



MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment Project

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COOK ISLANDS REPORT ON THE UNESCO GENDER AND MEDIA RESEARCH
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INTRODUCTION

My name is Maureen Hilyard and I am a Cook Islander. I am both the Cook Islands UNESCO Commissioner for Information and Communication and the Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment Project Coordinator. The Project is an Australian Aid project which promotes two components of the Cook Islands National Gender Equality Policy: (1) women's economic empowerment and (2) eliminating violence against women.

The relevance of the UNESCO Gender and Media Research to the Gender Project is via Section J of the Beijing Declaration - Women and the Media.

I am a member of the local Media Association due to my voluntary submissions of local and project events and of international meetings and workshops that I attend.

I raised the Gender and Media survey during the November meeting of the Media Association and asked for their participation. I put it online so that they could access it anytime, and to support a paperless environment. There were 6 members at the meeting. The survey was also distributed to all Government Heads of Ministry as well as among key NGOs within the community.

After allowing 4 weeks in which to complete the survey, and reminders in between, I received 2 responses. This may be due to a number of reasons: the length of the survey, the fact that most of the questions related to the media as a publicly-owned entity which in the Cook Islands it isn't – all the media is privately owned; time available to complete such a survey; or even interest in the survey.

Therefore my summary below covers the topics related to the survey in very general terms with regards to my own knowledge of the situation in the Cook Islands, but they will give you an idea of how the media reflects gender within our public and private sectors, and in society in general here in the Cook Islands.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

The Cook Islands Government has a National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and a Strategic Plan of Action (2011-2016). It follows on from the National Policy on Women which was originally established in 1995.

The principle of equality is incorporated into the Constitution of the Cook Islands¹, but this does not specify gender equality although the government promotes it as such. Despite the aspiration of the 2011-2016 policy to enhance the social and economic development of the nation through the increased "contribution of all members of society and partnerships based on respect and equality between women and men", there has been little change since the 1995 document was first introduced, to increase the involvement of women in the labour force

¹ <http://www.ck/govt.htm> - Equality before the law (section 64(1)(b))

other than low level positions mainly in the hospitality area due to Tourism being the mainstay of our country's income. Disadvantages remain in terms of women's relative access to economic and political participation; statistics still show that women still have lower pay and earning capacity; and domestic violence is still a high statistic for such a small population.

A recent Gender Project stakeholder meeting revealed that despite a Cabinet directive in 2012 that all Government departments were to institute a Gender Policy, no Government department had done so, or even if they have one hidden in their archives, their employees do not know of it. The Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs did not have a Gender Policy, despite being the home of the Gender and Development Division. Their rationale was that the Gender issues were incorporated into the Public Service Code of Conduct although the references to anything gender-related are not specific. There are no policies to cover any inappropriate behaviours e.g. anti-harassment, nor to specifically support gender equality in the workplace in relation to working conditions, decision-making, training or promotions.

Apparently, the Public Service Office has a media policy but this has not been distributed across the other Ministries.

Contact with the Prime Minister's office which has a media officer to deal with official government releases related to the activities of the Prime Minister or his office revealed that the Cook Islands Government does not have a media policy. There is no specific attention given to gender as their aim is to get information out to the public regardless of content, or whether there should be any consideration of gender relevance. The Prime Minister's media officer has a media background from within the private sector which is self-regulating. The Ministry of Education has a media office to disseminate information and to promote activities related to its official outputs.

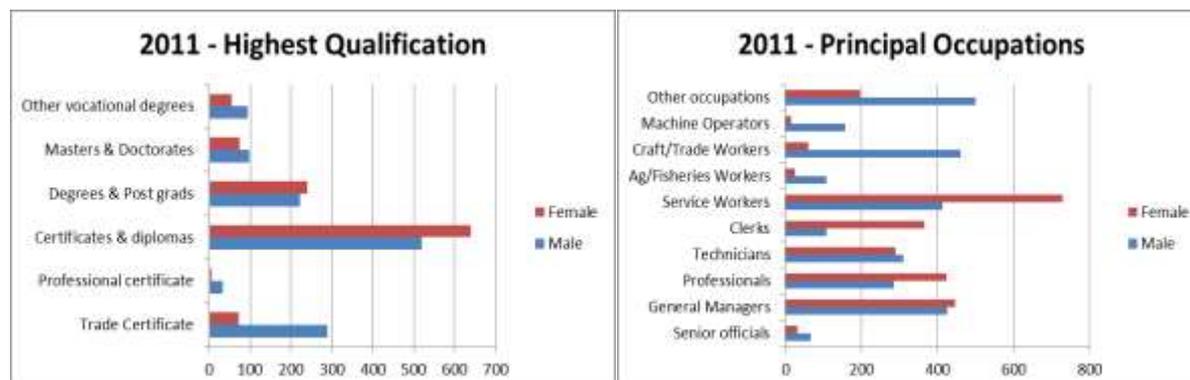
Within the Cook Islands there are no publicly own media companies. All media companies are privately owned: three radio stations; 2 television stations, 2 newspapers (one of them also online), There are no cable channels, or online radio stations or television channels. Telecom Cook Islands (TCI) is a monopoly providing internet and telecommunications services. TCI is currently 60% owned by Telecom New Zealand and 40% owned by the Cook Islands Government. TCI currently manages the spectrum and the country code Top Level Domain (.ck).

I. Policy, Legal, Regulatory Framework and Monitoring

There are no policies in place to ensure gender balance in the appointment of women and men to any government bodies. Appointments to any leadership positions are at the discretion of the ruling government and appointments are perceived as related more to who knows whom rather than who might be the best person for the job. Anecdotally, if a local panel is selecting a person for a high level position, personalities can often play a role before any gender or qualifications considerations. There is little consideration for gender balance at any level of management from junior to senior management level.

II. Educational and career development

Statistically, women are just as qualified as men, and even though they may exceed men in many of the general management positions, qualifications and experience do not help them to get appointed to top leadership or decision-making positions (senior officials). Political expediency has enabled women to achieve leadership positions as Secretaries of Government Ministries, but these are not mandated and the perception is that political will dictates who gets a leadership role.



The Cook Islands Constitution states that there is non-discrimination and “equality before the law” for all – however discrimination still exists against homosexuals and cross-gender persons. Single-sex marriage is illegal in the Cook Islands. Women’s employment is not promoted in any media areas through policies, practices, quotas, broadcasting regulations, or by statements by Ministers or government. The Code of Ethics distributed by the Public Service Commission is the document that government Ministries tend to stand behind with regards to any gender-related policy although it does not specify gender in relation to work within the Public Service.

III. Education, Training and Skills Building

There is no educational institution that actively promotes women’s education and training. The Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment is the first of its kind to actively raise the awareness among the business sector for training and access to financial services for women in the Cook Islands. Media studies has been taught at the national secondary school on Rarotonga, however there is not a specific gender component that is included into the studies. Media and Journalism, as well as an introductory Gender Studies programme that they provide, has not featured in tertiary courses provided by the University of the South Pacific at the Cook Islands campus, for several years. The university campus is funded by the University headquarters in Fiji and it is assumed that they have a gender policy. The Cook Islands government does not provide any funding for the local campus. No statistical data or analysis has been provided or carried out with regards to the number of men/women who have undertaken media studies or any gender-sensitive training, over the past number of years.

Because the media companies area privately owned, there is no regulation regarding the number of men and women who are employed within them. However, in the major daily newspaper, there are more women than men employed in the content related area of their business, while the technical area (the publishing of the daily newspaper) are men. The company has difficulty attracting journalists, especially Cook Islanders, so that many of their writers are from overseas. Currently they have 3 journalists – all women and their editor is male. Journalists are expected to be both writers and photographers

IV. Research

Up until the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Project, there has been no other gender-related research. This project has been sponsored by the Australian Government. The research that is currently being undertaken by the Gender Project specifically targets the issues experienced by women in relation to establishing a business – financial, training and policy constraints. The research is not specified by our National Policy document but is an expected outcome of the Gender Project itself, specified by the donors. The current research areas do not reveal anything about the work of women/men in the multiple roles of media, or in any decision-making related to media involvement. There are also no ethical codes or policies in favour of gender equality in media content or the portrayal of gender in advertising.

V. Public Awareness and Dialogue

The Cook Islands government does not mainstream media and gender issues into a range of policies, strategies and activities. There is no integration of media and gender into social welfare programmes for women and girls; nor in job creation for women and girls; nor in national health programmes or national cultural policies, or in awards and honours. There has only been recent public awareness with regards to business development for women and girls except through this current project’s focus on offering opportunities to help to develop women’s economic empowerment.

Because there is no publicly owned media, there has been little in the way of raising awareness by the Cook Islands government of The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; or the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; or Women’s rights. What has been raised, has been through the efforts of a local NGO, Punanga Tauturu whose work is with women and women’s rights - they provide legal advice and support for women who have experienced domestic violence - and another women’s NGO, the Pan Pacific South East Asia Women’s Association (PPSEAWA) which promotes awareness of gender issues, literacy among women and peace within our community.

VI. Gender in Media Content

There have been no media campaigns that focus on:

- The equal sharing of family responsibilities that emphasise gender equality and non-stereotyped gender roles of women and men within the family

Due to the establishment of the Gender Equality Project, the following issues have been, or are currently being, addressed

- The elimination of spousal and child abuse and all forms of violence and
- An increasing public awareness of the human rights of women

Possibly due to the high number of women working in the media industry, the daily newspaper welcomes articles that promote women and their experiences. Local women's NGOs, for example, PPSEAWA, were invited to provide information that promoted women's leadership and to encourage women to put their names forward to stand during the last parliamentary elections. They also promoted leadership training for women. There were several articles that were posted in the press for no charge because they had been written by the President of PPSEAWA, and the Editor supported women's leadership programmes.

I provide articles about leadership in an international organisation that relates to involvement in the area of global management of the internet (ICANN). This relates to a specialist area and because internet development in the Cook Islands is seen to be an important development issue, the Editor invites articles that continue to raise awareness of the issues related to communication using new technologies in the Cook Islands.

The recent finalising of the Family Law Bill and its preparation for presentation to Parliament is a recent advancement in legislation related to violence against women. Once it has been presented, the Bill will be put out for public consultation and the Gender Project aims to prepare media statements that highlight the changes in legislation related to the welfare of women and children. Because the media are self-regulating and are based on their own professional guidelines and code of conduct, there are no restrictions by the Government on freedom of expression of the media. Public education on all issues is basically in the hands of the media although there is a professionalism within the sector which ensures a quality of content through their company's own moral or ethical lens rather than that which is expected because of any government mandate.

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