to enhance their growth in the industry. | | | |
| Identify women mentors internally and externally.<br>Design and implement a mentorship program to support women. | Gather feedback from women participating in the program.<br>Revise as needed. | Report on effectiveness of the mentor program and number of participants. | |