



**GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS**

**NATIONAL REVIEW**

**Twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
adoption of the  
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)**

**June 2019**

## Introduction

This report presents the national progress on measures and action undertaken in the Cook Islands to further achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women, in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The first decade of the new millennium was tumultuous for the people of the Cook Islands. The migration of families to New Zealand and Australia after the government reform programme in the late 1990's and the movement of people from the Pa Enua to Rarotonga have changed the composition and location of our population and challenged the delivery of core services to remote islands and atolls. The global economic crisis late in the first decade affected the mainstays of the economy; tourism, agriculture and offshore banking.

We have however risen to the challenges. Significant achievements have been made particularly in education, health and expanding employment opportunities. The Cook Islands is on track to achieve the majority of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 – one of the few Pacific countries to do so and has made significant progress against the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The initiatives of Government are guided by the National Policy on Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) 2011-2016. It embodies a vision of a society in which social justice enables all individuals to live in dignity, to enjoy their human rights, achieve their full potential and contribute to the development and the wellbeing of society. The vision reflects a society where women and girls have equal access to and benefits from the development and growth of our country and where women and girls are protected from all forms of discrimination and violence. We will not achieve this vision without narrowing the gender gap and improving the status of women.

The gender gap is narrowing, with successes in health, education and employment. Progress has been made in addressing major issues of concern to society such as gender based violence and expansion in the coverage of the social welfare system. Women have been the drivers of much of this progress with their prominent roles in social and family life now much broader in being the drivers of reform based on societal concerns.

Many challenges still remain, including providing a secure economic base for the country, dealing with environmental issues, and securing family safety. This assessment provides an opportunity to assess our progress and reinvigorate our commitment towards achieving gender equality in the Cook Islands.

The report is structured according to the guiding questions provided as suggested in the '*Guidance note for the preparation of national reviews*' and is presented in four sections with respective Annexes, as follows:

- *Section One:* Overview analysis of achievements and challenges since 1995
- *Section Two:* Progress in the implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action since 2009
- *Section Three:* Data and Statistics

## Section One: Priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks since Beijing 1995

### A) MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

There have been a number of major achievements in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Cook Islands since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. These include:

- Increased support by the Cook Islands Government to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Cook Islands against international and regional standards through adoption of the Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2011-2016) and currently 2019 - 2024
- Significant achievement in education and health outcomes for women and girls with the Cook Islands on track to achieve the majority of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 – one of the few Pacific countries to do so;
- Significant efforts targeted at addressing barriers to women's participation in the labour force, particularly in relation to employment laws, maternity protection and an increase in the access of women into senior and management positions in the public and private sectors.
- Significant efforts targeted to the reduction in violence against women and girls including the review of existing legislation and identification of improved legislative protections, greater public awareness and shift in behaviour on the non-acceptability of violence against women and girls, and the completion of a comprehensive study on the prevalence of gender based violence in the Cook Islands in 2013

#### **National Policy on Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment**

The Cook Islands Government accepts that gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, the Cook Islands Government has progressively shown its commitment to be a responsible manager of social and human rights of Cook Islanders and a responsible member of the international community through the ratification of a number of human rights instruments.

At the international level, the Cook Islands has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1997, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1997 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008. Commitment was made to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, and report against the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

The Cook Islands Government has signed on to agreements in the Pacific region such as the Pacific Platform of Action for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005-2015, adopted the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration in 2012 and the Moana Declaration in 2013.

Most recently, the Pacific leaders restated at the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in September 2014 commitment as part of a global UN process to eliminate all forms of gender-based discrimination, inequality and violence; achieve the full human rights of women; and promote women's economic empowerment and equal participation in leadership and decision making within the SAMOA Pathway.

Ultimately, achievement of these commitments must come from national action. The first Cook Islands National Policy on Women was adopted in 1995. When it was reviewed in 2010, it showed that there had been visible improvements in access to health and education and an increased involvement of women in the labour force. It also recognised that disadvantages remained in terms of women's relative restricted access to economic and political participation, generally lower pay and earning capacity, and some remaining and subtle forms of gender bias. For these reasons, the Cook Islands Government committed to a revised approach to ensure gender equality commitments are fulfilled within the core of Government's business rather than on the periphery. This required a shift from focusing solely on women's development towards a mainstreaming approach of women and men working together to address gender inequality within the nation's national development strategies and priorities.

Arising from that review, and the need to mainstream and work in a multi-sectoral approach the Cook Islands Government adopted the National Policy on Women to National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in 2011 to better reflect the required broad based approach. This policy identifies six priority areas to guide stakeholder efforts to build on achievement gained since 1995 and to further target areas where good outcomes were elusive.

In order to achieve gender equality in the Cook Islands and further empower women, the National policy identified six priority areas:

1. Gender-responsive Government's programs and policies
2. Equitable participation of women and men in decision-making and governance systems
3. Enabling environment for the full participation of women in economic development
4. Improved capacity of women to contribute to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies
5. Improved capacity of women to address health issues
6. Elimination of violence against women

A five-year Strategic Plan of Action was also developed to support the implementation of the Policy with a series of outputs and key actions identified in order to achieve the outcomes. Monitoring systems such as the establishment of a National Steering Committee to monitor the progress against the plan and the establishment of six taskforces to focus on each of the priority areas but there were challenges encountered at the effectiveness of these committees.

The implementation of the Policy required the active involvement and contribution of the Government, nongovernment, civil society organizations and communities. Some of the outcomes, output and actions proposed in the 2011 – 2016 Policy were incorporated in key planning and budgeting processes at the national, sectoral and agency levels. The successful implementation of the monitoring and reporting framework across government systems, however, remained a key challenge of effective mainstreaming of gender issues.

### **Review of National Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (NPGewe) 2011 – 2016**

During the review of the NPGewe in 2018, it revealed some progresses towards achieving the goals set in 2011. It also highlighted areas of concern, challenges and barriers and new emerging issues that have formed the priorities in the new NPGewe 2019-2023.

#### **1. Gender-responsive Government’s programs and policies**

Gender mainstreaming into Government programs, policies and budget remains a work in progress but the endorsement of the Family Protection and Support Act in 2017 was one significant achievement for the Cook Islands as this legislation establishes protection measures for women, girls and children. Goal 9 of the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan 2015 – 2020 include Accelerate Gender equality empower all women and girls, and advance the rights of youth, the elderly and disabled.

#### **2. Equitable participation of women and men in decision-making and governance systems**

There have been an improved number of women who have entered leadership positions in politics, local government and high-level decision making bodies in government with 60% of the public service comprised of women. Women’s representation in politics has increased since 2011 with 17% women parliamentarians with one holding a ministerial post, 14% in local governance.

#### **3. Enabling environment for the full participation of women in economic development**

Cook Island families tend to combine full-time and part-time work (private or public sector) with small business and other agriculture or marine food production activities. More women operate within the informal sector, particularly in the Pa Enua, operating small business at the markets. This provides some women with the flexibility and freedom to engage in work that revolves around the immediate needs of the family, while utilizing their traditional skills and knowledge e.g. handicrafts, weaving, tivaevae. A prime source of revenue for many women living in the Pa Enua.

The labour force participation rate for women has increased steadily over the years, however significant challenges remain. Women tend to do more unpaid work than men; as primary caregivers of children, elderly, and other vulnerable people, they are responsible for 75% of all domestic duties<sup>1</sup>. This limits women in their pursuit of professional careers, promotions, or in business start-ups.

#### **4. Improved capacity of women to contribute to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies**

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<sup>1</sup>Census Report 2011

Climate change and natural disaster impacts all facets of life in the Cook Islands, however these phenomena do affect men and women differently. Women, children, elderly, and people with disabilities are more vulnerable during, and after, cyclones and other natural disasters, therefore improving our resilience and preparedness must begin with them.

The 2016-2020 Joint National Action Plan II (JNAP) is a collaborative and sectoral plan that integrates climate change and disaster risk management in the Cook Islands. The guiding principles of the plan highlights the alignment to the National Sustainable Develop Plan (NSDP) and Target 13.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Equal participation of women and girls in policy and programme-making according to the JNAP is not specifically mentioned however it is general an agreed practice to include all members of Society especially in the Outer Islands – ‘Pa Enuā’ as the risks is greater for these small islets given their vulnerability.

The Cook Islands has adopted the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the UNFCCC objectives – in On 1 September 2016 the Cook Islands deposited its instrument of ratification of the Paris Agreement with the United Nations; numerous other international and regional obligations including the Kyoto Protocol, the Framework for Resilient Development Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, which is highlighted and incorporated into the II JNAP.

The engagement of women in the engineering, scientific and technology-related occupations that are employed in addressing the effects of climate is encouraged and of equal opportunity. This is reflected through the employment of women in key technical agencies such as the National Environment Services and Ministry of Marine Resources.

The recognition and linkage of the International agreements and Frameworks (referred to in 14.2) into National Plan development processes ensures that women and girls are not subjected to discrimination, are protected against gender-based violence in evacuation centres and adequately represented in disaster preparedness and response structures.

Strategy 9 - Human Health and Welfare of the II JNAP outlines the need for key agencies and stakeholders to develop and resource a gender-responsive contingency plan to maintain emergency medical supplies, including the special needs of vulnerable groups. The development of the contingency plan is pending.

## **5. Improved capacity of women to address health issues**

In the Crimes Bill (Amendments to Crimes Act 1969) Subpart 2 of Part 6, abortion is decriminalized in the context of a lawful medical procedure, clause 72(1) of the Bill further defines it. Clause 72(2) provides that the age of the pregnant person and whether the pregnancy is a result of a sexual offence may be taken into account when determining whether the pregnancy would be a serious danger to the life, or physical or mental health of

the pregnant person. It will remain an offence to carry out or to procure an abortion that is not a lawful medical procedure.

The Ministry of Health is currently making a submission to the process of amendments to the Crimes Act regarding the decriminalization of abortion and this work is pending. In addition, the Cook Islands Family Welfare Association (CIFWA) has also conducted public consultations in preparation for their submission to the process since 2017.

There exists no restriction or prohibition by policy or legislation for the provision of contraception to the Cook Islands population, currently there is a process that allows for the access of contraceptive products for girls below the age of 16.

The Ministry of Health is guided by the Cook Islands Integrated National Strategic Plan for Sexual and Reproductive health by way of programs and sustained-awareness activities to ensure the delivery of high-quality age, gender and culturally appropriate risk prevention education; upskilling of health professionals, education of political and traditional leaders, and accessibility and availability of testing as means to combat issues including early pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

The Cook Islands Mental Health and Well-being Policy 2015 is yet to be reviewed, however the principles of the CEDAW Convention is highlighted under the Human Rights section of the overarching principles of the Policy which provides guidance into its implementation.

## **6. Elimination of violence against women**

The Family Protection and Support Act 2017 commenced on 1 December 2017. It is a comprehensive piece of legislation which addresses no fault divorce, domestic and child support, parenting arrangements, care and protection of children and domestic violence in Part 6. The purposes of Part 6 of the FPS Act are to ensure the protection of victims of domestic violence, to recognize that domestic violence in all its forms is unacceptable behavior and to prevent domestic violence. Domestic violence is defined to include economic abuse, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse and stalking. There is a regime of civil procedures for the making of protection orders, police safety orders, provisions for the service of protection orders to ensure the continued safety of victims, authorising the occupation of the family home and compensation for injuries losses and expenses. If the respondent challenges the making of the orders there is provision for evidence to be taken from the protected person at the discretion of the Court in writing, orally behind a screen, or from a different locality using technology. The Police have statutory obligations under Part 6. Applicants under Part 6 are exempt from payment of fees for proceedings. Parliament passed the Harassment Act 2017 to provide protection against violence and abuse when there is no domestic relationship.

The Family Protection and Support Regulations 2017 (FPS Regulations) were promulgated to commence on 1 December 2017. It provides for user friendly forms so that applicants in the outer islands in particular are able to make applications with the assistance of the Registrar in those islands because of the lack of legal advisers. It also enables applicants in Rarotonga to make applications without having to go to a lawyer and for applications to be dealt with by Justices of the Peace.

The Police have been issuing Police Safety Orders. Since 1 December 2017, Police Safety Orders were issued. A temporary protection order has been made and breached. The Police have received advice about prosecuting breaches of Police Safety Orders and protection orders.

It is too early to assess the effectiveness of Police Safety Orders and Protection Orders but anecdotally the community are relieved to have this assistance so easily accessible. The first appearance of a respondent who has breached a Temporary Protection Order will occur this week in the High Court.

#### *Crimes Amendment Bill 2017*

Part 6 of the Bill provides for Crimes against the person and is non-gender specific. Subpart 2 partially decriminalizes abortion to enable abortion in certain circumstances by a medical practitioner. In Subpart 8, stalking is an offence and it may be possible to prosecute a person under clause 100(3) (k) who sexually harasses a person. Subpart 9 addresses abduction and kidnapping and specifically abduction for marriage or sexual connection. Subpart 10 deals with female genital mutilation, which although not a cultural norm in the Cook Islands, the community is concerned that the Cook Islands does not become a safe haven for people for whom such activity is acceptable.

Subpart 11 (Sexual offences) of Part 6 of the Bill provides for the offence of sexual violation which means “rape” or “unlawful sexual connection”. Rape is limited to the sexual connection of a person’s penis into the genitalia of a female without consent or an honest and reasonable belief in consent of the female person. Unlawful sexual connection is defined as sexual connection other than rape without the consent or an honest and reasonable belief in the consent of the person involved in the sexual connection. The rape by a husband of his wife is criminalized.

The Bill criminalizes stalking and grooming a person under 16 years old and extends to unlawful sexual activity by a Cook Islander or Cook Islands resident outside the Cook Islands with a person under 16 years old.

#### **7. Education and Health Outcomes**

Significant achievements have been in education and health. The Cook Islands is on track to achieve the majority of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 – one of the few Pacific countries to do so.

Access to basic education is universal. A high proportion (over 90 per cent) of children remains in school until Year 11, or about 15 years of age. The minimum age of leaving school was increased to 16 years of age in 2012 (Education Act 2012).

Girls are achieving better results than boys. In 2011, it was found that boys were lagging behind girls in every aspect of literacy tested in the Cook Islands schools. Childhood literacy testing in the Cook Islands starts with English and Maori reading and at Year 4 where the gender gap was 13 per cent for English and 7 per cent for Maori.

At senior secondary school girls are achieving better than boys, but boys have a wider range of local training opportunities than girls. Despite better performance, the statistics show that girls are not moving into the labour force after completing schooling and more research is required to find out why this is happening in terms of their 'work readiness', the jobs available and the jobs they want to do and if remuneration doesn't meet expectations.

The overall health indicators have considerably improved in the last decades. Health care services are more accessible and the care of better quality. The Cook Islands has made great strides in reducing the maternal mortality ratio and infant mortality rate to zero and the reproductive health standards are good.

## **8. Empowering women in economic participation**

Over the past 10 years, women are increasingly active in the labour force in full- and part-time work. Two different groups of women are emerging: on the one hand some are well trained and educated career women breaking through the glass ceilings into highly skilled occupations; and on the other the majority of women work in relatively low skilled jobs in the retail and tourism sector. Both groups constantly juggle the demands of work and family responsibilities. The number of years women and men are economically active has become longer in the last 10 years, with fewer women and men retiring before age 65 years. The number of women and men in part-time work is increasing, as women and men find work to provide incomes and balance work and family life; although women still are the majority of part-time workers.

Amendments to employment relations legislation and the passing of the Employment Relations Act 2012 have had positive impacts on working conditions for women. On the 1 January 2013, the Cook Islands Government funded paid maternity leave benefiting women in the private sector commenced. Women in the public sector were already guaranteed this protection through public service policy. This payment will assist employers with the costs of allowing women employees in the private sector to take paid leave from their job(s) to recover from giving birth to a baby.

Expansion in the coverage of the social welfare payments included the carer's allowances in 2008, and a significant increase in the born baby bonus on 1 November 2010 from \$300 to \$1000 on the birth of a child.

The growing number of women in non-agriculture wage is expected to increase consistently. Since the initial MDG report (2005), the percentage change has improved from 38% in 1991 to 55% in 2007. This is a 44.7% change over the last 16 years, or an average annual improvement rate of 2.8%. These figures confirm that more women are becoming self-employed and create businesses dealing in tourism, retail, arts and other enterprises.

In 2012, two of the 14 government ministries were headed by women, two of five legislated department heads were women and half of the 10 Crown agencies were headed by women. Currently, six of the 14 government ministries are headed by women, and half of the 10 Crown agencies are headed by women. Two of the 10 Island Executive Officers are headed by women. One Island Mayor is a woman. The first female judge from New Zealand was appointed to serve in the Cook Islands High Court in 2013. The percentage of women appointees on all statutory boards and committees have currently increased.

Over the past 10 years the Census indicates that there has been a narrowing in the gender wage gap; but the gap remains. The Public Service Commission has recently completed 'job sizing' the entire public service which has highlighted the gender differences in government – not all men and women doing the same kind of work are paid the same amount.

## **9. Efforts to address violence against women and girls**

Victims of domestic violence are predominantly women and children. Reducing violence within families and minimising its impact on women and children are long-standing priorities for the Cook Islands Government. A dedicated National Task force is established to oversee the implementation of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women priority outcome on elimination of violence against women (2011-2016).

Government-led initiatives undertaken since 1995 include legislative review and amendments to promote gender equality such as the enactment of the Employment Relations Act 2012 and the development of a comprehensive civil Family Law Bill to modernise and bring together the different pieces of legislation that currently govern family law in the Cook Islands. The Family Law Bill will also increase the protection from domestic violence for women and children. Amendments of the Crimes Act 1969 are expected to be tabled in Parliament in the next sitting.

The National Policy on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Strategic Plan of Action 2011-2016 includes the elimination of violence against women as one of the policy priority outcomes.

A national survey on the prevalence, causes and consequences of violence against women in the Cook Islands was conducted in 2013. The Cook Islands Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Cook Islands National Council of Women conducted a survey on

Family Health and Safety in the period November 2012 to April 2013. This survey aimed to obtain reliable data on the prevalence and frequency of different types of VAW in the Cook Islands. Among other objectives, the study also sought to document the associations between partner violence with health issues and other outcomes, and to identify risk and protective factors for partner violence.

The Cook Islands Police, supported by development partners, has set up a Domestic Violence Unit in response to the increasing incidence. Also in place is a '**No Drop Policy**', where offenders will still be processed through the court system even if the partner wishes to withdraw the charge.

Since the Domestic Violence Unit was established in 2007, police procedures for dealing with domestic violence have been revised in line with external and internal review recommendations. Training and mentoring for officers dealing with domestic violence incidents has been ongoing and sensitive to victim experiences. The number of complaints reported to the Domestic Violence Unit is increasing as awareness in the community grows that domestic violence is a crime, and although there is still a high level of underreporting and secrecy around the issue more victims are seeking assistance from the Police.

An increasing proportion of relatives and neighbours are reporting domestic violence incidents to the Police, perhaps the beginning of a shift from the perception that domestic violence is a strictly private, family matter. Advocacy, awareness and community outreach activities are paying off and more women are receiving police assistance with associated referral to counselling and other social services.

Non-government Organisation continue to play an important role, not only in raising awareness about women's human rights and the legislative measures for the elimination of violence against women, but also in supporting the mobilisation of women at the community level – especially in the outer islands. The Punanga Tauturu Inc. (PTI) has and is in the forefront of addressing the issue of domestic and sexual violence in providing support services and protection of victims.

The Rotaianga Men's support Centre was established to help men with any problems they have in their relationships with their families and in the community as an initiative to involve men as partners to stop violence against women. Their programme is based on biblical principles and their services include: mentoring, support groups for discussion about specific issues; addressing violent, abusive, angry outbursts or actions, home life skills, work skills and social skills.

## **B) MAJOR CHALLENGES**

Women of the Cook Islands have witnessed many changes in the last decades toward the improvement of their status and rights, greater access to education and employment and access to high level management positions in Government Institutions. However, there are still remaining gender inequalities that require the mobilization of all sectors of the society in order to eliminate those inequalities.

The challenges which persist despite significant activity since 1995 include:

- Mainstreaming gender equality in Government's policies and programs
- Low participation of women in high level decision making and leadership, particularly at the political level
- Persistence of violence against women

### **Gender equality perspective is **not effectively mainstreamed** in Government's Policies and Programs**

There have been several successful initiatives to address women's issues and reduce gender inequalities in the last few decades in several sectors. However, gender equality perspective is not systematically integrated in the policies and programs of the central and local government and through the sectors.

The gender stocktake of the Government conducted in 2009-2010 reveals that gender issues are rarely discussed as development issues among government agencies and gender equality is not mainstreamed across the sectors. With the exception of the Education and Health sectors, there is little production and use of sex disaggregated data and gender analysis for guiding policy making, programs design and service delivery.

There is no effective accountability system for mainstreaming gender at the institutional and individual levels. The technical capacity to conduct gender analysis and mainstream gender is generally low in all sectors. The coordination of initiatives for addressing women's human rights is weak and collaboration with the national women machinery is very limited. The financial and human resources for mainstreaming gender are largely insufficient.

This has meant that the Gender and Development office is firstly working towards increasing capacity for gender mainstreaming of government policy makers, managers and professionals as well as its own capacity in its role of monitoring and evaluation, coordination and providing technical advice. The Gender office in the Ministry of Internal Affairs is working with development partners to assess how best to implement mainstreaming in government agencies in the Cook Islands. A cautious approach has been adopted being mindful of lessons learnt when the capacity of government agencies to mainstream gender and develop gender sensitive policies and analysis is not in place before mainstreaming is introduced

### **Low participation of women in high level decision making and leadership**

Traditional gender stereotypes inhibit gender equality and the empowerment of women in all the critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action. Gender stereotypes limit the developments and the achievements that women and men can accomplish in all the social, economic and political spheres of society, since through gender stereotypes, rigid stereotypes are assigned to women and men. Hence the participation of women, or men, in areas that are typically dominated by a particular gender, many limited.

Public governance is one of the arenas where inequality between men and women is highly visible. Limited female participation in structures of governance where key policy decisions are made and resource allocations decided often has a negative impact on women's political, economic and social opportunities.

There were a record of candidates in the 2010 general election but there was low representation of women. Ten women stood for the national election compared with 60 men, 86 per cent of the candidates were men. This means that 38 per cent of men standing were elected compared to 10 per cent of women.

Currently, in Parliament there are four women Member of Parliaments out of twenty four seats. The Speaker of Parliament has been appointed by the Government to a person outside of the legislature and is a women, thus raising representation of women in Parliament to five of twenty five (20%).

The difficulties of combining family life, work life and politics remain a severe obstacle to women seeking political office. Among the political challenges that women face, the prevalence of the "masculine model" of political life and lack of party support feature prominently. In particular, the barriers to the political participation of women at the local level may be related to lack of community support, lack of family co-responsibility within households to release women from unpaid household work, little recognition and legitimacy allocated to their contribution within public power spheres, and the lack of economic resources to pursue a candidature.

### **Persistence of violence against women**

The 2014 Cook Islands Family Health and Safety Survey key findings reports that:

- Nearly one in three ever-partnered women (32%) in the Cook Islands has ever experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner.
- Almost 30% of women have ever experienced physical partner violence. The most common acts of physical violence reported were being 'slapped or having something thrown at her' and being 'pushed and shoved'.
- Slightly over 13% of women have ever experienced sexual partner violence, including forced sexual intercourse; being afraid to say no to sexual intercourse because of what partner might do; and being forced to perform degrading or humiliating sexual acts.
- By region, 44% of women in the Southern Group, 27% in Rarotonga, and 23% in the Northern Group reported experiencing physical and/or sexual partner violence at some point in their lives.

Reducing violence within families and its impact on women and children continues to be a priority for the Government and the non-government sector. Continuing work to improve the data collections, a national coordination's mechanisms need to be in place and strengthen capacity of service providers to work in partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders.

### **C) MAJOR SETBACKS**

The 1996 and 2001 government restructuring and economic reforms resulted in many families emigrating to New Zealand and Australia. The effect of out migration is noticeable in 30 – 39 year age group for both males and females. Cook Islands population is getting older, with women making up 5 per cent of the 9 per cent of people aged 65 years and over in 2011 compared with 3 per cent for both sexes in 2001.

In recent years Government has been bringing families back through an incentive based resettlement programme and this, combined with an expanding range of economic opportunities in the Cook Islands seems to have slowed up the population loss through migration.

### **D) ADVERSE CONSTITUTIONAL, LEGISLATIVE AND LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS**

Delays in the passage of the Family Law Bill and Crimes Act Amendments have resulted in slower progress against commitments made in the National Policy on Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment. Fortunately, the Family Protection and Support Act enacted in 2017 and its enforcement, has helped minimise the domestic violence faced by women and girls.

### **E) SHARE OF THE NATIONAL BUDGET**

In the absence of gender analysis, it is not possible to identify the true allocation of the Cook Islands national budget towards gender equality and women's empowerment, which is responsibility shared across ministries. It is also difficult to identify the true allocation of the benefits gained by gender from the National Budget expenditure.

While not a true reflection of the budget allocated to gender equality and women's empowerment, funding allocated to the Gender office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is identifiable. In fiscal 2013/2014, the Gender office, one of ten divisions in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, was allocated a budget provision of NZ\$77,427 (just under 10% of the total Ministry budget). The budget covers two full time positions and operational costs.

In addition, the Gender office received various donor funded initiatives and projects between 2009 and 2013 which include UNDP funds, towards the development of the Family Law Bill worth \$100,000 (2009-2014); UN Women funds towards the consultancy of writing the government CEDAW periodical report worth \$16,000 (2010-2012); UNFPA funds towards the production of IEC materials to promote the findings from the Family Health & Safety Study worth \$9,000 (2014); Australia Government funding on a gender project to eliminate violence against women and economic empowerment of women worth \$455,000 over three years (2013/2014) and 2016-2018

Efforts to enhance national capacity in relation to gender responsive budgeting has been challenging and reflect the difficulties of mainstreaming gender across Government responsibilities. Various government officials in planning and finance have had the opportunities to participate in regional training workshops on how to conduct gender

responsive budgeting in the national budget process. Further technical assistant is required. As a mainstreaming issue, this remains a major challenge.

## **F) MECHANISMS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY DIALOGUE**

The task force and working committees established for the monitoring of the implementation of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and the five year strategic action plan 2011-2016 provides the mechanism for structured and regular dialogue between Government and civil society on matters related to policy, programmes, projects and legislations.

There have been quarterly stakeholder meetings on international gender issues through a caucus forum to provide dialogue opportunities between Government and civil society on matters related to presentations and participation in regional and international conferences or meeting on women's human rights and equality matters. These have not been held in recent years and should be revived.

A National Biennial Women's Conference held every two years is a joint coordination effort between the National Council of Women and the Gender Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This conference reviews national and islands work plans in relations to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Despite not having a formal mechanism in place to report against progress on the Beijing Platform of Action, or other international commitments, the Gender office has a good working relationship with non-governmental organisations, including civil society organisations, women's organisations, faith based organisation and the private sector.

The Gender office consults with these organisations when formulating and/or implementing initiatives or measures that further promote gender equality in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as reporting requirements fall due. It also partners with various organisations when carrying out specific initiatives to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of such measures through the sharing of expertise and knowledge on equal treatment or on particular areas in which these organisations work.

## **G) SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE ON MONITORING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

As one of the key players in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, the Gender office regularly engages with relevant stakeholders, and in so doing, keeps them updated with information on development in relation to equality, and on a regular basis and other information disseminate through various media, website, updates on equality and on initiatives carried out by the Gender office through social media and meetings with stakeholders when appropriate.

Through such efforts, the Gender office not only seeks to share and disseminate information on equality, but to also acquire further knowledge on current developments and needs at local and island levels. Such cooperation is valued by the Gender office since, apart from further awareness on equality, the Gender office is also better able to understand the

challenges that need to be addressed in order to enhance gender equality, and to develop and implement initiatives to further safeguard gender equality.

As expected under the National Policy, better sharing of knowledge on monitoring and implementation of initiatives to progress achievement against the Beijing Plan of Action would act as an important catalyst to spread ownership and accountability of the objectives across partners.

## **Section Two: Progress in the implementation of the critical Areas of Concern of the Platform for Action**

### **Critical Area A: Women and Poverty**

The Millennium Development Goals progress reports for 2005 and 2010 state that there is no extreme poverty in the Cook Islands; however the data indicate that there is a large proportion of the rural population heavily reliant on subsistence to meet their basic needs and a proportion of the urban population which depend on social welfare benefits to make ends meet. This is evident in the poverty indicators derived from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) of 2005-06, the Census data on the incomes of persons aged 15 years and over and social welfare payments made.

Three regions were used for poverty analysis of the HIES data – Rarotonga, Southern Group and Northern Group. The poverty line for Rarotonga was NZ\$117.95, in the Southern Group it was NZ\$74.91 and NZ\$49.23 for the Northern Group. This variation in the poverty lines shows the lower price values of subsistence food production in the rural areas, notably the north, the size and scope of the ‘cash’ or ‘formal’ economy in Rarotonga compared to the rural islands where it is not possible to purchase the range of goods and services as it is in Rarotonga.

Applying these poverty lines to the data and looking at the sex of the household head shows that the sex of the head of household is not a good indicator of in poverty in Rarotonga, and to a lesser extent in the Southern Group. In Rarotonga 18% of the households headed by women were below the poverty line, compared with 24% of the households headed by males.

An analysis of the relative distribution of household income by the sex of the household head from 2005-06 showed that female headed households are living very closely to the poverty lines. In Rarotonga 27% of households were headed by women, but households headed by women made up 32% of the households in the lowest 20% of household expenditure in Rarotonga. This means that about three out of every 10 of the lowest spending households in Rarotonga had a female household head, and one in four had a female head in the Southern Group (25%).

The Cook Islands Government through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Welfare Division is responsible for providing a safety net for people in need through the administration of the Welfare Act 1989. Additional assistance is provided to vulnerable people through home visits, special assistance projects, caregivers’ allowances and grants to service providers including civil society organisations.

Under the government funded social welfare system includes transfer payments in the form of: Child benefits; Destitute and Infirm payments; Carer’s allowance; Pension power subsidy; and a one-off baby bonus payment of \$1,000 is provided to mothers on the birth of a child.

## **Critical Area B: Education and Training of Women**

Access to basic education is good. A high proportion (over 90 per cent) of children is in school until Year 11, or about 15 years of age. The minimum age of leaving school is 16 years of age (Education Act 2012).

Girls are achieving better results than boys. In 2011, it was found that boys were lagging behind girls in every aspect of literacy tested in the Cook Islands schools. Childhood literacy testing in the Cook Islands starts with English and Maori reading and at Year 4 where the gender gap was 13 per cent for English and 7 per cent for Maori.

At senior secondary school girls are achieving better than boys, but boys have a wider range of local training opportunities than girls. The Ministry of Education is committed to extending the range of alternative learning programmes to increase retention, particularly of boys with stronger links between junior secondary school and alternative learning pathways through TVET or senior secondary level.

The Ministry of Education faces a considerable challenge in improving the gender balance of its early childhood education and primary school teachers, and to a lesser extent at secondary level. Strategies to increase the number of male teachers at all levels of education can only be developed when the underlying reasons that teaching is not considered to be a 'male' occupation are identified.

## **Critical Area C: Women and Health**

The overall health indicators have considerably improved in the last decades. Health care services are more accessible and the care of better quality. The Cook Islands Government in partnership with Civil Society and NGO has made great strides in reducing the maternal mortality ratio and infant mortality rate and the reproductive health standards are good.

There has been no case of maternal mortality since 1993. The infant mortality rate (IMR) was 7.1 per 1000 live births in 2009; mostly caused by extreme birth, the country's expanded programme on immunisation achieves very high rates of coverage, with 100 per cent coverage in 2011. The IMR has been estimated at an average of 10.2 per the period 2001-2012; for males and 7.0 for females. This is an improvement from the shorter period 1996-2001 where the IMR was estimated at 21 and for the period 2001-2006 estimate of 14.

The 2012 Cook Islands Ministry of Health Statistical Bulletin show the prevalence of contraceptive use is approximately 44 per cent. However, the adolescent fertility rate is as high as 68 births for 1000 women amongst women aged between 15 to 19 years. In addition, concern remains in the consistent prevalence of STI's among our young men and women which reach 46 per cent.

Women's enjoyment of their reproductive rights needs improvements. Amendments have been made to the existing Ministry of Health consent form for sterilization which requires

clients' consent and signature, however, an ongoing issue is the actual practice of some Health Officials who still insist that the husband's approval is required.

#### **Critical Area D: Violence against Women**

The elimination of violence against women is the sixth outcome priority of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Ongoing initiatives includes awareness raising about women's human rights, review of the legislation and current services; building capacity to respond to the needs and protect the victims, particularly in the outer islands and involving men as partners to stop violence against women.

Violence against women is an extreme manifestation of gender inequality and the power differences that exist between men and women. The Cook Islands Family Health and Safety Study undertaken in 2013 (not yet published) has provided comprehensive statistics on the prevalence of violence against women in terms of the magnitude, patterns, and forms of violence, attitudes towards violence, the impact of violence on women and families, and women's responses to domestic violence. The most widespread forms of violence against women are intimate partner violence and domestic violence in general.

Physical violence against women and girls perpetrated by men other than intimate partners is widespread, mostly by immediate family members, but not enough is known about whether this physical violence is a result of gender norms or because this is the prevalent form of discipline for both girls and boys by both males and females (although mothers or stepmothers are the most common perpetrators).

Regardless, physical violence is not an acceptable form of discipline. This norm is changing: the 2012 Education Act bans any use of corporal punishment by staff towards students in education institutions. In addition, the issue of corporal punishment in the home is included in the Crimes Act Review policy paper; however it is not clear whether this will be included in the revision as the draft for the Revised Crime Acts is not yet available.

Since the Domestic Violence Unit was established in 2007, police procedures for dealing with domestic violence have been revised in line with external and internal review recommendations. Training and mentoring for officers dealing with domestic violence incidents has been ongoing and sensitive to victim experiences. The number of complaints reported to the Domestic Violence Unit is increasing as awareness in the community grows that domestic violence is a crime, and although there is still a high level of underreporting and secrecy around the issue more victims are seeking assistance from the Police. An increasing proportion of relatives and neighbours are reporting domestic violence incidents to the Police, perhaps the beginning of a shift from the perception that domestic violence is a strictly private, family matter. Advocacy, awareness and community outreach activities are paying off and more women are receiving police assistance with associated referral to counselling and other social services.

The Family Protection and Support Act encompasses violence against women and most specifically, domestic violence; as well as a range of sections to protect the human rights of women, children, victims and survivors. The Act covers settlement of affairs for marriage

and de facto relationship dissolution; duties and responsibilities of parents relating to the care, protection, welfare, best interests, and development of children; procedures for resolution of issues regarding family relations through negotiation and agreement; and the safety and protection of adults and children in domestic relationships. The Family Act was developed according to 'progressive realisation' principles and obligations of the Cook Islands as a signatory to CEDAW, CRC and CRPD.

### **Critical Area E: Women and Armed Conflict**

In 2007, the Cook Islands withdrew the reservation made in relation to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to Article 11(2)(b) regarding women's recruitment into or service in the Armed Forces and law enforcement agencies 'in situations involving violence or threats of violence.'

The Cook Islands do not have a defence force. However, through the support and financial assistances of the Australia and New Zealand Government, the Cook Islands Police involvement in regional peacekeeping activities began in 2001. Since the establishment of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2003, nearly 22 Cook Islands Police personnel, 18 male and 4 female have had the opportunity to participate and be trained in armed conflict situation and serve up to nine months per mission assignments for RAMSI.

This reflects the Cook Islands Government compliances to CEDAW and implementation of BPA and of the Resolution 1325 to appropriate representation of female in the police force in peacekeeping missions.

### **Critical Area F: Women and the Economy**

An enabling environment for the full participation of women in economic development is the third outcome priority of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. This will require the identification of new livelihood options and economic opportunities for women, building the business management and marketing capacity of entrepreneurs, facilitating access to markets for outer islands, adopting legislation on paid maternity leave for all working women, encouraging the establishment of measures to support working parents and breastfeeding mothers, promote the development of infrastructure and access to technologies to reduce women's workload, ensure economic development strategies are gender responsive so that both women and men contribute to and benefit from the economic development of the country.

Over the past 10 years, women are increasingly active in the labour force in full- and part-time work. Two different groups of women are emerging: on the one hand some are well trained and educated career women breaking through the glass ceilings into highly skilled occupations; and on the other the majority of women work in relatively low skilled jobs in the retail and tourism sector. Both groups constantly juggle the demands of work and family responsibilities.

The number of years women and men are economically active has become longer in the last 10 years, with fewer women and men retiring before age 65 years. The number of women and men in part-time work is increasing, as women and men find work to provide incomes and balance work and family life; although women still are the majority of part-time workers. More research is required about the economic activities of women and men, particularly as part-time workers and whether they have more than one part-time job, whether they work reduced hours because of other family care obligations, what their relative earnings are and so on.

The Cook Islands Employment Relations Act 2012 guarantees maternity protection for female employees in both government and private sectors. In addition, Part 5 of the Act stipulates discrimination, harassment and duress. Prohibits discrimination on the grounds includes gender, age, disability, maternity and health status.

Over the past 10 years the Census indicates that there has been a narrowing in the gender wage gap; but the gap remains. The Public Service Commission has recently completed 'job sizing' the entire public service which has highlighted the gender differences in government – not all men and women doing the same kind of work are paid the same amount.

Young women in the Pa Enua are looking for employment opportunities and economic empowerment. Young women would prefer to stay on outer islands and use local products to produce handicrafts but no market, no business avenues. Prohibitive costs of shipping.

In order to improve women's economic security the Cook Islands Government acknowledge funding support provided from the Australia Government under the Pacific Womens Shaping Pacific Development Initiative for the period 2013-2015 to enable a number of initiatives to strengthen capacity for gender responsive development for an enabling environment for the full participation of women in economic development. This will include identification of new economic opportunities for women; promotion and support of women's businesses in both the formal and informal sections; support of women's access to financial services and other productive assets for the development of their enterprises; and support of the integration of women living with disability in socio-economic development.

### **Critical Area G: Women in Power & Decision Making**

Equitable participation of women in decision-making and governance systems is the second priority outcome of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. This requires encouraging and building women's leadership in every sectors and at every levels, supporting the participation of women in local governance institutions, raising awareness about women's competencies and the benefits of being represented equally by women and men in the government, supporting media's role in promotion an equal representation of women and men in decision making and governance mechanisms, raising awareness of political parties about their role in promoting women participation in politics, reviewing the Electoral Act for creating favourable conditions for the representation of women in the parliament.

There has been no significant improvement in the representation of women in the national parliament of the Cook Islands. There were a record number of candidates in the 2010 general election but there was low representation of women. Ten women contested in the national election compared with 60 men: 86% of the candidates were men. This means that 38% of men standing were elected compared to 10% of women. The recent 2014 general election also had a low representation of women with seven women contesting in the national election compared to 45 men. There were four women elected as members of parliament in 2014, three on the opposition side and one in government.

The Cook Islands essentially has a two party political system, with the Cook Islands Party and the Democratic Party. If there is to be any increase in the representation of women amongst the nations leaders this must first be reflected in increased representation as candidates endorsed by the two main political parties.

In 2010, the Prime Minister appointed a woman as the Speaker of the House of Parliament from outside of parliament.

Public governance is one of the arenas where inequality between men and women is highly visible. Limited female participation in structures of governance where key policy decisions are made and resources allocations decided often has a negative impact on women's political, economic and social opportunities.

Local government in the Cook Islands is outside of the main island of Rarotonga consists of Island administrations elected by popular vote. Women are underrepresented in decision making at the local government level. Currently, there is one female Mayor on the island of Manihiki and one female Island Council member on each of the islands of Manihiki, Mangaia, Mauke, and Mitiaro.

The current initiatives under the Commonwealth Local Governance Fund project managed and implemented by the Cook Islands National Council of Women in partnership with government provides advocacy, mentoring, leadership training workshops and profiling of potential women to participate in the upcoming island governance elections one each of the islands.

### **Critical Area H: Human Rights of Women**

The Cook Islands acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). By acceding to these instruments, the Cook Islands have assumed obligations under international law to respect protect and fulfil the human rights of everyone in the Cook Islands. It has also undertaken to put into place domestic measures and legislation compatible with its obligations under the treaties, and has agreed to submit periodic reports on the measures taken to give effect to its treaty obligations.

In 2008, an agreed systematic programme of legislative reform consistent with CEDAW recommendations was approved by the Cook Islands Government. The progress is as follows:

- a. *Employment Relations Act 2012 enacted.* This Act included the guarantee maternity protection for female employees in both the government and private section, in addition stipulates discrimination, harassment and duress. Prohibited grounds of discrimination on gender and sexual preferences.
- b. *Education Act 2012 enacted.* This Act states that the Education system will ensure that everyone involved is treated with dignity, respect and understanding in a way consistent with the fundamental human rights and freedom stated in the Constitution of the Cook Islands.
- c. *Health Act 2013 enacted.* This Act includes the rights of any person under the care of the Ministry of health.
- d. Family Law Bill 2014 – tabled in Parliament in November 2014, and will be referred for review by a Parliamentary Select Committee.
- e. Crimes Act Amendment Bill 2014 – expected to be tabled in Parliament in December 2014

In the event of unlawful discrimination in respect of persons with disabilities that person may file a complaint to the Ombudsman Office. Under the enacted Cook Islands Disability Act 2008, the Ombudsman jurisdiction is extended to investigate complaints against any person (whether public or private sector) of discrimination against persons with disabilities.

The Cook Islands has benefitted from various human rights awareness and training workshops conducted by numerous technical agencies, this includes the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), Regional Rights Resources Team program. Human rights training have been aimed at equipping government officials with information and understanding on human rights norms and standards to better their understanding and their work. Legal literacy tailored training has enabled Justices of the Peace, lawyers, police officers and service providers learning opportunities to apply human rights norms and standards in their decision making.

### **Critical Area I: Women and the Media**

While there are high levels of participation by women in the media, including in senior managerial roles, many women face barriers in accessing ICTs. One is that they are more likely than men to lack basic literacy and computer skills. Another, in the less developed regions, may be gender-based cultural attitudes. The location of information centres or cybercafés in places that women may not be comfortable frequenting or that are culturally inappropriate for them to visit causes them to have less access to those ICT facilities that do exist.

The Census of 2011 found that 79% of women lived in a house with a telephone or had a telephone at their place of work; 71% lived in a house with access to a cell phone or could use one at work and 44% had access to the Internet at home, their work or by using Internet cafés.

Even when access is not an issue, the paucity of Internet content that meets the information needs of women can lead to inequality in use. As a result of issues such as these, women's ability to benefit equally from the opportunities offered by ICTs and to contribute fully to the knowledge-based economy is limited. To overcome the further marginalization of women, it is imperative to expand their access to and use of ICTs. However, while expanding access is necessary, it is not sufficient to close the gender digital gap. To do this requires policies containing specific measures for targeting and addressing the gender dimensions of ICTs.

Telecommunication access has improved significantly, however costs remain relatively high. Government is working on deregulating the telecommunications sector to introduce competition with the ultimate aim to improve both service and cost to consumers. The Cook Islands did not sign the regional commitment for optic fiber.

A range of Government and Non-Government agencies use radio, television and social media broadcasts to educate the public and raise awareness about gender issues and most recently gender based violence. The broadcasts are not part of a broader information and education campaign designed around the national gender equality policy and tend to be specific to donor funded projects.

## **Critical Area J: Women and the Environment**

Improving the capacity of women to contribute to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies is one of the six priority areas in the Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Gender considerations are also included in the 2013 – 2016 Climate & Disaster Compatible Development Policy and programming.

The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment policy recognises that the information about the impacts of climate change in the Cook Islands is very limited. Very little is known about how people adapt to climate stresses although it is accepted that climate change is greatly affecting natural resources upon which people's livelihood depends greatly and also impacts on household food security. The National policy recognises that women and men play different roles in the livelihood strategy of their families and their use of natural resources and provisions of food for the family differs. Climate change is expected to affect women and men differently and actions will need to be gender responsive.

More statistical information on links between gender and the environment is needed in several areas. Data on changes in women's and men's work burdens as a consequence of droughts, floods, or deforestation, for example, are not available as there is no information about time use in the Cook Islands. Sex-disaggregated data on the effects of natural hazards on other human dimensions, such as education, health, food and economic security are also not available.

Monitoring the impacts of climate change on the lives of women and men is particularly challenging. On the one hand, the gendered effects may not be easily detectable at the level of larger geographical units – region, country or even urban/rural area – where the traditional systems of social statistics have been focused; hence, monitoring may need to take into account smaller areas that are particularly prone to climate change manifestations. On the other hand, separating the effect of climate change on women and men's lives from other environmental and socio-economic factors is difficult. Non-climate factors such as demographic pressure or over-exploitation of resources also increase the risk of environmental degradation and have an effect on access to natural resources and on human health and survival.

Data to assess the capability of women and men to protect local natural resources are not available. There is little information on access to environment-related practical knowledge, including access to modern agricultural information and techniques. Sex disaggregated data on participation in the management of local natural resources such as water or biodiversity are also lacking.

## **Critical Area K: The Girl Child**

The Cook Islands ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and have established a National Children's Committee to oversee the implementations of the Convention. The Child and Family Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs coordinate and provide support to families and children at risks.

The Family Protection and Support Act 2017 seeks to encompass child protection rights as guided by the principles and provisions of the CRC. The Act provides legal effect to rights and responsibilities of families and communities towards children. In addition, it promotes the child's best interest in all decision making, the child's right to be heard, to be protected from all forms of violence, the child's right to special care and protection if deprived of a family environment.

The Education Act 2012 ensures that the education system is equitable, and that children are treated with dignity, respect and understanding, consistent with Article 64 of the Cook Islands Constitution on the fundamental human rights and freedom. The Ministry of Education policy allows and encourages teenage girls to continue their education during pregnancy and after child birth.

The Ministry of Health established a youth friendly clinic in 2010 to increase youth access to health services. The service provided advice on family planning, counselling, pregnancy testing, and referral to health clinic and hospital. The Cook Islands Family Planning Association is an NGO with the objectives to provide family planning health services, contraceptives and preventative measures in family planning.

## Section Three: National institutions and processes

### Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

The Gender office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs established in 1993 is Government's national machinery for gender equality and the empowerment of women and is the central mechanism for the advancement of women. It employs two staff: a senior Gender adviser and a Program/Research Officer.

The priorities and objectives for advancing gender equality are set out in the 2011 Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment & Strategic Plan of Action (2011-2016), and are aligned with the Beijing Declaration & Platform for Action, Pacific Platform of Action and the 2007 UN CEDAW Committees' concluding comments. Six policy priority outcomes include:

- a. Gender-responsive Government's program and policies.
- b. Equitable participation of women and men in decision-making and governance systems.
- c. Enabling environment for the full participation of women in economic development.
- d. Improved capacity of women to contribute to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies.
- e. Improved capacity of women to address health issues
- f. Elimination of violence against women

In 2008, Cabinet endorsed the CEDAW Law Reform Programme, the scoping work to be undertaken on a review of relevant parts of family law and a review of some parts of the Constitution being undertaken as well as preliminary research being undertaken on whether civil legal aid and victim assistance should be explored. The established working group of selected Head of Ministries already established by Cabinet will monitor the foregoing work. The working group comprised Crown law Office, Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Police, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Internal Affairs (to provide Secretariat Services).

The working group focused on the development of the Family Law Bill (Act to date) and the review of the Crimes Act, drafting and holding consultations for over three years period since 2010. The Gender office received financial and technical assistances from UNDP to enable the drafting support to the Family Law Bill, later changed to Family Protection and Support Act after numerous drafted versions and enactment.

The Cook Islands is a recipient to the Australia Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Initiative towards supporting Cook Islands gender equality challenges. The (2013-2015) project covers the implementation of two components of the Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, & Strategic Plan of Action (2011-2016). Component 1: Strengthening capacity for gender responsive development towards an

environment for the full participation of women in economic development. Component 2: Strengthening capacity towards the elimination of violence against women.

The Gender office was actively engaged with government ministries and agencies across a range of public policy issues, Inter-agency consultation is required and necessary to the implementations of the National Policy on Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment. A number of programmes and projects have been undertaken with government ministries and NGO include:

- The National Statistic Office is responsible for national statistics and conducts Census of population & dwelling and GADD draws data from this source to monitor the status of women. Also collates from other government ministries and agencies in their particular areas of responsibility, including the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education.
- Advocacy programmes with the Ministry of Health in promoting women's reproductive health and health rights.
- Gender office working in partnership with the National Council of Women (NCW) as the lead group in implementing the National Policy on Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment.
- Gender office in partnership with Punanga Tauturu Inc., in promoting the advancement of women through the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, providing advocacy, counselling and training on all islands.
- Gender office in partnership with the Cook Islands Red Cross Society in promoting awareness of the human rights of women, children, and other disadvantaged women groups.

The head of the national machinery is not a member of the institutional process for SDG. Unfortunately, there is no formal mechanisms in place for different stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development however, the national machinery work together with the National Council of women and relevant partner government ministries through the implementation of the national Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment to contribute to those documents.

The issues of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls are included s key priorities in the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) 2015 – 2020 of the Cook Islands and this has been translated in the previous and current Ministry of Internal Affairs Business Plan 2019 – 2024.

## Section Four: Data and Statistics

The Cook Islands National Statistic Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Finance, Economic and Management is responsible for national statistics. Gender-disaggregated data are available in a wide range of official statistics. Statistics about Cook Islands women that are regularly collated by NSO include details about age, ethnic affiliation, language, religion, families and households, fertility, work and income, education, housing and where they live. Information is also available about women's health and disability, life expectancy, and the ratio of women to men. Latest statistics about domestic violence are available through surveys such as the 2014 Family Health and Safety Study.

The Cook Islands gender profile report is in the final stages of production. This report presents and analyses statistics on the status of women and men, girls and boys. It looks at the statistical data, indicators, research and reports about the Cook Islands and analyses these in terms of social and economical differences between women and men. The statistical data and indicators used are part of a broad framework of gender statistics being promoted in the Pacific region by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. The report explores gender issues under 11 topics in keeping with the regional framework with additional analysis of important issues to the Cook Islands. These are population, households, family & housing, education, work & employment, public life and decision making, legislation & governance, environment, poverty, information & communications, health, crime and justice.

Data on the Minimum Set of Gender Indicators is collected and compiled as follows:

Minimum Set of Gender Indicators	Data Collection	Tier
<b>I. Economic structures, participation in productive activities and access to resources</b>		
1 Average number of hours spent on unpaid domestic work by sex	Data is available from NSO Census of Population & Dwelling	2
2 Average number of hours spent on paid and unpaid work combined, by sex		2
3 Labour force participation rates for 15-24 and 15+		1
4 Proportion of employed who are own-account workers by sex		1
5 Proportion of employed who are working as contributing family workers by sex		1
6 Proportion of employed who are employer, by sex		1
7 Percentage of firms owned by women, by size	Data collected at companies registry at the Ministry of Justice	3
8 Percentage distribution of employed population by sector and sex	Data is available from NSO Census of Population & Dwelling	1
9 Informal employment as a percentage of total non-agricultural employment by sex	Data is available from NSO Census of Population & Dwelling also from Agriculture statistic bulletin	2
10 Youth unemployment by sex	Data is available from NSO Census of Population & Dwelling	1
11 Proportion of population with access to credit, by Sex	Data recorded at Banks.	3
12 Proportion of adult population owning land, by sex	Data recorded at Land registry, MOJ	3
13 Gender gap in wages	Data is available from NSO Census of	1

14 Proportion of employed working part-time, by sex	Population & Dwelling	1
15 Employment rate of persons aged 25-49 with a child under age 3 living in a household and with no children living in the household by sex		3
16 Proportion of children under age 3 in formal care	Data not available	3
17 Proportion of individuals using the Internet, by sex	Data is available from NSO Census of Population & Dwelling	1
18 Proportion of individuals using mobile/ cellular telephones, by sex		1
19 Proportion of households with access to mass media (radio, TV, internet), by sex of household head		1
<b>II. Education</b>		
20 Literacy rate of persons aged 15-24 years old, by Sex	Data is available from NSO Census of Population & Dwelling	1
21 Adjusted net enrolment ratio in primary education by sex	Data collected and available from education bulletins	1
22 Gross enrolment ratio in secondary education, by Sex		1
23 Gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education, by sex		1
24 Gender parity index in enrolment at primary, secondary and tertiary levels		1
25 Share of female science, engineering, manufacturing and construction graduates at tertiary level		2
26 Proportion of females among tertiary education teachers or professors		2
27 Net intake in first grade of primary education, by Sex		1
28 Primary education completion rate, by sex		1
29 Graduation from lower secondary education, by sex		1
30 Transition rate to secondary education, by sex		1
31 Education attainment of population aged 25 and over by sex	Data is available from NSO Census of Population & Dwelling	1
<b>III. Health and related services</b>		
32 Contraceptive prevalence among women who are married or in a union, aged 15-49	Data is collected, recorded in the Annual Health Bulletin of the Ministry of Health. Also NGO (CIFWA) collects this data.	1
33 Under-five mortality rate, by sex	Data is extracted from the Patient Information Management system (MedTECH). It is on-going registry that captures all deaths in Cook Islands	1
34 Maternal mortality ratio		1
35 Antenatal care coverage	This data is collected indirectly through the Obstetric-Gynaecology Clinic records	1
36 Proportion of births attended by skilled health professional	Data is collected through MedTECH	1
37 Smoking prevalence among persons aged 15 and over by sex	Data is collected. In fact, data on this indicator was collected in 2009 and 2011 in a School Health Survey. NCD STEPS survey conducted in 2004 and 2007 (survey every six years)	1
38 Proportion of adults who are obese, by sex	Data is collected through MedTECH	1
39 Women's share of population aged 15-49 living with HIV/AIDS	No reported HIV/AIDS case, but there are regular ongoing surveillance	1

	conducted on STI by the Ministry of Health	
40 Access to anti-retroviral drug, by sex	Access links to regional pharmaceutical stock piles	1
41 Life expectancy at age 60, by sex	Data on this indicator is collected and calculated. Life expectancy is calculated by the National Statistics Office from mortality data by age and gender which is collected by the Ministry of Health MedTECH. This is calculated assuming that age-specific mortality levels remain constant.	1
42 Adult mortality by cause and age groups	Data is collected through MedTECH	3
<b>IV. Public life and decision-making</b>		
43 Women's share of government ministerial positions	Data is available from Parliament Services	1
44 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament	Data is available from Parliament Services	1
45 Women's share of managerial positions	Data is available from the HRMIS at PSC (limited only to Government Ministries and Agencies positions) Private Section data not included and not collected.	1
46 Percentage of female police officers	The list of police officers is available from Ministry of Police	2
47 Percentage of female judges	The list of judges is available from Ministry of Justice	2
<b>V. Human rights of women and girl children</b>		
48 Proportion of women aged 15-49 subjected to physical or sexual violence in the last 12 months by an intimate partner	The Ministry of Health & the National Council of Women conducted a one-off study called 'Family Health & Safety Study'. A nationwide research study on the prevalence of domestic violence against women in the Cook Islands and its impact.	2
49 Proportion of women aged 15-49 subjected to physical or sexual violence in the last 12 months by persons other than an intimate partner		2
50 Prevalence of female genital mutilation/ cutting (for relevant countries)	Not applicable to the Cook Islands	1
51 Percentage of women aged 20-24 years old who were married or in a union before age 18	Data is recorded in the Marriage registry at the Ministry of Justice. NSO collects this data.	1
52 Adolescent fertility rate	Data is available from MedTEC and Health Bulletin	1

The areas where there are no available data, Gender office together with NSO will look into the collections and compilation of such data. The NSO undertook comprehensive consultations in early 2014 to develop a National Statistics Development Plan to meet national statistical needs.

The 2014 Family Health and Safety Survey provided the necessary data and information in relation to the nine indicators on violence against women as agreed.

The areas where there is no available data, GAD Division together with NSO will look into the collections and compilation of such data.

The Census on Population and Dwellings carried out by the National Statistic Office has a set of core variables and through these variables we are in a position to single out sub-groups of women.

In relation to women in disabilities, a disability data base is being developed to collate data from various sources. The collected data includes: gender, age and locality of residence.

In relation to health data on women irrespective of sub group is available only if they make use of health care services where this data is documented especially for secondary care, certain chronic diseases and their treatment, as well as infectious diseases. The collected data includes: gender, age and locality of residence.

## Preparing Cook Islands Government's National Review

The Cook Islands Government's National Review has been prepared and coordinated by the Gender office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs with information collected from the following government ministries and agencies:

- Ministry of Finance, Economic & Management - National Statistic Office
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Police
- Office of the Public Service Commission
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