

How do International Organizations promote the increase of Pacific Islands' women's representation?

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Abstract: Pacific Islands region is the area whose women occupy the fewest parliament seats. In recent years, efforts are made to improve women's political status, increase the proportion of women members of parliaments in Pacific Islands. Researchers have identified the role of local and external actors in promoting women empowerment in this area. This article seeks to clarify an alternative explanation that above all those powers, Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGO) play a crucial role. They invent various measures to improve women's political participation in the area, increasing their representation in the parliaments. In this article, three causal mechanisms—economic donation, political participation and identity constitution are identified to analyze how IGOs contribute to Pacific's quota campaign in recent ten years. In analyzing the efforts of IGOs in increasing women's representation in Pacific, this article contributes to the research of Pacific's women empowerment in terms of theory, emphasizing the role of IGOs, discussing how theory of new-liberal institutionalism can practice in gender equality of Pacific. At the level of public policy, the article arranges the policies of IGOs in Pacific's women empowerment, affirming the core role of IGOs in this domain.

1. Introduction

Above all continents of the world, Pacific councilwomen make up the lowest proportion in the parliaments. To change the status quo, various efforts were made. In the past ten years, the percentage of women members (MPs) in the parliaments has achieved a substantial increase. What are the dynamics of increase of women MPs? This article argues that in promoting gender equality of Pacific parliaments from 2012 to 2021, IGOs play a core role. To specify the causal mechanism of IGOs and the increase of Pacific Islands' women's representation, examining how their efforts help female candidates in Pacific, I draw on theories of neo-liberal institutionalism and constructivism, analyzing how do IGOs take measures of economic donation, political participation and identity constituting to increase women's parliament seats and to what extent do these measures take effect. I find that in increasing women's political participation, promoting gender equality in Pacific Islands, IGOs do play the crucial role. They do not only pay attention to the gender inequality of Pacific, doing many researches to arouse the public concern about this issue, but also invest heavily in helping female candidates, doing efforts in advocacy education, advertisement and lobbying to increase the proportion of women members of parliaments in this area.

2. The status quo of Pacific's women representation

Pacific women possess the fewest parliament seats all over the world. Until 2017, only 6.1% of Pacific parliamentarians are women. [1] The only three states in the world which have no female member all Pacific states: Vanuatu, the Federated states of Micronesia and Papua New Guinea. [2] In recent years, the proportion of women members of parliaments (MPs) has risen. In 2013, women hold only 3.3% seats in Pacific Islands' parliaments. [3] Until 2017, this data has increased by 2.8%. Until 2020, it has been increased to 6.4%. Although it is still far lower than the global average of 25.5%, [4]

in past ten years, progress has been made. The percentage of women MPs has risen, and more states which had no single women MPs have been accepted women candidate to be their new members.

Table 1. Women's Political Representation in the Pacific Islands Region (as at 2012)

Country	Total seats	Total women	% Women
Fiji	32	5	15.6
Palau	29	3	10.3
Kiribati	46	4	8.7
Samoa	49	2	4.1
Marshall Islands	33	1	3.0
Papua New Guinea	111	3	2.7
Tuvalu	15	0	0.0
Nauru	18	0	0.0
Tonga	26	0	0.0
Vanuatu	52	0	0.0
Micronesia (Federated States of)	14	0	0.0
Solomon Islands	50	0	0.0
Total	475	18	3.7

Source: Adapted from IPU (2019) [5]

Table 2. Women's Political Representation in the Pacific Islands Region (as at 2020)

Country	Total seats	Total women	% Women
Fiji	51	11	21.57
Nauru	19	2	10.53
Samoa	50	5	10.0
Solomon Islands	50	4	8.00
Tonga	27	2	7.41
Kiribati	45	3	6.67
Palau	16	1	6.3
Tuvalu	16	1	6.3
Marshall Islands	33	2	6.06
Papua New Guinea	111	0	0.0
Vanuatu	52	0	0.0
Micronesia (Federated States of)	14	0	0.0
Total	484	31	6.4

Source: Adapted from IPU (2021) [6]

Considering the severe gender inequality in Pacific states' parliaments, different kinds of agents devote into increase female representative in this area. Existing researches have sought to specify the role of different agents. Drage pointed out that though the underrepresentation of women in Pacific is severe, the government, nongovernment and community-initiated activities are groundswell. [7] Baker specified the role of local actors, external actors and structural factors in the quota campaign.[3] Corbett and Liki emphasized the effort of donator in promoting the women representation of Pacific.[8] At the level of external, the role of IOs is also been emphasized. Bush argues that in quota campaign, international efforts are more important than that of domestic ones.[9] In various cases, IOs can be a supportive actor in the quota campaign.[10] However, existing researches have not identified the role of IGOs in promoting quota campaign in recent ten years. Compared with them, I highlight that above all the powers, IGOs are the core agents which concern Pacific women's political rights, specifying the measures of them to help female candidates. They put the issue of women empowerment at a significant position above all the functions of them, and maintaining the capacity of managing women issues independent to national actors. Constructivists argue that IGOs are not only independent actors which have their own agendas, but also can embody multiple agendas and multiple sources of

agency.[11] For social organizations, interests and rights for women are the new elements and agenda of them.[12] The new elements further give birth to organizations which claim legitimate the rights and interests.[12] In the next part of the article, three mechanisms—economic donation, political participation and identity constitution are specified of how do IGOs do their efforts to promote women empowerment, increasing women MPs in Pacific Islands.

3. Economic donation

The first approach of IGOs to help female candidates is economic donation. To women candidates, a significant barrier is that they often have less access to the financial resources for their electoral campaigns (UN Women 2015, 1). To alleviate this problem, IOs initiate different kinds of projects in Pacific Islands for women candidate's donation, advocacy training and public advertising. In implementing the donation projects, the IGOs always choose to cooperate with donator states, or undertake their own donation projects.

Cooperating with donators is a significant approach of IOs' donation. In modernized society, actors can shift from their own agency to others'. [12] For national states, serving as models for other states around them is significant. [12] Assistance programs can be an effective measure to display themselves before IGOs. [12] In Pacific, regional powers like Australia seek to maintain their reputation. Thus, economic donation becomes an important method. Many Pacific women candidates have been supported by projects of doner governments. Donors provide both financial and technical support to female candidates. [3] In Pacific area, Australia is the core regional power, seeking to exert its influence and maintenance to Pacific islands. Therefore, in recent years, it has been devoting itself into donating gender equality projects. In the past few years, Australia has been the largest non-core partner of UN Women in Pacific. The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) cooperates with the UNDP, providing financial and technical assistance, and channeling fund through the UNDP. [3] Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women) is a significant project. It was announced at the Pacific Islands Forum member countries by the Australian Government in 2012, which commits \$320 million over ten years in 14 member states of Pacific Islands Forum. [13] It mainly aims to increase the interest of women in decision making; expand women's economic opportunities; decrease violence against women; enhance women agencies in Pacific. [13] Foundations from philanthropy and business are also different kinds of the capital sources of the IOs to initiate projects and support women candidates. Those donators play important role in the donating projects of IGOs, providing substantial funds for them.

Besides of cooperating with donators, IOs also undertake their own donating projects. Taking the UN as an example, many of its departments have devote into promoting female quota campaign in Pacific. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP)'s role includes funding for gender-sensitizing projects. [3] For instance, in Papua New Guinea (PNG), the UNDP, UN Women and AusAID have spent over US\$800,000 on the seats campaign. [3] The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund also provides fund to support women leaders, decreasing the exclusion of women in politics and social life in Solomon Islands. [14] Those donating projects enhance the maintenance of IGOs in Pacific greatly. In sum up, economic donation is a core method for IOs to help women candidates, promoting the quota campaign. By providing donation, sometimes cooperating with donator states as Australia, IOs initiate different kinds of projects to support women politicians of Pacific Islands, promoting gender equality in this area.

4. Political participation

Political participation is also a significant approach for IOs to improve the political status of Pacific women. The independent power and authority of IGOs come from the legitimacy rational-legal authority that they embody, and the technical information and expertise they have. [11] The information and expertise also give them resources of political participation. Not only do they carry out theoretical research of gender inequality, Pacific women in climate change and quota campaign,

but also, they seek to advance various political practices to help female candidates. Theoretical research is one of the significant means of political participations of IOs. In realizing the importance of gender equality and the role of women in political life, IOs are at the forefront. In sector of women and gender equality, interests of nation states are limited. [15] Instead, it is international norms which promote women status, suffrage right and similar issues become recognized consensus. [16] The UN particularly attaches importance to the empowerment of women and seat campaign in Pacific. The UN Women points out that the severe gender inequality and lack of women in leadership and decision making in Pacific is resulted from the inherently biased systems and structures. [17] The increasing of women in the leadership is benefit to the social and economic development. [17] The longer the women's political representation promotes the more the women's labor force participation, and the higher proportion of public employment of women. [17] Besides the research of cause and present situation of why women candidates cannot possess more seats in parliament, a credible database is also important. The Inter-Parliamentary Union is one of the authorities on the proportion of women in parliaments, seeking to establish a systematic data and report on the research of gender equality in national parliaments. Through theoretical research, IOs promote the issues of gender equality in the parliaments and women's representation become a frontier research direction, having a clear motivation to support the women candidates in Pacific.

Another method of political participation is dialogues with parliaments, MPs and governments in Pacific to lobby them make policies of quota campaign. In the theory of institutionalism, international norms exert its effect on states. While becoming the members of IOs like the UN, states are often required to behave as the norms of IOs.[18] Institutions also structure incentives. [19] Although it is the powerful states which have core influence on the decision-making of IOs, there are also a mechanism to protect the small states.[20] In the UN, when smaller powers stand together, the actions of great powers will not be approved.[20] The donations from IOs also become an important motivation for small powers like Pacific Islands to adopt the advices of IOs. Those incentives make it possible for IOs to persuade small state to accept their ideology and norms. For instance, in Solomon Islands, UN Women promoted the provincial dialogues to help women connect with their national MPs.[17] The effort of UN achieved positive results, as the Provincial government in the Western Province has committed to spent 20% of its budget to imply this policy for the first time. [17] Dialogues with Pacific governments become an efficient method of IOs to promote the quota campaign in the continent where women possess the least parliament seats all over the world. High-level dialogues may be effective to promote the policy formulation and implementation.

Advocacy training is also an important part of IOs' political participation. For instance, the UN offices in Papua New Guinea provide campaign materials and advocacy skills training to campaign. [3] The UNDP also take the approach of political participation like lobbying MPs, drafting the Women's Bill and doing publicity work.[3] In Samoa, the UNDP and the UN Women Fiji Multi-Country office initiated the project of "Women in Leadership in Samoa (WILS)", which sought to promote the gender equality and enhance the women's leadership.[14] To support women candidates, promoting inclusivity of politics, it organized the activities of leadership training, briefing MPs about the significance of women's leadership, and producing the documentaries on Samoan women's leadership.[14] Advocacy training is becoming a main kind of project of IOs to support women candidates, helping them get more seats in parliament.

IOs also support the women politicians in Pacific Islands by publicizing their achievements, cooperating with them in the women issues. In 2016, the former president Hilda Heine was elected as the president of Marshall Islands, which is the first female head of a state.[21] In 2021, Fiame Naomi Mata'afa became Samoa's first women prime minister.[21] For IOs as UN, they not only regard the election of women leaders as a historical progress of Pacific's gender equality, but also look forward to cooperate with them in the issues of gender equality and women empowerment.[21] A female prime minister of Samoa is also benefit to the project of WILS. By advertising the achievement of women politicians, IOs try to convey an idea that Pacific women empowerment has achieved progress, and the women politicians are contributing to the development of their motherland. In sum up, political participant can be an important and efficient method for IOs to make both government, male MPs and

public understand the significance of promoting women empowerment, increasing the proportion of women MPs.

5. Identity constituting

Re-constituting the identity of women in Pacific is another significant approach of IGOs to increase the number of women MPs in this area. Gender identity and role are not changeless. Rather, it is constituted by society and human actions. [22] Not only can people be changed by varying social systems, but also, they are able to transform their gender conceptions and society. [22] The traditional theories of international relations tend to be state-centrism, which neglect the role of IOs in shaping international politics. [23] Instead, recent years scholars especially constructivists have begun to concern about how IGOs constitute the culture of world as independent actors. They constitute the world by—creating categories of action and actors to classify the world; fix meanings of concepts in social world; diffuse and articulate new principles, norms and actors above the world. [11] IGOs have been devoting to reconstitute the women's identity since the 19th century. The first step is to give women equal citizenship and suffrage rights as men. Traditionally, citizenship was gendered. [24] Only independent male can be the ideal citizen in the classical liberal.[25] Since the 19th century, however, IGOs began to initiate a discourse of universal rights which included women, advocating to give women an equal citizenship as men.[24] The legislation of suffrage rights of women in Pacific is related to the colonial history of this area. After the independence of Pacific islands, most states adopted western political system and parliamentarism. The democracy gives women equal civil identities as men, despite the flaws it has. Although Pacific islands are still covered in the shadow of patriarchy, the democratic institution, whose establishment is highly related to the effort of IGOs, gives women the rights of both election and representative, which reconstitute their identity as citizens.

To help women go out of families, the IGOs also seek to promote the employment of Pacific women. The UNDP figured out that the vulnerable and informal work influences women more than men.[26] The lack of income is resulted from the differences of education, years of experience and skill levels, but more driven by discrimination. [26] To narrow the gap, the IGOs provide funds and different projects for the skill training, education and employment promotion. For instance, in Vanuatu, Pacific Women has offered 27 skills training activities in February-June 2019, supporting 423 women with skills development through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in 2019.[27] Research shows that the proportion of women in Pacific exporting business has been risen, in which 32% are CEOs or proprietors and 41% are executives.[28] When women can undertake different kinds of social work instead of only being housewives, their identities also change. It can also help the society to accept that women can also take high level jobs and be politicians and MPs.

Furthermore, in the current world, more emerging issues are concerned by public. To promote gender equality in Pacific parliaments, IGOs have been seeking to reconstitute gender identity in these areas. For example, recent years in Pacific, climate change is a core topic of discussion. IGOs have been devoting into realize and promote the discourse of Pacific women in climate change negotiations. Firstly, they do researches to understand how women be influenced by and react to climate change. UNFCCC argues that in tackling climate change in Pacific, gender equality can be crucial, as women are influenced more and play important role in handling the climate change.[29] UNAIDS also concerns the impact of climate change on Pacific women, paying attention to the voice of women activists in this topic.[30] In early 1990s, the significance of gender in climate change was not realized by IOs.[31] However, in recognition of it, they introduced several means to include gender in climate negotiations.[31] These efforts provide an important idea that women should not only speak in 'women issues'. [31] Instead, they have knowledge and skills in professional field, especially in governing their motherland. Therefore, the identity of Pacific women is re-constituted as specialists, scholars, activists and politicians. Through all those methods to change the traditional views about women, reshape their identity, IGOs seek to create an equal environment for female candidates, making it easier for public to accept and choose a women MP.

6. Conclusion

In sum up, in the topic of gender equality in Pacific parliaments, the role of IGOs is non-negligible. Unlike traditional political actors as national states, they pay more attention to the emerging issues including gender equality. To promote the increase of women MPs in Pacific islands, they support the female candidates by economic donation, political participation and identity constitution, seeking to help more women gain fair opportunity as their men competitors. Some results have been achieved. Due to the efforts of IGOs, the public has been realizing the significance of gender equality and women empowerment, quota campaign also has been bringing into focus. In Pacific, there are also women national leaders for the first time, which marks a great progress of gender equality in this area. This article seeks to clarify the contributions of IGOs' efforts. Theoretically, it explores how international norms and organizations can be effective actors in Pacific gender equality, examine the theory of new-liberal institutionalism; practically, it specifies the role of IGOs' efforts, pointing out that they play a crucial role in the women empowerment of Pacific in the aspect of public policy. However, barriers for women candidates still remain. The intervene of IGOs is also criticized by traditional power. As a result, the proportion of female MPs has not achieved a substantial growth. In the future, as the impact of climate change becomes more urgent to Pacific Island, which threat to women's survival and rights in this area, it will be more worth to discuss how to promote women empowerment, bring Pacific women out of their dilemmas.

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