

Tuvalu Gender Profile

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GENDER CONTEXT

Tuvalu is a patriarchal society with strong religious rules and morals imposed by Christianity. These set the regulations on men and women's behavior and concepts of the family structure and contribute to gender relations or the social constructs of relationships between men and women. According to the Government of Tuvalu 3rd and 4th report to the CEDAW Committee in 2012, daughters are protected and treated with respect in their families, and are expected to move into the husbands family once they are married and their children will be included in their fathers clan and have access to his land. Following their traditions many women choose to remain at home and forgo the opportunity for a career with difficulties in balancing family life with the demands of full time employment also an underlying reason.¹

The most recent population census in 2002 indicates that Tuvalu had 9,561 people with estimates by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in 2009 placing the population at 11,093. More than half of the population are made up of the economically active population from 15-59 years of age. The proportion of young dependents has increased while the aging population decreased with more women outliving the men from 60 years and the life expectancy at birth for females is 65.1 and males 61.7.²

According to the 2013 Pacific Regional MDGs Report Tuvalu is off track in achieving MDG 1 Eradication of Poverty. The global financial crisis lowered demand for Tuvalu's seafarers, resulting in a decline in remittances which is an important source of income in most households. There is no industrial and manufacturing activity in Tuvalu; hence the nation relies heavily on imports to meet its basic needs.

Women and single mothers without regular incomes, women with alcoholic spouses and abandoned elders were identified as vulnerable groups in Asian Development Bank (ADB) Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) consultations carried out across six communities in Tuvalu in 2003.³ Land is very important and valuable to Tuvaluans and ownership is based on communal family grouping called 'Kaitasi'. Tuvalu, being a patriarchal society, allows land to be inherited through the male lineage. Land may be passed to a daughter only if there are no sons, or she is the only child or the only surviving one.⁴

GENDER ISSUES

Women in Parliament

There has only been one female parliamentarian in Tuvalu from 1986 – 1993 with no female parliamentarian from 1993 until 2011, when the wife of a former Minister contested the bi-elections following the death of her husband. She won her seat and has since been appointed Minister for Home Affairs, so in 2013 there is one female Parliamentarian within Tuvalu's political arena. The Tuvalu Government CEDAW Report highlights the cultural barriers women need to overcome when contesting for elections. Such barriers include the traditional and stereotypical perceptions of

¹ Tuvalu Government Initial and Second Report CEDAW Committee 2008

² Government of Tuvalu, Millennium Development Goals Progress Report, 2010/2011

³ *ibid*: Page 17

⁴ Tuvalu Government Initial and Second Report CEDAW Committee 2008

women's priority roles that confine them to the home as home maker, care giver and nurturer of the family, the financial constraints and the nature of voting which is based on relational and family lines rather than on the merits of candidates. The situation is exacerbated by the absence of political parties, which could be a tool for affirmative action through allocation of safe seats to women.⁵

Women in Decision Making in Government

There are 41 senior positions within the public service of Tuvalu, which includes Permanent Secretaries, Senior Assistant Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Directors and men dominate the senior positions within the Government. From 2009 to the present (2013), women occupy 9 senior positions including 2 Permanent Secretaries, 1 Senior Assistant Secretary, 3 Assistant Secretaries and 3 Directors.

Women in Local Government

At the local government level in Tuvalu, decisions are made by the Island decision making entity (Falekaupule) in collaboration with the Government Department of Rural Development and the Kaupule (the executive arm of the Falekaupule). Development plans for each island community are prepared and implemented by the Falekaupule through the Kaupule. Women in Tuvalu are generally not present when men are assembled for local government meetings as women are expected to have their own separate meetings. The absence of women's voices at the local government level has resulted in a lack of understanding by women on important issues of women's development in island communities. Government has drafted laws to amend the Falekaupule Act to allow women to debate and finalise annual budgets for the Falekaupule. From the last Kaupule elections, more women have competed in these elections and a few were successful. Tuvalu also passed a law requiring female representatives on local councils.

Violence Against Women

Violence against women in Tuvalu is an issue that often remains unreported. The 2007 Tuvalu Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS) reported that four in 10 women have been subjected to some type of physical violence, with their current husbands or partners being the main perpetrators (84.6%). In particular, wives whose husbands drink alcohol excessively are far more likely (72%) to experience physical, emotional, or sexual violence than those whose partner does not drink (27%). It is estimated that around half of all reported acts of physical violence were reported by women aged 25-29.

According to the findings of the survey, women in Tuvalu were brought up to accept, tolerate, and even rationalise domestic violence and to remain silent about such experiences. The culture of silence associated with domestic violence is evident in the number of cases recorded by the Office of the People's Lawyer with only five domestic violence cases recorded in 2011 and only eight new domestic violence cases by August 2012. Since the enactment of the Police Powers and Duties Act 2009, the Police have also changed their attitude towards dealing with domestic violence cases. The act requires police officers to investigate and provide emergency protection orders to survivors of violence. With instructions from the Office of the Attorney General, the Police Department now has a No Drop Policy. In this Policy, domestic violence involving sexual assaults cannot be withdrawn unless by the court. There are no shelters for victims of domestic violence in Tuvalu. However, in some cases, the

⁵ ibid

centre of Fusi Alofa Association Tuvalu (a Disabled Persons Organisation) has been reported to accommodate some victims of domestic violence. However, the said organisation does not have the necessary equipment like food, clothes, and security needed by the victims of domestic violence. ⁶A Family Protection Bill is pending enactment.

Unequal Access to Productive and Economic Resources

The 2007 Tuvalu Demographic Health Survey (TDHS) examined women's empowerment through the types of earnings, the magnitude of a woman's earnings relative to those of her husband or partner, and control over the use of her own earnings and those of her husband or partner. The survey found that more than half of all women (52%) make decisions jointly with their husbands on how their earnings should be spent. Overall three in ten women (33%) decide by themselves how their earnings should be spent with 13% reporting that the decision is mainly made by husband or partner. According to the TDHS, young women are more independent than older women with regard to making their own decisions about how their cash earnings are spent. The proportion of women who independently decide how to use their earnings generally increases with education, with less educated women and women from poor households more likely to be involved in joint household decision-making. Although Tuvalu shows a slow progress in women's economic participation, there are more women entering the private sector as business entrepreneurs.

SECTORS

Education

Under the present education system, girls and boys have equal access to education; all children have equal access to primary education, some have the opportunities to attend secondary school, based on merits. Tertiary education is also based on merits, through the award of pre-service scholarships to successful students. Despite achievements in the area of Education, the MDG Report 2010/2011 highlights as the greatest challenge the quality of education with some of the primary schools indicating weakness in critical thinking, reading, writing and arithmetic. The 2013 Regional MDG Tracking Report confirms that net enrolment and literacy rates are generally high with the quality of education a main concern. Results from the national Year 8 exams reveal a low, although improving, passing rate (between 2003 and 2009). To improve both access and quality of education, Government emphasises curriculum development and expansion of non-formal education skills for young people. Government is also using the UNDP MDG Acceleration Framework to improve progress in this area. Although Tuvalu is close to gender parity in secondary and tertiary education level women's economic participation remains a challenge. Men are still dominant in the fields of engineering, construction and information technology. However there are signs of change, average data from number of new pre service scholarships between 2003-2005 and 2007-2009 shows female to male ratios for business and finance, law, management and administration have all improved. For the same period, women are still dominating in the field of health (in particular nurses) and education service.

⁶ ibid

Health including sexual and reproductive health

Tuvalu MDG Progressive Report 2010/2011 lists outer island access to preventive services in terms of HIV and STIs as a challenge. There are plans to expand education programs to outer island and to also include testing protocols for people in the outer islands. TDHS 2007 results revealed that women are more susceptible to STI infection. For example, 48.9% of young men between the ages of 15-24 use condoms during sexual intercourse while none of the young women use any condoms at all. Moreover, 1.9% of the women in that same age group used a condom during first sexual intercourse compared to the 21% of men using a condom during first sexual intercourse. The results also indicate that youths in the outer islands (rural areas) are more vulnerable to STIs due to the lack of access to condoms there. Low promotion and utilisation of family planning underpin a decline in the contraceptive prevalence rate. Teenage pregnancy has slightly increased. Negative attitudes towards family planning and overall reproductive health services prevent wives from accessing family planning services.

Waste

Regular access to safe drinking water poses an ongoing challenge for Tuvalu. Recent reports note the progress in high access but water quality issues and poor access during droughts remain a challenge. During the Tuvalu Mission, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Water and Sanitation stressed that people should not drink the water contained in the water storage tanks directly and needed to boil it. Despite various efforts to improve the situation people are still suffering from a lack of water in sufficient quantities on a continuous basis. The Special Rapporteur recommended the government immediately adopt and implement its draft Water Act and its Sustainable and Integrated Water and Sanitation Policy. Basic sanitation has improved from 1994 to 2004, with the percentage of households having flush septic tank toilets increasing from 30% to 67% in Funafuti and from 12% to 25% in the outer islands. Women and girls, and people with physical impairments face serious obstacles when they need to go to the ocean to relieve themselves. A woman in Funafuti told the Special Rapporteur that she carried her old mother down to the beach each time she needed to urinate or defecate, and that she was often harassed by youths when she went to bathe in the sea.

The Regional MDG Report noted the improved sanitation access but outer island concerns. One-fifth of households in outer islands have no sanitation facilities. Given women's primary role as caregivers, women are more impacted by the lack of water and sanitation facilities. Women who are managers of water in Funafuti and in the outer islands are pressured for alternative water sources during severe droughts. The attainment of equality between women and men requires that women's needs are considered in the delivery of water and sanitation services, as well as in the design of policies and budget allocations. All primary and secondary schools in Funafuti have access to improved water and sanitation. The situation on the outer islands' schools is similar to that on Funafuti, as a result of the 1992 – 2009 primary schools' upgrading project funded by the European Union.⁷ However during the 2011 drought children had to bring water from home.

⁷Tuvalu CRC Report, 2012

INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Tuvalu ratified CEDAW in 1999 and was a signatory to the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. In 1999 based on outcomes for the Beijing Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration, Tuvalu's first National Women's Policy was formulated. The Policy provided the basis and direction to pursue the development of women in eight areas of concern: Institutional Strengthening, Women and Health, Women and Education, Women and the Environment, Women and the Law and Women and Economic Development. An action plan was also developed to provide the framework for implementing the new women's policy under the Department of Women Affairs (DWA). Despite this there was minimal progress due to financial constraints.⁸ Government had put in place a National Coordinating Committee on Women in 1999, which was reactivated in 2005 and chaired by the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry responsible for the DWA. Members are drawn from other Government Departments, NGO's and civil society. The NCC provided the monitoring mechanism to ensure the implementation of the revised NWP.

The DWA is currently (2013) positioned under the Prime Minister's office and is able to strategically influence other sectors of Government from this position. Women and gender issues have been part of Tuvalu's National Strategic Sustainable Development Plan, which is also called "TeKakeega II" with a 10-year period commencing from 2005 to 2015. Under the TK II Strategic Area Goal 3 on Social Development it states that there is a need "to promote gender equity and to expand the role of women in development".

The anti-discrimination provisions of the Tuvalu Constitution fail to recognise freedom from discrimination against sex. Therefore, a number of laws still discriminate against women in Tuvalu, e.g., laws relating to inheritance of land, adoption of children, marriage, custody of children, or domestic violence. There are calls on the Government to review all relevant laws, which discriminate negatively on women. These claims include the demand to change policies and practices, which perpetuate the discrimination and marginalisation of women, so as to bring them into line with international human rights standards.

Actors

The Tuvalu National Council of Women (TNCW) is a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) that was set up in the late 1970's to direct and manage women's affairs and their issues. The council consists of sixteen women and the formal link between Government and women's communities. TNCW has provided support in the area of women's political participation, women's handicrafts, legal literacy and recently ran programs on ending violence against women. Other NGO's are also instrumental in driving the work on gender equality and women's empowerment in Tuvalu. The Tuvalu National Council of NGO's (TANGO) is an umbrella organisation that cover the full range of development issues with membership including a number of women's organisations. TANGO has its own gender policy and is committed to ensuring that projects pay specific attention to the different impacts on women and men, involve women in the consultation process and give specific attention to the collection of sex-disaggregated data. Other stakeholder include:-

⁸MDG Progress report, 2010/2011

- TUFHA (Tuvalu Family Reproductive Health Services and Advocacy)
- CEDAW/ VAW Committee
- Fusiolofa (Disability Organisation)
- Tuvalu Red Cross
- Office of the People’s Lawyer
- Police Domestic Violence Sexual Violence Unit
- SPC RRRT Country Focal Point

RECOMMENDATIONS

Assistance towards the work on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Tuvalu has been inconsistent over the years. While Government has made significant commitments to advancing the gender agenda since 1999, this has been limited by the lack of resources to support Governments plans. The DWA with the assistance of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community has now developed a draft Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy expected to guide the work in country over the next five years and with the objective of institutionalising commitments to Gender Equality across all of Government. It is recommended that assistance towards gender mainstreaming in future programme/actions/priorities should be coordinated through the Department of Women’s Affairs as this will also assist with strengthening the capacity of the Department to work effectively in each sector.

- Adoption and implementation of the Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment Policy
- Enactment of the Family Protection Act
- Gender mainstreaming and budget support on gender across all sectors in particular water and sanitation
- Amendment of discriminatory provisions in the constitution and legislation
- Increase women employment opportunities through labor mobility schemes and women owned business

