

Gender Profile Nauru

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Gender Context

Nauru is a matrilineal country however over the years patriarchal standards and values have been engrained and reinforced through practice, policy and law.¹ As traditional Nauruan society was matrilineal, women had an important voice in the family and the community. Although land is still inherited through the maternal side, most informants of a Situation Analysis report supported by UNICEF felt that nowadays the voice of women is ignored, and the status of women has been eroded. They describe Nauruan society as dominated by men, and said the social expectation is that women will defer to their husbands and be submissive and supportive. Although large numbers of women are now engaged in wage employment, most women still consider their primary role to be wife and homemaker.²

Nauru still faces significant economic challenges with a lack of job opportunities, and it is likely that hardship is increasing. Without recent data it is difficult to gauge the trends in women's economic participation. It should be noted that government is the largest employer, followed by the mining sector and smaller private sector. In September 2012, Nauru reopened a refugee detention and processing center for Australia that opened opportunities for employment for the locals. However social assessment study including a gender assessment has yet to be completed.

The 2006 census recorded a population of 9,265 with an annual growth rate of 2.1%. Net migration is assumed at present to be zero, with all population growth being natural increase. The 2013 Pacific Regional MDGs Report notes the absence of data on maternal deaths however Nauru recorded 97 percent skilled attendance and high antenatal coverage. The report also noted that Nauru has a low contraceptive prevalence rate, consistent with relatively high unmet need for family planning. Teenage birth rate fell but is still high.

Gender Issues

Women in Decision Making

Only two women have ever been elected to parliament in Nauru. During the constitutional reforms in 2006, it was suggested that some seats be reserved for women, but this was met with resistance from many in the community, including some women, and was not pursued. Few women stand as candidates. In the 2004 general elections, only two women stood out of 73 candidates. In the 2007 elections, there were seven women out of 79 candidates. There are cultural and traditional barriers to women running, in particular familial ties, a common problem in small countries. In June 2013, Nauru elected a woman to parliament after a period of 20 years as the last time a woman was elected was in the 1990s.

A major hurdle in Nauru is increasing female representation in parliament and the number of women standing for office. Temporary special measures such as reserved seats or quotas are seen by many political experts as the only way to increase the number of women in politics at all levels of Government. In 2010, the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, together with UNIFEM and UNDP, supported the development of national action plans on women in decision-making in Pacific Small Island States

¹Government of Nauru report to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review year?

²Government of Nauru, UNICEF, Situation Analysis of Women and Children, 2005

Violence Against Women

Domestic violence is a serious issue in Nauru, but there is little documentation about it. A baseline study on physical and sexual intimate partner based violence is currently underway in Nauru. It should be noted that in the other FICs where the study was completed the prevalence level was extremely high including small islands states such as Kiribati. Published crime statistics are not disaggregated by gender of victim. Rape, incest, severe assault and sex with a minor are criminal offences in Nauru however penalties for perpetrators remain mixed and influenced by discriminatory laws and negative attitudes. The absence of specific domestic violence legislation and long awaited criminal code reform remain a concern.

Nauru has yet to develop a Comprehensive Policy on violence against women and expedite their legislative process for a comprehensive violence against women legal reform. Advocacy and awareness on ending violence against women remains a priority for the Women's Affairs Department and the Nauru Police. The White Ribbon Campaign has led to increased public interest in this issue.

The Nauru Police Department established a Domestic Violence Unit in 2007 to deal with all cases involving violence against women and children. The Unit also conducts community education programs about gender-based violence in communities in collaboration with community leaders.

The Police, Women's Affairs and Public Health departments set up a Safe House in 2008. Women and children use the shelter for protection while legal proceedings such as Apprehended Violence Orders are processed.

The Domestic Violence Committee was established in 2010 with representatives from the Police Force, the Justice, Health and Women's Affairs departments, members of the Competency Based Economies through the Formation of Entrepreneurs (CEFE) ex-graduates, Nauru Women's National Council and the Nauru Young Women's National Council. The Committee assists survivors and users of violence.³

Unequal Access to Productive and Economic Resources

During the time of economic hardship, labour force participation rates dropped more sharply for women than men, dropping from 83% for men in 2002 (census) to 74% in 2007 (DHS), and from 70% for women in 2002 to 52% in 2007. With the economic growth since large-scale phosphate mining resumed in 2007, these rates will have increased.

According to the 2007 DHS, employment levels are positively associated with educational attainment, particularly for women. Women with more than secondary level education are more likely to be employed (77%) than those with only secondary education (50%). The 2007 DHS found that 73% of men who only had a secondary education were employed, compared with 50% of women.

The proportion of people employed increased with age, and is highest in the 35–39 age group for both sexes, and with the number of living children. Married women are the most likely to be employed (54%), followed by those who are divorced, separated, or widowed (53%). Women who never married are the least likely to be employed

³Government of Nauru Millennium Development Goals, Progress Report, 2012

(46%), while 61% of never married men are employed.

Most women work in clerical and professional occupations and men in occupations related to crafts, trades, plant and machine operation. Only 2% of the economically active population was engaged in traditional (non-formal) work such as agriculture and fishing activities, involving more men than women.

Through the Women's Affairs Department, the newly formed Nauru Women Entrepreneurship Association assists women in the community to start and manage small businesses. The Community Education Training Centre similarly assists communities to develop gardening, cooking, sewing and other livelihood projects, and represent women in community and national consultations.⁴ The Forum Secretariat assisted the Government of Nauru in developing their National Strategy on Women's Economic Empowerment which focuses on better working conditions and employment opportunities, training for women in the technical and management fields, better access to finance and saving schemes.

Gender and Development

The Republic of Nauru National Sustainable Development Strategy 2005–2025 focuses on a just society that recognizes and respects the rights of women and promotes equal opportunities and commits to integrating gender across all sectors. At present data on gender responsive budgets and sectors need to be further strengthened and there is a need to strengthen current monitoring systems to better performance on gender mainstreaming across all government sectors. The current key performance indicators supported through the national strategy on gender includes:

- Proportion of CEDAW related programmes established and mainstreamed in all GoN plans, policies, strategies and programmes
- Proportion of women in Parliament
- Proportion of women in leadership positions in Government, Government Boards, and private sector
- Proportion of women in paid employment
- Per cent share of average household income contributed by women
- Proportion of community projects/programmes managed and implemented by women's groups/NGOs/Civil Society

Nauru ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), on 7 June 2011. Accordingly, the Nauru Government is reviewing all its domestic laws, including the Criminal Code, to comply with international human rights standards. Preparations on Nauru's initial CEDAW report are underway with the Department of Women's Affairs.

Sectors

Health

Nauru has a number of major health issues, the most common and serious of which is

⁴ibid

the high rate of Type 2 diabetes. Other major health issues (some of which contribute to the prevalence of diabetes) are poor nutrition, high rates of smoking and alcohol consumption, obesity and heart disease. Life expectancy at birth is 49 for indigenous Nauruan males and 56.9 years for indigenous Nauruan females. The population growth rate is 4.1 per cent per annum.⁵

Nauru's teenage pregnancy rate increased from 63 per thousand women in 1992 to 93 in the period 1997-2002, and in 2002 almost one in every six girls aged 15-19 had already born a child. Although most couples marry when they discover that the girl is pregnant, the high rate of teenage pregnancy is a concern, since most of these pregnancies are unintentional and burden young people with the responsibilities of parenthood before they have themselves become adults.⁶

All Nauruans receive free medical services on Nauru. Every year Government arranges for medical specialists to visit the island and provide services. This gives Nauruans an opportunity to seek specialist medical treatment and obtain referrals which are not otherwise readily available. The Government also makes annual budget provision for overseas medical treatment in cases that meet selected criteria.

The project to establish Community Clinics is in its infancy and is currently being piloted in one district. Each district has a community nurse and a community health liaison officer.⁷

Education

The Ministry of Education reports that net primary enrolment has improved from 69.7% in 2002, to 95% in 2011, an improvement due to community outreach efforts and reforms within the education system. Primary school completion rates also improved, but over a longer timescale, from 81.3% in 1992 to 91.2% in 2007. Attendance rates of both students and teachers remain a concern, although these rates have also improved in recent years. Other issues of concern are low academic achievement levels, as shown by national examination results, and low (although rising) secondary school completion rates for both boys and girls.⁸

Nauru is likely to achieve the goal for universal primary education, but more work needs to be done to maintain improvements in enrolment rates for secondary education and attendance rates in both primary and secondary schools.⁹ The 2013 Regional MDG Tracking Report showed Nauru's progress towards MDG 3 as mixed. Nauru achieved gender parity in education however there are concerns over the enrolment of boys at high school, the report also highlighted an overall trend for all FICS of high level of enrolment of girls in schools not leading to economic outcomes. The limited access and opportunities for girls and women in technical, science, engineering and management remains a challenge.

Energy, Food Security and Climate Change

Nauru's remoteness, its dependence on imported fuel for all energy purposes and rising fuel and transportation costs make energy security a critical national issue. High

⁵Government of Nauru report to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review

⁶Government of Nauru, UNICEF, Situation Analysis of Women and Children, 2005

⁷Government of Nauru report to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review

⁸Government of Nauru Millennium Development Goals, Progress Report, 2012

⁹ibid

energy prices continue to strain limited resources.

Food security is also a significant issue. Most food is imported. There is little arable land as phosphate mining has left 80% of the land barren. Climate change may further reduce prospects for local food production, with increased droughts and water shortages and coastal inundation. Evidence base on the gender issues surrounding climate change and food security can be further developed. Women and their important role in the energy sector as managers and users needs to be understood and increased efforts to engage women within this sector.

To address these new challenges and meet the goals of the NSDS, the Government is strengthening national planning and implementation mechanisms for sustained economic growth; addressing the debt burden, and saving for a future without the phosphate industry. Nauru aspires to build resilience and self-sufficiency through local food production, water security and renewable energy.¹⁰

Institutional and Legal Framework

The Department of Women's Affairs has existed since 1997. Before that, the Department of Foreign Affairs dealt with issues concerning women, and their only formal source of representation was an NGO, the Nauru National Council of Women. The Department of Women's Affairs works with the Department of Culture and NGOs to promote craft activities, employment opportunities for women and youth and to make representation on women's needs.¹¹

The government is currently undertaking a complete review of the Criminal Code, and proposes to include in the revised Code provisions that deal specifically with domestic violence, and which afford women greater protection from threatened, apprehended and actual domestic violence.

Actors

Key actors in Nauru working in various aspects of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment are:

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- The Department for Justice
- The Department for Women
- The Police Domestic Violence unit
- Nauru Safe House
- SPC RRRT Country Focal Officer
- Nauru Umbrella of NGO's
- Community paralegals network

Recommendations

The gender profile highlights areas of achievements, challenges and gaps. The following recommendations are to ensure women in Nauru are able to benefit from

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¹¹Government of Nauru, UNICEF, Situation Analysis of Women and Children, 2005

government and development programs and these lead to overall improvement in women's lives.

- Increase budgets and resources to support gender mainstreaming across all key sectors in particular justice, economic, health, education and energy
- Strengthen sex disaggregated data across all sectors including energy, infrastructure and trade
- Support education and training programs for women in technical, science and management
- Expedite the process of legal reform with introduction of domestic violence preventive and protection measures, employment opportunities, paid maternity leave, address sexual harassment at the workplace
- Access to finance and savings for women entrepreneurs and review of discriminatory laws and policies that limit women's equal participation in the economy
- Introduce special measures to support women in parliament, local and community decision making bodies

