



**Government of the  
Cook Islands**



**Cook Islands National Policy  
on  
Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment  
&  
Strategic Plan of Action (2011 - 2016)**



**GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS**

**COOK ISLANDS NATIONAL POLICY  
On  
GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**

**&**

**Strategic Plan of Action, 2011 - 2016**

**MAY 2011**

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Gender and Development, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Rarotonga, COOK ISLANDS



## Foreword

### Message from the Minister.

Kia orana.

This policy acknowledges and builds on past achievements and ongoing efforts to achieve gender equality in the Cook Islands.

Despite the common view that there is equal opportunity and everything is fine, there still remain subtle elements of discrimination. In effect, considerable discrimination against women persists.

Women's heavy workloads, for instance, continue to increase but, for a variety of reasons, are not equitably shared. The continued stereotyping and confining of women's roles and responsibilities to the domestic arena limits their participation in the social and economic development process.

Until recently, Government has adopted the approach of a gender and development perspective recognizes the importance of the relations between women and men, and in its planning process which is based on an analysis of the different situations and needs of women and men, aims at creating gender equity and equality between women and men. This also recognized that in order to redress gender inequalities it is necessary to create the conditions for women's empowerment while women and men work together to address attitudinal and institutional barriers to gender equality.

I believe that this Policy, together with the Strategic Plan of Action, provides a framework to guide the process of developing laws, policies, procedures and practices which will serve to ensure equal rights, opportunities and benefits for women and men in all spheres of Government programs and services as well as in the workplace, in the community and in the family.

I am grateful to the many individuals, Ministries, Agencies, Organisations both in Government, Non-government Organisations and in the communities who have contributed to the development of this National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. It is with great pleasure, that I present this policy to all women and men of the Cook Islands, our Sector Stakeholders, Development Partners and Communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Brown'.

Honourable Minister Mark Brown  
Minister for the Ministry of Internal Affairs  
Cook Islands,  
May 2011

## Acknowledgement

The Gender and Development Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs gratefully express our gratitude to the following institutions, and individuals who kindly gave valuable assistance and support during the consultations and compilation of this policy.

1. Central Planning & Policy Office (Office of the Prime Minister)
2. Cook Islands National Council of Women
3. Ministry of Health
4. MFEM – Statistic Department
5. Ministry of Internal Affairs – Disability Division
6. 2010 National Women’s Conference Participants
7. Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) – Human Development Programme, Gender Adviser

### *This policy is prepared by the*

1. Gender and Development Division, Ministry of Internal Affairs,

*In partnership with:*

2. Central Planning and Policy Office (Office of the Prime Minister)
3. Cook Islands National Council of Women.

*With technical assistance from:*

4. Secretariat of the Pacific Community, (SPC) Human Development Programme, Gender Adviser, 2011

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# I. Introduction

The first Cook Islands National Policy on Women was adopted in 1995.<sup>1</sup> While there have been visible improvements in access to health and education and increased involvement of women in the labour force, disadvantages remains 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<sup>2</sup>.

Significant policy shifts entails a revised approach to ensure gender equality commitments are fulfilled within the core of Government's business rather than on the periphery. This requires 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.

The 2010 review of the National Policy on Women calls for multi-sectoral and mainstreamed approaches to fulfilling these policy obligations and an updated policy. A change of name from National Policy on Women to National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment better reflects the required broad based approach.

It is a well established fact that the social and economic development of a nation and the wellbeing of the population require the contribution of all members of the society and partnerships based on respect and equality between women and men. This is an essential precondition to enable the country to address the challenges of intensified socioeconomic and environmental changes. Through this Policy, the Government of the Cook Islands expresses its commitment to provide equal opportunities for women and men to participate and benefit from the development of the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Summary in Annex 3

<sup>2</sup> ADB. Socio-Economic Report on the Cook Islands. 2008

## II. Policy Operating Principles

The National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) recognizes that women and men are equal partners in the development of the Cook Islands, and places gender equality at the heart of economic and social progress, giving equal value to the roles and responsibilities of Cook Islands' women and men. It also recognises that in order to redress gender inequalities it is necessary to create the conditions for women's empowerment while women and men work together to address attitudinal and institutional barriers to gender equality.

The operating principles underpinning the National Policy:

- Women and men are equal partners in the development of the Cook Islands and gender equality is at the heart of economic and social progress, and equal value needs to be given to the roles and responsibilities of the country's women and men.
- Women's empowerment will help achieve the national objective of ensuring the benefits of development are shared equally throughout the islands and the population, in order to ensure real improvement in their standard of living;
- The realization of women's human rights is the basic guiding principle for the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.
- Gender equality is a right and customary practices are subject to the principle of equality enshrined in the Constitution of the country.
- The principle of equality is guiding the adoption of affirmative actions for compensating for historical and social disadvantages women undergone which have deprive them of equal opportunities.
- Identified priority outcomes are linked to stated national priorities in the revised NSDP.
- While Government policy priorities may change, the priority outcomes identified in this Policy will remain valid.
- Women economic empowerment is critical for achieving the social and economic development goal of the country.
- Policy makers and managers need to develop their capacity to mainstream gender and address women human rights issues into their field of intervention and sector.
- Strong partnerships and coordination mechanisms need to be in place between the national women machinery - the GAD division housed under MINTAFF - and other line and sectoral ministries and with outer islands governance mechanisms.

### III. Policy Objectives

The aim of this policy is to guide the Cook Islands Government in implementing and monitoring its commitments to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women. The policy is also a tool for dialogue with and between different sectors and agencies to achieve the following objectives:

- (1) Define agreed priorities for empowering women and achieving gender equality;
- (2) Create an enabling environment for translating Government commitment to gender equality and women's human rights into reality;
- (3) Align national plans to implement Government's international and regional commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment.
- (4) Define a mechanism for monitoring and reporting on the progress in line with the Cook Islands commitment to regional and international state obligations.

### IV. Policy Vision

The National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment is based on a vision of:

**A society in which social justice enable all individuals to live in dignity, enjoy their human rights, achieve their full potential and contribute to the development and the wellbeing of the society; where women and girls have equal access to and benefits from the development and growth of the country; where women and girls are protected from all forms of discrimination and violence.**

### V. Policy Mission

In partnership with Government Institutions, Civil Society and all key stakeholders the mission is to:

**Establish and reinforce mechanisms to eliminate gender inequalities and for addressing the needs of the women of the Cook Islands and ensure they fully enjoy their human rights.**



## VI. Policy Goal

Cook Islands women have always contributed significantly to the development and wellbeing of their families, communities and society as a whole. Their contribution however is not always properly acknowledged and the constraints they face, which prevent them to enjoy fully their human rights, are not adequately addressed. There are remaining issues that require attention that are critical for the social and economic development of the country and for addressing emerging challenges such as those related to climate change impacts. This Policy acknowledges and builds upon past achievements and ongoing efforts to achieve gender equality.

The National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment outlines a set of agreed priorities for advancing gender equality and for ensuring the enabling environment for women to enjoy their human rights.

The purpose of the Policy is to provide a framework to guide the process of developing laws, policies, procedures and practices which will serve to ensure equal rights, opportunities and benefits for women and men in all spheres of Government programs and services, as well as the workplace, the community and the family. The objective of achieving gender equality is the responsibility of the whole Government and each sector has to play an active role in line with the national values and international commitments in partnership with non-governmental organisation, civil society and all Cook Islanders.

The goal of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) is:

**To advance gender equality and enhance women's empowerment ensuring the active contribution and meaningful participation of both Cook Islands women and men in all spheres, and at all levels, of development and decision making.**

## VII. Policy Priority Outcomes

In order to achieve gender equality in the Cook Islands and further empower women this Policy proposes the six following outcomes:

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

## VIII. Policy Strategic Plan of Action 2011 – 2016

The five-year Strategic Plan of Action proposes a series of outputs and key actions in order to achieve the outcomes of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Its implementation requires the active involvement and contribution of the Government, non-government, civil society organizations and communities. It is essential that the outcomes, output and actions proposed are incorporated in key planning and budgeting processes at the national, sectoral and agency levels.

### Policy Goal

The goal of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) is to **advance gender equality and enhance women's empowerment ensuring the active contribution and meaningful participation of both Cook Islands women and men in all spheres, and at all levels, of development and decision making.**

### Policy Priority Outcomes

The priority Policy outcomes sought over the first 5 years of this plan (2011-2016) are:

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

### Outcome 1: Gender-Responsive Government's Programs and Policies

#### Outputs:

- 1.1. CEDAW articles are embedded into legislative and statutory reforms and policy initiatives across Government.
- 1.2. CEDAW review report is prepared and presented to CEDAW committee
- 1.3. Knowledge about gender equality and women's human rights issues is updated and made available to decision makers, planners, managers of the government institutions and civil society
- 1.4. Gender perspective is mainstreamed in Government policies, programs and services including the Outer Islands
- 1.5. Sex disaggregated data is systematically produced in all sectors and used to inform policy decisions, program design and planning
- 1.6. GADD has improved its capacity to coordinate, advise, and provide technical assistance to the Government's institutions
- 1.7. The civil society has enhanced its capacity to advocate, raise awareness and play an effective role in promoting the values of gender equality and women's human rights
- 1.8. A system is in place to coordinate and monitor the advancement of gender equality and women's human rights at all levels and in each sector

**Key Actions:**

- ❖ Embed CEDAW articles into legislative and statutory reforms and policy initiatives across government
- ❖ Initiate and conduct research on relevant issues related to gender equality and women's human rights
- ❖ Support the production and use of sex disaggregated data and gender analysis to inform government's policies and programs
- ❖ Mainstreaming gender into all government policies, programs and services including the Outer Islands
- ❖ Strengthen the capacity of government officials and managers on mainstreaming gender equality
- ❖ Strengthen the role of coordination, advisory, and technical support of GADD
- ❖ Monitor the advancement of gender equality and women's human rights at all levels and in each sector
- ❖ Monitor the impacts of government policies and programs on gender equality and women's human right

**Outcome 2: Equitable Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making and Governance Systems****Outputs**

- 2.1. Increased recognition of women's rights to participate in public life and exercise leadership roles
- 2.2. More women are showing interest in taking leadership roles and participate in national and local governance institutions
- 2.3. Political parties put in place mechanisms to increase the recruitment of women in their organization at all level
- 2.4. Media are playing a greater role in promoting gender equality and women's human rights and the value of electing women to parliament
- 2.5. Increased number of women elected to parliament and local government
- 2.6. Equitable representation of women and men in leadership positions in both public and private sectors

**Key Actions**

- ❖ Advance the Cook Islands 5 Year Action Plan to Advance Women in Public Life 2011-2013 program
- ❖ Develop an enabling environment to promote women's leadership and participation in decision making in governance systems at both national and local levels.
- ❖ Build the capacity of women to exercise leadership in different sectors.
- ❖ Promote competent women in high level of decision making and management positions in the government bodies at both national and local levels.
- ❖ Conduct public awareness-raising campaigns about the benefits of electing women in leadership position
- ❖ Assessing media's role on the coverage and equitable treatment of women candidates and women occupying decision making positions and putting gender equality and women's human rights issues on the political agenda
- ❖ Support political parties to review their organizational culture to encourage women to join their organizations

## **Outcome 3: An Enabling Environment for the Full Participation of Women in Economic Development**

### **Outputs**

- 3.1. Increased benefits from new livelihood options and economic opportunities for women
- 3.2. Women increased access to productive assets
- 3.3. Better working conditions supporting parental role of women and men in both public and private sectors
- 3.4. Elimination of pay disparities

### **Key Actions**

- ❖ Identify new economic opportunities for women
- ❖ Promote and support women's businesses in both the formal and informal sectors
- ❖ Support women's access to financial services and other productive assets for the development of their enterprises
- ❖ Improve working conditions and women's friendly workplaces in both public and private sectors
- ❖ Promote the adoption of policies against sexual harassment
- ❖ Support the adoption of the Employment Relations Bill which proposes the access to maternity leave to all working women
- ❖ Conduct a study to increase the understanding of pay disparities between men and women and identify measures to eliminate those disparities
- ❖ Increase women's contribution and benefit from the tourism industry
- ❖ Support women's investments in the productive sectors of fisheries and agriculture.
- ❖ Support the integration of women living with disability in socio economic development.

## **Outcome 4: Improved Capacity of Women to Contribute to Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies**

### **Outputs:**

- 4.1. Better understanding of the gender dimension of environmental, climate change impacts and disaster risk reduction
- 4.2. Gender responsive climate change and disaster preparedness and risk reduction strategies
- 4.3. Women's improved preparedness and capacity to respond to climate change impacts and disasters

### **Key Actions:**

- ❖ Identify differential vulnerability of women to climate change and disasters
- ❖ Build the capacity of women to respond to the impact of climate change and disasters
- ❖ Ensure the integration of gender concerns in climate change adaptation and disasters risk reduction plans
- ❖ Develop gender responsive natural resources management policies and programs
- ❖ Ensure the allowance of proper resources to address women's needs and build their capacity to adapt to climate change and disaster risk reduction from the climate change financial resources and other external funding sources
- ❖ Network with regional and international organizations promoting gender mainstreaming in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies to voice the concerns of Cook Islands women.

## Outcome 5: Improved Capacity of Women to Address Health Issues

### Outputs:

- 5.1. Women's sexual and reproduction rights are respected and promoted
- 5.2. Teenage pregnancy rate considerably reduced
- 5.3. Substantial reduction of STI among teenage girls
- 5.4. Healthier lifestyle and significant reduction of non communicable diseases for the overall population

### Key Actions:

- ❖ Promote changes in the legislation and policies for ensuring women's sexual and reproductive rights
- ❖ Disseminate information about women's sexual and reproductive rights
- ❖ Improve access to contraceptives – particularly for teenage girls
- ❖ Intensify dissemination of information about responsible sexual behaviors to teenage girls and boys in order to reduce girls' pregnancy and the proliferation of STI
- ❖ Improved screening systems and response to breast cancer, cervical cancer, STI and HIV Aid
- ❖ Raise awareness and build the capacity of women to be active in promoting healthy lifestyles
- ❖ Develop infrastructures and services to encourage women and girls to lead an active and healthy life

## Outcome 6: Elimination of Violence against Women

### Outputs:

- 6.1 Legal frameworks, law enforcement and justice systems are strengthened
- 6.2 Services to victims are improved
- 6.3 Services to treat the perpetrators of violence are in place
- 6.4 Community level mobilization to intervene and protect the victims is strengthened
- 6.5 Increased partnership with men to combat violence against women

### Key Actions:

- ❖ Promote the adoption of the Family Law Bill
- ❖ Strengthen legal frameworks, law enforcement and improve justice systems
- ❖ Improve the coordination of services providers– policy, health, and NGOs
- ❖ Conduct a study on the prevalence of violence against women
- ❖ Disseminate information about women's human rights and the measures of the Family Law Bill
- ❖ Strengthen a response and protective systems to address violence against women at the community level
- ❖ Develop services to accompany the victims and support their recovery
- ❖ Provide treatment and rehabilitation services to the perpetrators
- ❖ Provide rehabilitation services to reduce alcoholism
- ❖ Work with men to end violence against women

## IX. Implementation

An effective and robust National Women Machinery is necessary to take a lead role in raising awareness across civil society and the whole of Government at national and island levels to be responsive to the different needs of women and men and to address gender inequality. Coordinating policy implementation will be overseen by the National Women's Machinery comprising the Gender and Development Division (GADD) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in partnership with the Cook Islands National Council of Women (CINCW). GADD will play the lead role in coordinating the implementation of this Policy within Government while the CINCW will play a key role in coordinating its implementation with civil society organizations.

Whilst the Gender and Development Division play the lead role of coordination and advisory, the implementation of the Policy requires the engagement of all sectors and all Government Agencies at both national and island levels. Each sector and agency concerned by the outcomes of the Policy must dedicate appropriate resources (human, financial and material) and are expected to play a leading and supportive role (as appropriate) in the implementation of the actions proposed in the Action Plan of the Policy.

## X. Monitoring & Reporting

Monitoring and evaluation are critical for measuring the nations' progress towards closing gender inequality gaps and advancing the development and status of women. The GEWE National Steering Committee (GEWE-NSC)<sup>3</sup> comprising of Head of Ministries and key stakeholders will monitor the implementation of the Policy, play an advisory role in directing interventions required, and report to Cabinet annually through the Ministry responsible for gender equality (MINTAFF). Each of the priority outcomes of this policy will be overseen by National Task Forces (NTFs)<sup>4</sup> dedicated to specific priority outcomes

Through annual reports, other reports and stakeholder forums, the GAD Divison (MINTAFF) will inform Cabinet on the progress of policy outcomes. Such reports will highlight progress and achievements on implementing this Policy, analysis of gender information and sex-disaggregated data, capacity building needs and the impacts of this policy's implementation.

The key performance measures will incorporate:

- The MDG targets that relate to each policy outcome
- Tracking that women have been given increased opportunities for training and education
- Reporting that women have been and are being actively engaged and meaningfully consulted and equally involved in decision making with men
- Targeting men's involvement in addressing gender equality especially in shared decision-making and gender based violence
- Systematic collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data and identification of gender gaps
- Linking national plans, policies and legislation to international and regional commitments<sup>5</sup> such as the Pacific Plan, the Pacific Platform for Action, the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW and UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to Terms of Reference in the Plan Of Action.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to Terms of Reference in the Plan Of Action.

<sup>5</sup> Refer to Annex 3 for a summary explanation of these commitments

## **ANNEX 1: Persistent Gender Inequality in the Cook Islands**

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.

### **☞ Gender Equality Perspective is not mainstreamed in Government's 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 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. Some legislative gaps to comply with CEDAW's commitments remain.

It is thus necessary to increase capacity for gender mainstreaming of Government policy makers, managers and professionals. Addressing women's human rights, gender inequalities, and women's differential needs, have to become every Ministry's business. It is also essential to strengthen the national women's machinery in its role of coordination and advisory. There should be in place a coordination mechanism that would stimulate more collaborative work and partnership between the different Government Institutions from all sectors, including with the local Government Institutions.

Embedding CEDAW articles in all legislative and regulatory provisions is central to gender mainstreaming and provides the necessary legal protections for women and the legislative framework for accountability and reporting by government.

**To achieve gender equality and empowerment of Cook Islands women, Government's policies and programs have to be gender-responsive; this is the first outcome propose in the Policy.** This requires that gender equality is mainstreamed in all government' policies and programs at both central and local level and in every sector; sex disaggregated data and gender analysis are produce and use in every sector; Government's Institutions develop their capacity in addressing gender issues in their sector; a coordination mechanism for the implementation of the Policy and the monitoring of the progress toward gender equality is established; accountability mechanisms for mainstreaming gender are put in place; the role of coordination and advisory of the Gender and Development Division as the national women machinery is reinforced; the civil society plays its role to advocate for women's human rights toward the Government and disseminate information and support women's empowerment.

## ☞ **Low participation of women in decision making and leadership**

The Cook Islands Government through the Pacific Plan and various other regional and international commitments has committed to advancing women participation in decision-making processes. There is a real need for a more coordinated and strategic approach to address the gross under-representation of women in the Cook Islands parliament and other echelons of decision making. This is not just a matter of women's rights. Increased balance between the sexes in decision-making goes hand in hand with good governance as it ensures consideration of a diversity of perspectives and direct attention to issues that may otherwise be overlooked.

Despite the comparatively high level of education and proven capacity to hold senior management level positions, women are still underrepresented in public offices<sup>6</sup>.

In 2010, there were 10 female candidates that contested in the Cook Islands general election, compared to 60 male candidates, more than the female candidates who contested in the 2006 election, with 8 female candidates. Only one female candidate was successful in the 2010 elections compared to 3 female candidates in the 2006 elections.

Research and consultation at the national and regional level has shown that women face a number of challenges when deciding to stand for elections, the lack of time and financial resources for campaigning and weak social capital; in addition to ingrained beliefs that decision making and politics is a domain for men, and they therefore are more competent in national decision making. A number of strategic entry points have been identified to achieve this policy outcome. Examples include, capacity building and candidate training for women, the role of the media (in terms of gender awareness and gender sensitive reporting particularly in the lead up to national elections;) gender sensitizing political parties, which could also include a review and recommendations on how to encourage the participation of women in a political party as well as ensuring gender sensitive considerations in respective party manifestos and the advocacy role of civil society organizations and faith based organizations.

Awareness-raising about women's capacity to hold positions and have leadership in decision-making bodies and the added value for the society to have an equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes is needed. The media can play a critical role for this purpose. The political parties also need to review how they can encourage more women to join their rank.

The Gender and Development Division working with development partners has developed a program to promote women to enter into parliament. However, before this program can start a comprehensive review and amendment to the Electoral Act is needed. Women's advocacy groups are supporting GADD's efforts in bringing forward this important legal reform.

**Equitable participation of women and men in decision-making and governance systems is the second outcome of the Policy.** 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 promoting 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 favorable conditions for the representation of women in the parliament.

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<sup>6</sup> Public office' includes elected, appointed or civil service positions.



## ☞ Unequal Access to Productive and Economic Resources

Improving the economic status of women through their access to, and share of, productive resources such as land, income, financial services, training opportunities, enterprise development services and technology contributes significantly to poverty reduction, food security and the overall economic development of the country. Although Cook Islands women are now more educated, benefit from a land succession system where they can claim customary land, can access credit and employment, they do, in fact, have unequal access to productive and economic resources. With the priority given to economic development by the Government of the Cook Islands, it becomes even more important to tackle the gender inequalities in the economic sectors and create the conditions for equal opportunity for women and men.

The 2006 Census showed that a significant gender difference remained in earnings for paid employment: more women than men were in the lowest-income bracket (less than NZ\$5,000) and more men than women were in the highest earning groups. It is a fact that men earn more than women, confirming pay disparities, but these disparities are narrowing especially in the outer islands. In Rarotonga, women earned about 76% in 2001 to 81% in 2006, of the men's incomes; in the Southern group, they earned 72% in 2001 to 76% in 2006; and in the Northern group, the women earned only 57% in 2001 to 76% in 2006 of men's incomes. This shows great improvement over the last census and a mechanism to monitor pay disparities and women's working conditions – including the measures enabling women and men to fulfill their parental responsibility need to be put in place.

An increase in female-headed households which represented 24% of the households in 2001 to 25% (1,073) of the households in 2006 with Rarotonga showing 74% (793) of this type of family arrangement -suffered elevated risk of having low incomes or being socially isolated. Most of those who receive social welfare benefits for destitution are single women heads of households with children<sup>7</sup>.

Another factor inducing pay disparity is the incapacity of Ministries with an important workforce – notably Health and Education - to provide salary increase for over five years – not even to match the increasing cost of living - because of budget restrictions. Although the intention is not to discriminate against women, since those Ministries are highly feminized with female workforce representing 57.5% in Health and 73.5% in Education it does in fact induce discrimination.

In the context of low salaries and high cost of imported goods, women continue to engage in subsistence livelihood activities<sup>8</sup> notably in agriculture and fisheries, especially in the Outer Islands. In 2006, this is evident in handicraft making including sewing activities, gardening and fishing activities both in the outer islands and the main island Rarotonga.

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

**Table 1. Average Annual Income by Sex and Region in the Cook Islands, 2006**

	Average Annual Income NZ\$	
	Men	Women
Rarotonga	\$17,310	\$14,100
South Group	\$8,185	\$6,265
North Group	\$8,830	\$6,714

Census 2006

<sup>7</sup> Cook Islands 2008 Social and Economic Report—Equity in Development

<sup>8</sup> ADB. Gender Profiles of Asian Development Bank's Pacific Developing Member Countries. 2008

2.8%. These figures confirm that more women are becoming self-employed and create businesses dealing in tourism, retail, arts and other enterprises.

Other factors hamper women's full participation and benefits for economic development. There is a need to provide better services and conditions for women having familial responsibilities. Since 2007, efforts by CINCW, Punanga Tauturu Inc., and GADD to ensure that the maternity protection clause within the Employment Relations Bill provides the same level of protection for women working in the private sector, as the same conditions of women working in the public sector, have been included. The Bill has recently been sent to a Parliament selection committee for final public and parliament consideration before being presented for enactment at the next sitting of the Parliament. If passed, all working women will be entitled to 6 weeks of maternity leave with pay when they give birth.

**Create an enabling environment for the full participation of women in economic development is the third outcome of the Policy.** 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 the 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.

### ☞ **Differential Vulnerability of women and men to Natural Disasters and Environmental and Climate Change**

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. However, we know that climate change is greatly affecting natural resources upon which people's livelihood depends greatly and also impacts on household food security. 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. Therefore it would be correct to suppose that climate change will affect women and men differently. Hence climate change strategies at the national and local levels need to be gender responsive, i.e., addressing differential needs women and men may have; build on their respective knowledge and skills to develop their capacity and reduce their vulnerability.

Communities, particularly in the Outer Islands, need to get support to develop their response to climate change impacts and natural disasters and women have to play a leadership role in developing and implementing their community's strategy.

The roles played by women in the home and in the community can be eased by mechanization and technology. An area of concern for women is energy. Special care must be given for the development and accessibility of energy efficiency technologies and those which provide for energy security particularly from renewable sources.

**Improving the capacity of women to contribute to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies is the fourth outcome of the Policy.** This requires conducting studies to understand the differential vulnerability of women and men towards climate change impacts and disasters, and how they respectively respond to climate stresses; ensure an equitable participation of women and men in climate change adaptation programs, especially at the community level in the Outer Islands; provide information and build the capacity of women to be prepared and respond to natural disasters and climate change impacts; ensure gender

perspective and women human rights are properly integrated in climate change and disaster risk reduction strategies and that funding mechanisms favor gender responsive initiatives.

## ☞ **Recurrent Health Issues**

The overall health indicators have considerably improved in the last decades. Health care services are more accessible and the care of better quality. The country has made great strides in reducing the maternal mortality ratio and infant mortality rate and the reproductive health standards are good. The prevalence of contraceptive use is approximately 44%. However the adolescent fertility rate is as high as 68 births for 1000 women among women aged between 15 to 19 years.<sup>9</sup> In addition, concern remains in the consistent prevalence of STI's among our younger men and women which reach 46%.

Reproductive rights of women still need some improvements. Amendments have been made to the existing Ministry of Health consent form for sterilization which requires client's 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.

Additionally non communicable diseases are a serious issue. The NCD STEPS Survey conducted in 2004 reveals that the prevalence of hypertension was 29.5% and diabetes 23.7%; 88.5% of the population is overweight and 61.4% is obese<sup>10</sup> and 74% have low level of physical activity.

Since they contribute to shaping the values and behaviors of their children, women can play a critical role in addressing issues such as physical activity, obesity, smoking or alcoholism at the household and community levels. Women are also greatly affected when one member of the family is suffering of heart disease, diabetes, cancer or other non communicable diseases because they are usually the care givers when family members are ill. Women, especially the young, need to play an active role in prevention and in creating new values and healthy lifestyle habits for the betterment of Cook Islands people's health.

**Creating the condition for improving the capacity of women to address health issues is the fifth outcome of the Policy.** This requires strengthening women's sexual health and reproductive rights; raising awareness on preventive measures around health issues, that are particularly affecting women; such as STI, increasing knowledge and skills on healthy lifestyles and creating the conditions for women to play a more active role in promoting healthy lifestyles; provide support to women who are taking care of a family member with incapacitating illness or living with disability; and improve accessibility of healthcare services and health information in the Outer Islands.

## ☞ **Violence against Women**

A national survey on the prevalence, causes and consequences of violence against women in Cook Islands is yet to be carried out. Findings from a situational analysis report states that domestic and sexual violence is still a very sensitive issue which few women will speak openly about. The Punanga Tauturu Inc (PTI) is in the forefront of addressing the issue. The Cooks 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. The up skilling of the Community Policing Unit to deal with gender based violence supports Cook Islands Police efforts to combat this activity.

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<sup>9</sup> ADB. Gender Profiles of Asian Development Bank's Pacific Developing Member Countries. 2008

<sup>10</sup> Cook Islands National Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent & Control non Communicable Diseases, 2009-2014.

Besides the adoption of legal measures to eliminate violence against women, there is a need to further develop and strengthen services for the victims, notably the role of health professionals. Better coordinated services between the Police, healthcare services and civil society organizations are needed. NGO can 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; they can also support the mobilization of women at the community level – especially in the outer islands – to play an important role in preventing violence against women (in both private and public spaces) and rescuing the victims. Services need to be developed for working with the perpetrators of violence against women.

**The elimination of violence against women is the sixth outcome of the Policy.** This requires the adoption of laws and policies against all form of violence against women; awareness raising about women`s human rights, the legislations and the 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.

## ☞ **Women with greater vulnerability**

The Policy aims to address gender inequality for the overall population and to benefit all women of the Cook Islands. However, women do not represent a homogenous group and the Policy acknowledges the fact that some women are more disadvantaged because notably of their isolation, age, physical condition, or limited assets. Those distinctions need to be taken into account while designing programs and priority should be given to women who face more obstacles or have less opportunity. For this reason, particular attention will be given to address their needs and ensuring they are participating in and benefiting from the Policy's initiatives.

- 1. Women living in the Outer Islands** are facing several challenges. Their remoteness and relative isolation limit their capacity to access to public services, to access employment, create enterprises and access market; and their greater dependency on natural resources for their livelihood increase their vulnerability to environmental and climate change impacts. Gender roles are more strict and women have less opportunity to participate in decision making and in local governance bodies thus their capacity to influence how resources are allocated is limited. In this context the Women Development Officers have an important role to play in supporting initiatives that will contribute to create an enabling environment for empowering women from the Outer Islands and reducing gender inequalities. A stronger linkage and coordination is needed between the Women Development Officers and the Gender and Development Division. In addition, the Outer Islands Councils and Island Secretaries need to strengthen their capacity to mainstream gender in their plans and in the services delivery.
- 2. Young women and girls** are facing all the issues mentioned above; and their young age adds a level of vulnerability. The difficulty for the Cook Islands society to deal with topics related to sexuality has an important impact on teenage girls with a high rate of teenage pregnancy (68/1000 births) and teenage mothers as high as 59 for 1000 women (2010<sup>11</sup>) and a very high prevalence of STI (39.8% per female population age 15-19 years, 2006). Young women also face various forms of violence.
- 3. Women with disabilities** are twice or three times disadvantaged as their male counterparts, they are treated differently because they are women, disabled and further if they are living in the Outer Islands, from limited access to special care services, inadequate infrastructures, prejudices, high dependency to their relatives, and exclusion from civil, political, economical, social and cultural lives. Accessing Government social welfare benefits is not enough; they have the right to live a fulfilling life and participate in the development and benefits of their communities. Special measures need to be taken for promoting their education, develop their skills, access employments, and participate in the governance system as much as their condition permitted.

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<sup>11</sup> Information provided by the Ministry of Health

## **ANNEX 2: Institutional Arrangement for the Implementation of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

The implementation of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment requires the contribution of all levels of Government Institutions from every sector and the civil society. The following describe the role of different stakeholders and the coordination mechanism.

### **The National Steering Committee**

If the Gender and Development Division play a leading role of coordination and advisory, the implementation of the Policy requires the engagement of all sectors and all Government agencies at both national and local levels. Each sector and agency concerned by the outcomes of the Policy must dedicate appropriate resources (human, financial and material) and are expected to play a leading role in the implementation of the actions proposed in the Action Plan of the Policy.

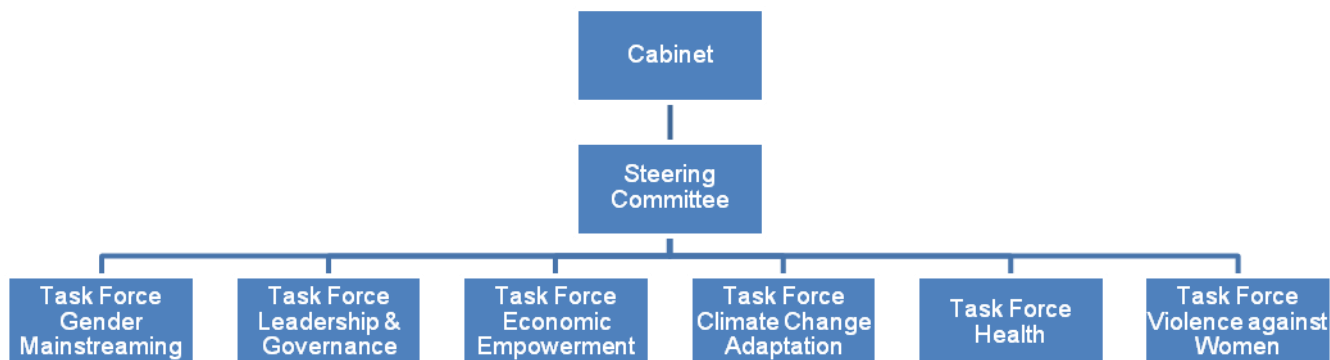
For the purpose of coordination, supervision advisory and monitoring of the implementation of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, a steering committee is established. The steering committee will be supported by the task force groups, will report on the progress in implementing the Policy to the Cabinet, and will oversee the reporting process to CEDAW committee.

The National Steering Committee will be chaired by the Secretary of Internal Affairs (MINTAFF) and will consist of the following:

- (a) The CEO (PM Support Office/Chief of Staff), Office of the Prime Minister
- (b) Chief Executive Officer, Public Service Commission
- (c) Financial Secretary, Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
- (d) Secretary, Ministry of Education
- (e) Secretary, Ministry of Health
- (f) Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture
- (g) Secretary, Ministry of Infrastructure and Planning
- (h) Secretary, Ministry of Justice
- (i) Secretary, Ministry of Cultural Development
- (j) Director of National Environment Services (Tu'anga Taporoporo)
- (k) Commissioner of Police
- (l) Director, Gender and Development Division, MINTAFF
- (m) President, CINCW
- (n) Representative of the Outer Islands

The National Steering Committee has a role of advisory and monitoring of the implementation of the Policy. It will adopt the implementation plan, annual plan and annual report of each task force, review the progresses, make recommendations and present the plans and reports to the Cabinet. The National Steering Committee also has a role of advocacy toward the Government for ensuring the allowance of proper resources for achieving Policy targets.

**Fig 1: Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism**



The National Steering Committee will meet twice a year in May and November to consider progress reports of the implementation of the Policy from:

- National Governments
- Islands Administrations and Islands Councils
- The National Women’s Machinery
- Respective National Task Forces on each policy outcome
- Achievement and impacts of policy outcomes
- CEDAW report to UN
- Support from development partners
- An annual conference for monitoring and reviewing progress

### **The Task Forces**

The development and implementation of activities for each priority policy outcome will be the responsibility of the respective taskforces. Coordination and monitoring will also be the responsibility of these task forces who will report to the National Steering Committee. Each task force will be composed of representatives of the institutions involved in the implementation of the related outcomes and resource-persons. Each will be led by the institution leading the implementation of the outcome (e.g. Ministry of Health for the Outcome related to Health).

Each task force will be responsible for developing a 5 years implementation plan as soon as the Policy is adopted. At the beginning of each year, the task force will prepare an annual plan including the resources required and will submit the plan to the National Steering Committee.

The task forces will monitor the implementation of activities for the achievement of the outcomes and will report the progresses to the National Steering Committee through an annual report.

## **The Gender and Development Division, Ministry of Internal Affairs**

The Gender and Development Division under the Ministry of Internal Affairs represents the official national women machinery. The Division has a role of coordination and advisory: it informs, advises and provides technical assistance to the different levels of Government for addressing gender inequalities and issues related to violation of women's human rights and coordinate the Government's efforts for addressing those issues. It also support the monitoring and reporting process about the progress and remaining gaps at the national, regional and international levels. The Gender and Development Division will be a member of the National Steering Committee and the Task Forces.

## **The Island Secretary's and Women Development Officer's**

Women of the outer islands undergo greater gender inequalities. Women Development Officers, under the authority of their respective Island Secretary, can play an important role in promoting the implementation of the Policy through the islands development plans, coordinates interventions for addressing gender inequalities issues and women's needs, and support women's empowerment process. They will liaise with the Gender and Development Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for coordination purposes but also to monitor and relay information about the progress and gaps in implementing the Policy and addressing outer islands women's needs and gender inequalities.

## **The Cook Islands National Council of Women**

The role of the Cook Islands National Council of Women (CINCW) is to serve as a focal point for the civil society organizations, and to facilitate information sharing and collaboration. The CINCW will act as a key channel for information – between the civil society organizations and the Policy Steering Committee and will support consultation processes on the Policy and implementation of the strategic action plan. As a member of the Steering Committee and the task forces, it will provide feedback about the implementation of the Policy and gender related concerns expressed by the civil society and Cook Islands women. It will play a key role in disseminating information to the Cook Islands population about the Policy and women's human's rights. It will contribute to monitor and report on the progress and the remaining gaps for achieving gender equality and protect women's human rights.



## **ANNEX 3: National, Regional and International Commitments**

### **Cook Islands Constitution**

The Cook Islands' Constitution came into force 1964. In Section 64, it guarantees to all citizens equal rights without regard to sex.

### **Cook Islands Government National Policy on Women 1995**

The development of the first National Policy on Women (1995) was driven by the CINCW and was an important piece of work that drove Government's work over the years on improving the status of our women.

The implementation of the National Women's Policy has been an uphill battle for women in the Cook Islands. The major obstacles encountered were the financial and capacity constraints of implementing bodies, which were the GADD<sup>12</sup> Unit and the CINCW.

Seven specific objectives were set out in the National Policy on Women, as follows:

- Ensure women participate equally in decision making at all levels
- Foster closer working relations between government, non government organizations and the private sector
- Enhance women's roles by improving health and environment
- Bring women's issues into mainstream development process
- Make women equal partners as contributors and beneficiaries of development within the family, community, and the nation.
- Maintain and preserve those cultural values/traditions that promote the status of women.
- Uphold the Human Rights of women by improving their social, economic, political and cultural status in line with UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by providing opportunities and support system for women's multiple roles in society.

The objectives reflected in the 1995 National Policy on Women are still relevant today and there have been incremental gains over the last 10 years. For example, the current draft National Sustainable Development Plan (2) expects to systematically mainstreamed gender issues into all the sectoral plans. The next step is to ensure that these provisions are maintained in the plan and the relevant budgetary allocations are provided by our government to ensure implementation of plans.

The National Policy on Women has recently been reviewed and the exercise brings to the fore the emerging issues that will be included in this National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

### **Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**

CEDAW is the short name given to the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Convention is commonly regarded as the international bill of rights for women. CEDAW was adopted in 1979 by members of the United Nations following

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<sup>12</sup> Gender and Development Division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

decades of national, regional and international efforts to promote and protect the rights of the world's women. This can be viewed at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>.

A CEDAW Optional Protocol was developed in 2000. This can be viewed at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/protocol/>

The Cook Islands became a party to CEDAW in 1985, when New Zealand ratified the Convention. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of August 2006, the country acceded to CEDAW in its own right and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 2007 at the 808<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Committee overseeing the implementation of CEDAW at the United Nations, Government presented its initial report. Ratification and accession commits the Cook Islands Government to reviewing a host of domestic legislation in accordance with the articles adopted under CEDAW.

A shadow country report prepared by Cook Islands non-government organizations preceded the presentation of the initial report to the UN in January 2007. This report supplements the Government report by highlighting NGO perspectives on the nature of the Government's commitments to implement the Convention through legislation, policies and resource allocation.

### **Millennium Development Goals (MDG)**

In September 2000, building upon a decade of major United Nations conferences and summits, world leaders came together at United Nations Headquarters in New York to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration committing their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and setting out a series of time-bound targets - with a deadline of 2015 - that have become known as the Millennium Development Goals – of which there are eight. This can be viewed on <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoal/bkgd.shtml>.

The third goal known as MDG 3 is to promote gender equality and empower women with target 3.3 being the proportion of seats held by women in parliament.

### **Beijing Platform for Action (BPA)**

Pacific Islands member states, including the Cook Islands Government, participating at the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995, approved the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) aimed at establishing priority actions at the threshold of the new millennium. Of the 12 critical areas of concern in the BPA, one of which is *Women in Power and Decision Making*, governments agreed to take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making setting specific targets and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through positive action. This can be viewed at the UN Website, Division of the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs,

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat 1.html>

### **Pacific Platform for Action (PPA)**

The 22 Pacific Island governments and territories, including the Cook Islands Government, through the Sixth regional Conference of Pacific Women and the Ministerial Conference on Women and Sustainable Development, both held in Noumea in May 1994, which unanimously approved the

Pacific Platform for Action (PPA) and agreed that women's development should become a top priority for all Pacific Island governments and administrations. The PPA identified 13 critical areas of concern, one of which was *Shared Decision Making*, where governments agreed to take action to promote women in elected political offices and appointed decision-making positions, attaining the 30% target set by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

*Pacific Platform for Action, Rethinking Sustainable Development for Pacific Women towards the Year 2000*, produced by the Pacific Women's Resource Bureau, South Pacific Commission [renamed Secretariat of the Pacific Community].

[http://www.sidsnet.org/pacific/spc/ac/pwb/pwb\\_ppa.html](http://www.sidsnet.org/pacific/spc/ac/pwb/pwb_ppa.html); and  
<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/778527>

## **Pacific Plan (PP)**

In 2004, Pacific Leaders, through the Auckland Declaration, noted that the serious challenges facing the countries of the Pacific called for the development of a 'Pacific Plan' to strengthen regional cooperation and integration as the main instrument for realizing their Pacific Vision. The Pacific Plan established four priority goals: economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security. *Improved gender equality* is a cross-cutting strategic objective in the Pacific Plan.

The Auckland Declaration can be viewed at:

[http://forumsec.org.fj/\\_resources/article/files/Auckland%20Declaration.pdf](http://forumsec.org.fj/_resources/article/files/Auckland%20Declaration.pdf)

The Pacific Plan can be viewed at:

[http://www.forumsec.org.fj/pages.cfm/about us/ the-pacific-plan/](http://www.forumsec.org.fj/pages.cfm/about%20us/the-pacific-plan/)

## **The Commonwealth Plan of Action**

The Commonwealth Plan of Action 2005-2015 was agreed to at the 7<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's/Gender Affairs Meeting (7WAMM) held in Fiji in May 2004. The Plan established a target of at least 30% of women in decision-making in the political, public and private sectors.

This can be viewed at

[http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/33902/38116/poa\\_2005\\_2015/](http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/33902/38116/poa_2005_2015/)

## **UN SC R1325 on Women, Peace and Security**

Adopted by the UN Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000

The resolution calls for increase in the number of women at decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions involved in preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts, increased participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes, ensure that a gender component is included in field peacekeeping operations, provide training guidelines and materials on (1) the protection, rights, and needs of women, the importance of involving women in peacekeeping and peace-building measures, adopt a gender perspective when negotiating & implementing peace agreements in areas like:

- Special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction.
- Support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution and involve women in all of the peace agreement implementation mechanisms.
- Ensure the protection of and respect for human rights of women and girls, particularly relating to the constitution, electoral system, the police and judiciary.

For more information: [iwtc@iwtc.org](mailto:iwtc@iwtc.org); <http://www.iwtc.org>

## **Convention on the Rights of the Child. (CRC)**

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights—civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. In 1989, world leaders decided that children needed a special convention just for them because people under 18 years old often need special care and protection that adults do not. The leaders also wanted to make sure that the world recognized that children have human rights too.

The Convention sets out these rights in 54 articles and two Optional Protocols. It spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The four core principles of the Convention are non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and respect for the views of the child. Every right spelled out in the Convention is inherent to the human dignity and harmonious development of every child. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care; education; and legal, civil and social services.

**Role of women:** Women in their various roles play a critical part in the well-being of children. The enhancement of the status of women and their equal access to education, training, credit and other extension services constitute a valuable contribution to a nation's social and economic development. Efforts for the enhancement of women's status and their role in development must begin with the girl child. Equal opportunity should be provided for the girl child to benefit from the health, nutrition, education and other basic services to enable her to grow to her full potential.

For more information: [www.unicef.org/crc/](http://www.unicef.org/crc/)

## **Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities. (CRPD)**

The Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol was adopted on 13 December 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and was opened for signature on 30 March 2007. There were 82 signatories to the Convention, 44 signatories to the Optional Protocol, and one (1) ratification of the Convention. This is the highest number of signatories in history to a UN Convention on its opening day. It is the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century and is the first human rights convention to be open for signature by regional integration organizations. The Convention entered into force on 3 May 2008.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2009, The Cook Islands ratified the Convention and also the Protocol. The country initial report is due in 2011.

## **Women and girls with disabilities**

The [Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities](#) recognizes that women and girls with disabilities are often at greater risk, both within and outside the home, of violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation. To address this concern, the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities has also taken a two track approach to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women with disabilities. It has as one of its principles equality between men and women, (Article 3 (g)) and it devotes an article to women with disabilities (see Article 6).

For more information see [www.un-org/disabilities](http://www.un-org/disabilities)

## Acronyms

BPA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CINCW	Cook Islands National Council of Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disability
GADD	Gender and Development Division
GEWE	National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MINTAFF	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NCD	Non Communicable Diseases
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NSC	National Steering Committee
NSDP	National Sustainable Development Plan
NTF	National Task Forces
NZ	New Zealand
PPA	Pacific Platform for Action
PTI	Punanga Tauturu Inc.,
STI	Sexual Transmitted Infections
UN SC	United Nation Security Council

## Glossary of terms:

**EMPOWERMENT:** Refers to the process of "conscientisation" which builds critical analytical skills for an individual to gain self-confidence in order to take control of her or his life. Empowerment of women is an essential process in the transformation of gender relations because it addresses the structural and underlying causes of subordination and discrimination.

**EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY:** Refers to a fundamental human right embedded in the Constitution of the Cook Islands. This Gender Policy Framework aims towards the achievement of *equality of opportunity*, in access to and share of employment opportunities, services and resources as well as in equality of treatment by employers and service providers.

**EQUALITY OF TREATMENT:** Refers to meeting the specific and distinct needs of different social categories of women and men. This can often involve special programmes and the commitment of additional resources, for example in the case of women and men with disabilities. Equality of treatment does not mean treating all men and all women in exactly the same way (i.e. in a gender blind fashion) as this would only serve to perpetuate existing disparities.

**GENDER:** In this policy framework document, refers to the social roles allocated respectively to women and to men in particular societies and at particular times. Such roles, and the differences between them, are conditioned by a variety of political, economic, ideological and cultural factors and are characterised in most societies by unequal power relations. Gender is distinguished from sex which is biologically determined.

**GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT (GAD):** Refers to a planning process which is based on an analysis of the different situations and needs of women and men. It aims at creating gender equity and equality between women and men. A gender and development perspective recognises the importance of the relations between women and men.

**GENDER ANALYSIS:** refers to gender analysis as the study of socially determined inequalities within women and men. Gender analysis entails studying “gender biases” which perpetuate gender inequalities in all sectors of society.

**GENDER AWARENESS:** Refers to a state of knowledge of the differences in roles and relations of women and men and how this results in differences in power relations, status, privileges and needs.

**GENDER DEVELOPMENT INDEX (GDI):** Refers to an index which uses some of the same variables as the HDI (see below), viz life expectancy, educational attainment and real GDP, but which goes further to take into account inequality in achievement between women and men.

**GENDER EMPOWERMENT MEASURE (GEM):** Refers to a measure which examines whether women and men are able to actively participate in economic and political life and to take part in decision-making. The GEM focuses on the respective capabilities of women and men to take advantage of the opportunities of life.

**GENDER EQUALITY:** Refers to a situation where women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential; are able to contribute equally to national political, economic, social and cultural development; and benefit equally from the results. Gender Equality entails that the underlying causes of discrimination are systematically identified and removed in order to give women and men equal opportunities. The concept of Gender Equality, as used in this policy framework, takes into account women’s existing subordinate positions within social relations and aims at the restructuring of society so as to eradicate male domination. Therefore, equality is understood to include both formal equality and substantive equality; not merely simple equality to men.

**GENDER EQUITY:** Refers to the fair and just distribution of all means of opportunities and resources between women and men.

**GENDER ISSUES:** Arise when the relationships between women and men, their roles, privileges, status and positions are identified and analysed. Gender issues arise where inequalities and inequities are shown to exist between people purely on the basis of their being female or male. The fact that gender and gender differences are socially constructed is itself a primary issue to deal with.

**GENDER MAINSTREAMING:** Refers to a process that is goal oriented. It recognises that most institutions consciously and unconsciously serve the interests of men and encourages institutions to adopt a gender perspective in transforming themselves. It promotes the full participation of women in decision-making so that women’s needs move from the margins to the centre of development planning and resource allocation.

**GENDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (GMS)** Refers to a holistic and system-wide approach to gender mainstreaming developed by the Commonwealth for the use of governments in partnership with other stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector. In this policy framework, it refers to a comprehensive network of structures, mechanisms and processes to enable government and other organisations to contribute to gender equality.

**GENDER PERSPECTIVE:** Refers to an approach in which the ultimate goal is to create equity and equality between women and men. Such an approach has a set of tools for and guidelines on how to identify the impact on development of the relations and roles of women and men.

**GENDER RESPONSIVE:** Refers to a planning process in which programmes and policy actions are developed to deal with and counteract problems which arise out of socially constructed differences between women and men.

**GENDER SENSITIVE:** Refers to the state of knowledge of the socially constructed differences between women and men, including differences in their needs, as well as to the use of such knowledge to identify and understand the problems arising from such differences and to act purposefully to address them.

**PRACTICAL GENDER NEEDS:** Refers to the needs identified to help women cope better in their existing subordinate positions. Practical needs are related largely to issues of welfare and do not challenge the existing gender division of labour or to women's subordinate positions in society.

**STRATEGIC GENDER NEEDS:** Refers to needs which are identified as necessary to transform the existing unequal relations between women and men. Addressing women's strategic gender needs expedites women's empowerment and facilitates the fundamental social transformation necessary for establishment of gender equality.

**SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY:** Refers to a stage of real equality underpinned by equality of opportunity, access and treatment between women and men.

**WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT:** Refers to a planning process in which the importance of women's needs in development is the major focus.



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