

# Gender Assessment

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## **FP036: Pacific Islands Renewable Energy Investment Programme**

Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga | ADB | B.15/07



**GREEN  
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The gender assessment for this specific project is also published by ADB, which can be accessed in the following link:

<https://www.adb.org/projects/46453-002/main#project-documents>

# Gender documents for FP036

[Pacific Islands Renewable Energy Investment Program: Cook Islands](#)

## GENDER ASSESSMENT

### I. Gender Overview

The total population of the Cook Islands officially tallied in the last census of 2011 stood at 17,794 people consisting of 8,815 men and 8,979 women.<sup>1</sup> The 2013 Pacific Regional MDG Tracking Report notes that 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. In this context the report indicates that Cook Islands is one of three countries in the Pacific on track to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. There has been notable achievement of gender parity in education with more girls attending secondary school and women's economic participation is also increasing. In comparison to other Pacific countries, they have the highest percentage of women in paid employment in the non-agricultural sector, which is above 50%.<sup>2</sup> Remaining gender inequalities such as gender-based violence, access to economic resources and increased participation in decision-making will require further attention in Cook Island society to lessen or eliminate those inequalities. Cook Islands acceded to the 'Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women' (CEDAW) in 2006 and has since made domestic commitments to achieving gender equality and advancing women, which include the government's 'National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment' (GEWE) together with a 5 year strategic plan of action 2011-2016.

### II. Gender Relations

**Work and Employment:** Similar to other Pacific island countries, the labour market in the outer islands of Cook Islands is limited with a reliance on subsistence livelihood activities notably in agriculture and fisheries. However on the main island of Rarotonga where a majority of the population resides, women's share of wage employment in the non-subsistence sector (industry & services) with regular wages or salaries is relatively high at 47%.<sup>3</sup> These figures confirm that more women are becoming self-employed and create businesses dealing in tourism, retail, arts and other enterprises. This has been attributed to a land succession system whereby women can claim customary land (in most cases) and better access to credit. The 2011 census however shows that a significant gender difference remains in earnings for paid employment. In this context more women than men were in the lowest income bracket and more men than women were in the highest earning groups. Pay disparities thus still exist and employment rights issues remain a challenge with emerging civil cases on sexual harassment and protection from unfair dismissal.

**National Mechanisms:** Cook Islands having ratified CEDAW in 2006, significantly endorsed the GEWE and the Plan of Action 2011-2016, which also established the Gender and Development Division (GADD) under the Ministry of Internal Affairs as the official national women's machinery entrusted with the coordination of mainstreaming implementation of the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mfem.gov.ck/statistics/census-and-surveys/census/143-census-2011>.

<sup>2</sup> Pacific Regional MDG Tracking Report 2013, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

<sup>3</sup> ADB Gender Statistics -The Pacific and Timore-Leste 2016, Manila

GEWE. The 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. Furthermore, the national policy emphasizes 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. This was integral to the formation of the CEDAW Law Reform programme that began in 2008 with revisions noted to a number of acts recommended, notably the Marriage Act and the Crimes Act.<sup>4</sup> However progress has been slow in presenting the amendments to Parliament evident in the recent tabling of the Family Law Bill in 2015 since its inception in 2010. Success however has been achieved on other fronts such as the enactment of the Employment Relations Act 2012, which provides maternity leave benefits for women in the private sector and includes provisions for the prevention of sexual harassment and protection from discrimination based on gender and pregnancy.<sup>5</sup>

**Women's Participation in Decision-Making:** The Cook Islands has made progress in increasing women's representation and political participation in comparison to its Pacific island neighbours whereby at the national level, the percentage of women in parliament is highest at 17%. It is also the highest with women in management roles at 48% with managerial positions including senior government officials, corporate and general manager positions. At the local level, numerous initiatives provide capacity building and support for women candidates in island council elections such as the Cook Islands National Council of Women (CINCW) whom provide individual mentoring for women candidates in island council elections. Women however continue to face a number of challenges when standing for election, such as financial resources and weak social capital in addition to ingrained beliefs that decision making and politics is a domain for men only. There are currently no political reform discussions to introduce temporary special measures such as reserved seats for women elected officials in parliament.<sup>6</sup>

### III. Sector Gender Issues

**Economic Development:** The *Te Kaveinga Nui: Living the Cook Islands Vision - A 2020 Challenge* includes the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan which is now into its third edition covering 2016-2020 (NSDP 3). It essentially sets out national development priorities with a multi-sector focus. It emphasizes the need to focus on providing equal opportunities in all sectors including social services (gender is included in social services). The 2012 gender mainstreaming stocktake exercise by SPC<sup>7</sup> reveals that gender issues however remain rarely discussed as a development issue and gender equality is not ideally mainstreamed across all 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

<sup>4</sup> Cook Islands Gender Equality Policy Analysis: Implementing the National Gender Equality Policy in the Cook Islands 2015, Cook Islands Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Project 2014-15, Rongokea L.F.

<sup>5</sup> Gender Equality: Where We Stand?, PGEI Initiative, SPC;

<sup>6</sup> Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Strategic Plan of Action 2011-2016.

<sup>7</sup> SPC 2012 Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments - Cook Islands

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 remain largely insufficient.

**Education:** According to the 2013 Regional MDG Progress Report gender parity in education has been achieved with more girls attending secondary school. In relation to post-school qualifications, the national education management information system (EMIS) show that women occupy the majority of university places in the Cook Islands (74% of tertiary students).<sup>8</sup> The Cook Islands however follow the global trend in which women continue to dominate traditionally 'feminine' fields of study and are underrepresented in technical and trade-related fields (such as construction, mechanical and electrical). Women continue to dominate in fields linked to social reproduction — education, health and welfare, humanities and arts, social science, business and law. The results of the 2011 census show that there were almost four males with a trade or business qualification for every female. About half (51%) of the adults with no qualification were female.<sup>9</sup> Education for women and girls is a high priority for the Government with more work needed to translate educational attainment into career achievement. More work is also needed to ensure that the legislative framework for education policy development is adequate and some proposals for legislative reform of the Education Act are being considered.

**Health, and Sexual and Reproductive Health:** The overall health indicators have improved considerably in the last decades. Health care services are more accessible and the quality of care is better. The country has made great strides in reducing the maternal mortality ratio and infant mortality rate, and the reproductive health standards are good. The Cook Islands is among the few Pacific Island countries and territories taking proactive measures to ensure that teenage mothers are able to continue their education and have access to youth-friendly reproductive health services. According to the 2011 Census, women live, on average, six years longer than men, with a life expectancy at birth of 78 years. However, the adolescent fertility rate is as high as 68 births for 1000 women among women aged between 15 to 19 years.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the consistent prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among younger men and women, which reaches up to 46 per cent, is a matter of concern. A current policy requires a husband's authorization if his wife wants sterilization. Abortion is still illegal, unless the life of the mother is threatened or if the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. These policies are violations of women's reproductive rights.

Other health issues, such as non-communicable diseases (NCDs), are becoming serious issues affecting women's health. NCDs account for over 75% of all cases in the health system. From 2006-2012, six out of every 10 new cancer cases were women.<sup>11</sup> Besides their vulnerability to those diseases and conditions, women are usually the ones providing care for ill family members — this burden is rarely acknowledged with an increasing proportion of the population aged above 65 years, due to fewer babies being born and increasing emigration. The Cook Islands is experiencing the phenomena of an 'ageing

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<sup>8</sup> Opt. cit. fn3

<sup>9</sup> Cook Islands Gender Profile 2012, SPC

<sup>10</sup> Opt. cit. fn7

<sup>11</sup> Opt. cit. fn3

population', and the country must ensure that older persons have access to appropriate health care services, are economically secure, and that they have appropriate access to in-home care from either family members, the community or other care providers.

**Water and Sanitation:** Challenges in the water sector relate to the geographical dispersion and the consequent high cost of providing services to the outer islands, and the general shortage of appropriate qualified staff in the sector. The lack of metering of production or consumption of water by users means that consumption is generally proliferate and wasteful; and there is little incentive to conserve water, particularly in Rarotonga. Where water resources are scarcer as in the outer islands, people are more inclined to conserve water. Gender plays an intricate role in the management of water resources and decisions made with regards to water impact men and women differently. For these reasons gender must be taken into account to give a balanced and equitable output.

**Gender-based Violence:** Research conducted by the CINCW in 2013 has produced the first comprehensive data about violence against women in the Cook Islands. This research shows that one in three women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their partner at some point in their lives.<sup>12</sup> Challenges remain, with high rates of physical violence against women and girls by persons other than intimate partners – mostly by immediate family members, especially by mothers and stepmothers. The research suggests that this kind of physical violence is mainly related to child discipline, and may not be violence that is primarily gender-related. However, physical violence is never an acceptable form of discipline. More preventive action is needed to reduce all forms of violence, whether perpetrated by men or women.<sup>13</sup> The Punanga Tauturu Inc (PTI) is an NGO that is in the forefront of addressing the issue. The Cook 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 Family Law Bill, which is tabled in parliament, contains a number of measures aimed at preventing violence against women and domestic violence, and aims to establish services to comprehensively address the social, economic and legal needs of women and children affected by various forms of violence.

**Civil Society Partnerships:** The role of civil society organizations (CSO's) such as the Cook Islands National Council of Women (CINCW) and other actors have proved invaluable to the work on gender equality and women's empowerment in the Cook Islands and have raised a level of consciousness of gender issues across all of Government. Although not fully institutionalized, some Government departments have taken steps to address gender issues within their sectors by linking with CSO's. Other active CSO's include the Punanga Tauturu Inc (PTI) and the Cook Islands Association of NGO's (CIANGO). The introduction of the government's Social Impact Fund for NGOs provides funding opportunities for these CSO's working towards gender equality, youth participation and disability issues. CSO's also fundamentally play a role in monitoring the country's progress towards achieving gender

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<sup>12</sup> Cook Islands National Council of Women, 2014 Te Ata O Te Ngakau. The Cook Islands Family Health and Safety Study, 2012-2013.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

equality, and coordinating some of the activities of the various entities responsible for the successful implementation of the GEWE.

### III. Women in the Energy Sector

The Cook Islands has one of the highest electricity tariffs among the Pacific countries due its heavy reliance on imported diesel fuel for power generation. The communities have expressed concerns about the rising cost of power which impact on poor and vulnerable groups, such as women headed households. Lack of reliable and affordable power supply diminishes standards of living and quality access to basic services such as health, education, communication and infrastructure services which are important for both men and women. Women are often the most vulnerable and disproportionately affected as they are primarily in-charge of the households budget and expenditures and perform household chores and care for family members. Costly electricity risks women resorting to traditional cooking technologies which could be harmful to the health.

The Cook Islands government has sought to utilize renewable energy to lessen vulnerability to volatile oil prices. It issued the Cook Islands Renewable Energy Chart in 2011 which targets half of the population of inhabited islands to have renewable energy by 2015 and the entire population by 2020.

Improved access to more affordable power supply will address women's needs in a lot of ways. Women are relieved from time and effort spent in food processing and transport through labor-saving technologies run by electricity. Lighting is also important to allow women to work in the evening more productively. More home industries and other micro-enterprises are made possible with access to affordable electricity. This will further improve women's self-employment in Cook Islands and potentially lead to increase income. A gender perspective in the renewable energy development is therefore necessary to understand culturally and socially defined roles of men and women which influence their access, use and participation in the sector.

**Pacific Islands Renewable Energy Investment Program.** The Pacific Islands Renewable Energy Project Investment Project (PIREIP) with subproject in Cook Islands will assist the government achieve its renewable energy targets. The project will install battery storage designed to allow additional solar power independent power providers (IPP's) to supply to the grid. The battery storage will facilitate the paradigm shift towards renewable energy and overcome the key barrier by allowing additional private sector investment onto the grid, resulting in 'crowding in' of the private sector.

**Gender Mainstreaming Approach.** Under the PIREIP, the proposed battery storage within existing substations will not have an impact on expansion of electricity access or quality of supply which are the key entry points for social inclusion and gender. The gender mainstreaming approach for the project was therefore focused on maximizing women's skilled and semi-skilled employment during construction, ensuring women's active participation and engagement during consultations, trainings and awareness programs and as well as capacity building program for the implementing agency. A Gender Action Plan has been prepared to outline proposed activities and targets in line with the gender mainstreaming approach and maximize benefits to both men and women during project implementation.