

Gender Profile
Federated States of Micronesia

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Gender Context

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is comprised of several distinct ethnic groups that differ widely in the roles, responsibilities, and status traditionally accorded women. With the exception of Yap and a few outlying atolls in Pohnpei, most ethnic groups are matrilineal (meaning land ownership and use rights and customary titles pass through the female line). Although matrilineal descent has often been cited as according women a higher status than in patrilineal societies, the reality is that matrilineal descent does not guarantee women a voice in decision-making about resources. While inheritance may pass through the female lineage, control over resources is often vested in male members of the lineage. Overlaying tradition, are the laws and norms of four successive colonial powers and those of the many churches that are deeply rooted in Micronesian society. Transition from subsistence to market oriented economies has also tended to undermine women's status.¹

Based on 2000 Census, the total population of FSM is at 107,008, with annual growth rate of about .26 per cent. Chuuk, the largest State, has 50 per cent of the total population, followed by Pohnpei, with 32 per cent, then by Yap with 11 per cent, and by the smallest state of Kosrae with 7 per cent. The population density in FSM is about 395 persons per square mile. Male life expectancy is 66.6 years, while 67.5 years for female population. FSM's population is among the youngest in the Pacific region – more than 50 per cent at ages 0 to 21.²

The 2013 Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report on notes that FSM is off-track in achieving MDG 1 Eradication of Poverty. There is evidence of growing hardship with Chuuk having the highest proportion of its population below the Basic National Poverty Line. Public sector jobs have declined across all the states and private sector remains stagnant. Women's economic participation remains low and in comparison to all other PICs FSM has the lowest percentage of women in paid employment in the non-agricultural sector.

The 2005 HIES shows that persons of low education level without wage/ salary income disproportionately head households in the lowest expenditure quintiles or with wage/salary income derived from the private sector (Abbott, 2005, p. 32). There is also a clear gender bias. Females head nationwide 20% of households but female-headed households comprise 39% of households in the lowest three expenditure deciles.³

Gender Issues

Women in Decision Making

FSM is a democratic federal State. It has three levels of government, consisting of a national government, state governments, and municipal governments. The National Government has a unicameral legislature (Congress of the Federated States of Micronesia). Congress has 14 members – 4 of whom are elected on the basis of

¹ Millennium Development Goals Status Report, Federated States of Micronesia, 2010

² Federated States of Micronesia National Universal Periodic Report 2010

³ Millennium Development Goals Status Report, Federated States of Micronesia, 2010

state equality. The remaining members are elected by congressional districts, apportioned among the states on the basis of population. FSM remains one of the three countries in the world, which have never elected a woman to national political office. At the moment there are three national cabinet women members. Women have fared no better at the State Congress, with one woman cabinet member in Chuuk, two in Pohnpei, two in Yap and none in Kosrae. National Congress recently introduced a bill (FSM Bill No. 16–10) to reserve four seats out of the 14 for women however this has not progressed. The lack of women’s participation in the highest level of government decision-making is largely related to cultural stereotyping of men’s and women’s roles, based on traditional social hierarchies.

Micronesian societies, with the exception of Yap and a few atolls in Pohnpei, emphasise matrilineal descent where identities, titles, rights and acquisition to property are traced through female hereditary lines. Women’s rights to land ownership and their access to resources have, however, changed under the various colonial authorities that have governed FSM, with most decision making related to land ownership and land use being retained by male members of the family. Other barriers to full participation in public decision making and participation at the higher government level include the lack of opportunity to undertake leadership training and the lack of support for women wanting to move into roles that have traditionally been dominated by men. Leadership at the national, state, and municipal levels is interwoven with a strong attachment to traditional forms of local leadership, in which women are not highly represented.⁴

Violence Against Women

A 2004 Situational Analysis Report emphasises that domestic and sexual violence is a common cause of injury to women and children and a major contributor to social problems. A draft national domestic violence policy was reviewed at the 2010 Women’s Conference before introduction into Congress. In Pohnpei, through an administrative order, the Justice Department has adopted a ‘no drop’ policy, which requires that cases of domestic violence be pursued in court, even if the victim requests that the case be dropped. Pohnpei has established a Division of Domestic Violence Prevention under the Department of Public Safety with the support of the National Health and Social Affairs Department and the Police Forces of New Zealand and Australia. As a pilot project, the Department conducted a domestic and sexual violence prevention and education programme in 94 per cent of the elementary schools in Pohnpei. To determine the extent, prevalence and type of violence perpetrated, there is a need for more detailed studies to inform policy and strategic interventions.⁵ Pohnpei has a draft domestic violence bill, which has yet to be presented to Congress.

Unequal access to Productive and Economic Resources

Data from the 2000 census show that for every two men employed in the wage and salary sector, there was only one woman was employed. Causes of this differential include traditional ideas about the roles of women, historic limitations on women’s participation in education, lack of control by women over land and other productive resources, and difficulty women face in accessing credit. The FSM Strategic

⁴SPC Stocktake of the gender mainstreaming capacity of Pacific Island Governments – Federated States of Micronesia, 2012

⁵ibid

Development Plan acknowledges that women have limited opportunities to exert “power and influence over economic processes and structure.” The plan notes that women are virtually absent in economic decision-making (formulation of financial, monetary, commercial, tax, compensation, and related economic policies) and their economic contributions are often ignored (FSM Strategic Development Plan 2003-2004, Volume I). Women however are making inroads into this traditional male bastion. Women have recently been appointed to the Social Security, Banking, and Health Boards. In the private sector, a Women in Business organization has also been created.⁶

Gender and Development

According to a gender stocktake conducted by SPC, FSM has no national gender policy in place. The FSM Strategic Development Plan (SDP) 2004–2023 includes a strategic goal to mainstream gender issues into decision-making, policies and strategic development plans. Included in the SDP is a gender matrix that guides the work on gender in FSM. The five strategic goals in the gender section are: Enhance and promote the cultural, economic, legal, political and social development of women and children throughout their life cycles; Enhance the leadership capacity and roles of women; Mainstream gender issues into decision-making, policies and strategic development plans; Maximise women’s contribution to and participation in democratic and development processes by creating opportunities for women’s active involvement; and Strengthen the institutional capacity of the women’s programmes.

Sectors

Health

Although maternal mortality rates (MMR) have fallen significantly, FSM still has a relatively high rate and one of the highest in the Pacific region. The recent data from the Regional MDG tracking Report indicates that FSM is off-track in achieving MDG 5. Maternal deaths are declining but under-reporting is widespread. Skilled birth attendance remains a concern. Improving maternal mortality is missing in the national plan. The 2009 FSM MDG Report noted an MMR of 206 in 2003 (GoFSM and UNDP 2009). The 2008 FSM Statistical Yearbook (GoFSM 2008) reports that the total fertility rate was 2.68 in 2006, a reduction from 3.19 in 2001. Rates vary considerably between states. For 2006, Pohnpei recorded the highest at 3.57; followed by Kosrae at 3.44, Yap at 2.47 and Chuuk at 2.07. The 2013 Regional Report notes a decline in teenage births however, it should be noted that teenage pregnancy is a major reason for girls dropping out of high school and college. Low contraceptive use has been attributed to poor service delivery due to geography, lack of supplies and cultural/religious beliefs against contraceptive use. Available data suggest that only 41 per cent of the population has access to an improved water source and about 45 per cent to improved sanitation (ADB 2010). This is of particular concern for women, both in terms of their role in food preparation and their hygiene.⁷

⁶Millennium Development Goals Status Report, Federated States of Micronesia, 2010

⁷SPC Stocktake of the gender mainstreaming capacity of Pacific Island Governments – Federated States of Micronesia, 2012

Education

FSM provides free and compulsory education from the ages of six to 14 years or to completion of the 8th grade. Figures from 2009 show near gender parity in access to education, with a ratio of girls to boys of 1:0.96 and 1:1.02 in primary and secondary levels respectively (FSM Office of Statistics 2010). FSM does, however, face challenges in improving the quality of education, retention rates and access in the outer islands (ADB 2003).

The 2008 FSM Statistical Yearbook (GoFSM 2008) highlights stereotyped fields of study at the tertiary level. At the College of Micronesia campuses for the school year 2006–2007 there were only boys enrolled in the field of agriculture, in computer information systems there were 200 boys compared to 135 girls, and in marine science there were 60 boys compared to 14 girls. Girls continue to dominate fields such as early childhood education, where there were 33 girls enrolled compared to two boys. This pattern is similar at state levels. The lack of women in technical and professional positions in employment is reflective of this situation. Traditionally assigned gender roles limit girls and women's choices in education and careers and have the effect of compelling women to assume the burden of household responsibilities.⁸

Energy

FSM is extremely vulnerable to climate change and has taken aggressive action to control its own greenhouse gas emissions and is continuing to do so by embracing a sub-regional “Green Energy Micronesia” initiative, an initiative of the Chief Executives of the Micronesian government to reduce energy use through increased efficiency (20%) increased conservation (20%) and expansion of renewable energy (30%). Given the different roles that women and men have in the energy system with the potential for new energy technologies to have unintended negative consequences for women, it is important to consider gender differences in the implementation of any energy interventions. A Yap Renewable Energy project which focuses on the land acquisition/ resettlement plan of a Wind Farm component reviews the gender impacts and needs and priorities of affected women and makes recommendations for the sustaining of affordable and reliable power supply to affected households. A separate Gender Action Plan provides detailed measures on gender that will benefit women in affected communities.⁹

Institutional and Legal Framework

FSM has a moderate legal and policy framework to support the mainstreaming of gender and women's human rights across the whole of government. The federal system of government with four different states creates a challenge for domestication of human rights law such as CEDAW. Two key human rights treaties are in force and the national development plan includes gender mainstreaming as a goal. However, Constitutional provisions allow for the preference of tradition over non-discrimination and there is no anti-discrimination legislation in place.

FSM has ratified two core international human rights treaties of particular

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ <http://yapstategov.org/downloads/ADB.pdf>

significance for the human rights of women and girls. It has also endorsed a number of key international and regional policy frameworks containing commitments to gender equality, including the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005–2015 (RPPA) and the Pacific Plan (2005, revised in 2007).¹⁰

Despite these legal assurances, women lag behind men in many areas including: health, economic empowerment, and political participation. Women also face special challenges in the areas of reproductive health and domestic violence which limit their ability to fully exercise their constitutional rights. A comprehensive review carried out shortly after FSM ratified CEDAW found that with respect to 113 internationally recognised indicators of legal compliance, FSM was fully compliant on 27 per cent, partially compliant on 16 per cent and out of compliance on 57 per cent (FSM MDG Report 2010). Areas where there was no compliance included deficiencies in the law relating to sexual assault and rape, domestic violence and human trafficking. Other deficiencies included the lack of consistency across the four states in the age of sexual consent, in grounds for divorce, in child custody, and in other educational, economic and political areas where there is discrimination.¹¹

In 1993 the national government established a Women's Interest Desk and a National Women's Interests Officer under the Department of Health and Social Affairs. The Women's Interest Desk was upgraded to a Woman in Development Unit in 1998 and again in 2000 to the Gender Development Office (GDO) under the Department of Health and Social Affairs (DHESA), where it continues to be hosted. The National Gender Officer also looks after programmes related to the elderly and to child rights.

There are state level women offices under the Social Affairs Division in Yap, Kosrae and Pohnpei. Chuuk does not have a government focal point for women; all women's issues are handled by the Chuuk Women's Council. From 1993, women's offices were established in Kosrae, Pohnpei and Chuuk and in Yap in 2003. The offices deal with gender issues and work on cross-cutting issues with other sectors at the state level. The offices in these states are located within the Social or Community Affairs Section and report directly to the Governor of each state. The national gender focal point coordinates FSM gender activities, deals with international and regional issues and is responsible for disseminating information and providing advice and assistance to the various state women's development offices. In all cases, the national and state women's offices/programmes consist of one person with limited financial support with the women's development office in Chuuk now closed.¹²

Actors

There are gender focal points in the Office of Statistics, Budget and Economic Management, Overseas Development Assistance and Compact Management, in the

¹⁰ SPC Stocktake of the gender mainstreaming capacity of Pacific Island Governments – Federated States of Micronesia, 2012

¹¹ SPC Stocktake of the gender mainstreaming capacity of Pacific Island Governments – Federated States of Micronesia, 2012

¹² *ibid*

Departments of Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Transportation, Communication and Infrastructure, and in the Office of Environment and Emergency Management. A Gender Advisory Committee exists for the purpose of promoting gender equality at the national government level.

There is no national human rights institution or other special institutional arrangement with the mandate for the protection and promotion of women's human rights. NGOs have played a valuable role as independent advocates and activists, providing training and advocacy. Such organisations include women's advisory councils in the four states, faith-based NGOs and the FSM Alliance of Non-governmental Organisations (FANGO).

Membership of the women's advisory councils includes all NGOs. In Pohnpei, for example, there are more than 28 NGOs while in Chuuk, which is the state with the largest population, there are more than 60 women's organisations. There is a Women in Business organisation in Chuuk and Pohnpei and an increasing number of women sit on boards and committees and hold technical assistance positions in the public sector. This includes women's representation on the social security, banking and health boards. Other actors include:

- Women's Lawyers network
- Climate Justice Group
- SPC RRRT Country Focal Officer
- Attorney Generals Office
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Recommendations

The SPC Gender Stocktake identifies a number of strategic approaches for gender mainstreaming. These include:

- Support in the development of gender mainstreaming action plan and in the implementation of the gender matrix section of the Strategic Development plan.
- Proper collection compilation and analysis of sex disaggregated data and gender indicators across sectors especially on maternal health.
- The development of strong linkages should also be developed with state gender focal points to maintain the mainstreaming process at both state and local levels.
- Submission of CEDAW Report, and its domestication at state level
- Integration of maternal health priorities in its NSDP
- Implementation and tracking of gender outcomes in the NSDP and a review of the plan
- Gender and human rights audit of the energy sector

