



University of  
Western Sydney

INSTITUTE FOR  
CULTURE AND SOCIETY

# 2015 Seminar Series

INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE AND SOCIETY

## Coining a New Vocabulary for Gender Equality in Pacific Economies: Community Conversations in the Solomon Islands and Fiji

**Professor Katherine Gibson**

### Abstract

The economic empowerment of women is emerging as a core focus of both economic development and gender equality programs internationally. At the same time there is increasing importance placed on measuring outcomes and quantifying progress towards the goals of development programs. These trends raise significant questions around how well gender differences in economic life are understood, especially in economies dominated by the informal sector and characterised by a highly gendered division of labour, as is the case in many Pacific communities. In this presentation I question how well existing indices of gender equality can reflect the experiences and aspirations of Pacific women and men. Drawing on a paper written with research collaborators Katharine McKinnon, Michelle Carnegie and Claire Rowland, I explore the following questions: how are concepts such as gender equality and economic empowerment understood in this geographical context? what language might express these place-based understandings? and how might local commitments and ideals be achieved or indeed measured? Our paper responds to Boaventura De Sousa Santos' call to recognise and value knowledges of the majority world that have been rendered either largely invisible or non-credible by modern development agendas. Reflecting on an action research project conducted with partner organisations in Fiji and the Solomon islands that was funded by an Australian Development Research Award, I explore how local aspirations for gender equality and local forms of economic engagement in the diverse economy can form the basis for a more nuanced approach to women's economic empowerment.

### Biography

**Katherine Gibson** is a Professorial Research Fellow in the Institute for Culture and Society. She is an economic geographer with an international reputation for innovative research on economic transformation and over 30 years' experience of working with communities to build resilient economies. Her most recent books are *Take back the economy: an ethical guide for transforming our communities*, co-authored with Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy (University of Minnesota Press, 2013) and *Making other worlds possible: performing diverse economies*, co-edited with Gerda Roelvink and Kevin St Martin (University of Minnesota Press, 2015). The project on which this paper is based was funded by an AusAID Australian Development Research Award 'Measuring Gender Equality Outcomes of Economic Growth in the Pacific: Working with Communities to Develop Indicators that Monitor Change'.

Date

Thursday 19 March

Time

11.30am – 1pm

Venue

EB.2.21 Parramatta (South)  
Campus