

# **Advancing Women's Political Participation in Tuvalu**

**A Research Project Commissioned by the Pacific Islands  
Forum Secretariat (PIFS)**

*By*

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Susie Kofe

## Executive Summary

This report was commissioned by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). This report provides findings of research conducted in Tuvalu to establish explanations and answers into why there is 'zero' political representation of Tuvaluan women in Parliament.

The study was carried out on the main island of Funafuti and included some of the outer-islands. A participatory consultative approach was used. A representative sample of the Tuvalu population was carefully selected to include parliamentarians, government officials, island communities residing in Funafuti, Non government organisations, civil society and seven outer islands. The data was gathered from individual interviews, questionnaires, radio talk-back show, interview over the telephone, stakeholders meetings and through island community consultations.

The main findings are:

1. The Constitution and electoral laws of Tuvalu do not directly hinder the representation of women in Parliament or at any other levels of decision making.
2. The majority of the sample population strongly supported the participation of women in politics.
3. Despite the legal guarantees in the laws of Tuvalu there are imbalances in representation by sex which disfavour women especially in education, employment, in-service scholarships awards and in the political arena.
4. There is a lack of political commitment, lack of legal capacity and resources to fulfil commitments in spite of the ratification of the Convention of Eliminating all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
5. Tuvalu culture and traditional practices were identified as the number one barrier to women's advancement and participation in politics and parliament.
6. There is an imbalance in representation by sex at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu, highlighting the minimal participation of women in political decision making.
7. There is a combination of social factors that need to be considered in order for women to increase not only their participation in decision making in parliament but also throughout all levels of decision making.

The following recommendations are based on the analysis of the responses gathered from the different consultations that were carried out as a means of facilitating a conducive environment to increase women's representation and participation at all levels of decision making and in politics in Tuvalu:

1. Government, Falekaupule and Non Government organisations to provide educational opportunities for women in all development areas and especially in areas such as gender, leadership, governance, democracy, human and legal rights. This would include training in advocacy and lobbying skills as well as presentation skills;
2. The Government through the department of women to work together with women's organisations to put in place appropriate gender policies that should promote and encourage their participation at all levels of decision making and in politics;

3. Government to review the current electoral system, provide advocacy and awareness programmes on various electoral systems especially those that are being used in Pacific Island Countries.
4. Government, through the Attorney General's office, to research the possibility of reforming Tuvalu's electoral system – analysing the preferential and first past the post systems in relation to democracy.
5. Donors through Government to commission a study on quotas for women in the Tuvalu parliament
6. Government, in collaboration with Faleakupule, to review discriminatory cultural practices that disadvantage the effective participation of women at all levels of decision making;
7. Donor funding required for Government to research into Tuvalu cultural values that prevents women from participating in decision making processes and especially in political arena.

The report provides a baseline study on factors that prevent the advancement of women into Parliament and other decision making levels in Tuvalu. More detailed research and analysis is needed to properly address the findings in this report.

# Aims and Purpose of the Study

## What is the Problem?

A recent Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO) report compiled to coincide with the recent global Beijing + 10 review of women's progress in March 2005, labelled Tuvalu as one of the then six (now five) Pacific Island countries that are part of the "dirty dozen" of countries with no female representation in parliament. Over the last 25 years Tuvalu has only had one female MP. This dismal representation of Tuvalu women in the political arena is also mirrored at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu. The country's population is made up of 51 per cent of women and yet there is no female representation in Tuvalu's parliament. This is indeed a problem. It does reflect a gender inequality and the urgent need for more research to be done to assess the impact of such gender inequality in decision making in Tuvalu and most important of all how this inequality affects the social wellbeing and the livelihood of the people of Tuvalu.

Tuvalu has made several commitments to the advancement of women nationally, regionally and internationally. In 1994 Tuvalu agreed to become a signatory to the Pacific Platform of Action for the Advancement of Women (PPA). Later, in 1995 at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, Tuvalu also made a commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women. Tuvalu's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1999 marked a pinnacle in Tuvalu's commitment to the advancement of women. This paved the way for the establishment of the first Government Department for Women's Affairs. The department's main function is to oversee and manage the development and advancement of women in Tuvalu.

However, financial constraints have not provided the Department of Women's Affairs with the autonomy to translate the aspirations of its Action Plan into achievable activities. Since 1999 little has materialised to reflect the government of Tuvalu's sincerity to translating its commitments to the advancement of women in Tuvalu. Tuvalu is still in the process of trying to formally write a CEDAW report, which has proven to be a difficult task due to unavailability of funds from the national budget. It has taken six years for Tuvalu to start formally writing the CEDAW report. According to the Department of Women, the CEDAW formal report is now in progress and should be ready by the end of 2006. In contrast, the Shadow Report for the status of implementation of CEDAW in Tuvalu was completed in 2004 by the Regional Rights Resource Team based in Fiji.

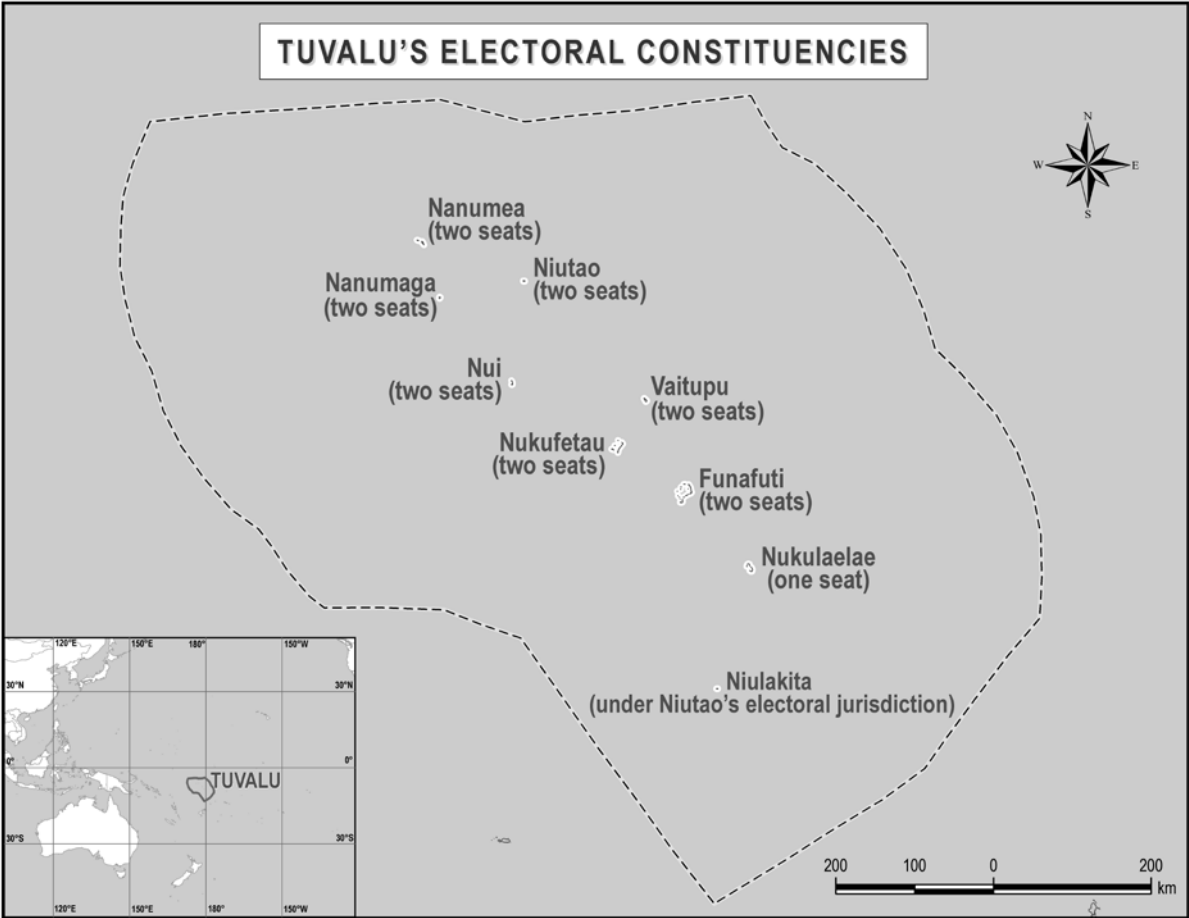
## What is the Aim of the Research?

The research aims to demystify the root causes of women's dismal representation in parliament and at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu. To achieve this, the research focuses on structural impediments as well as entrenched societal attitudes and beliefs. The findings should provide medium- to long-term measures to address the problem, hence promoting a more conducive environment for women's political participation and representation as well as assisting local women's organisations to develop broad-based strategies to increase their participation at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu.

## What are the Objectives of the Research?

The research intends to achieve the following:

1. Organise wide national consultations with multi stakeholders which include national political parties, national women’s machinery, national council for women, religious bodies, law reform bodies, Parliament and the Elections office, and other key stakeholders to obtain a range of views on gender equality within the electoral system;
2. Conduct a desk review of existing research literature on women/gender and barriers to equal political participation in Tuvalu;
3. Identify the current status of the Constitution, electoral legislation and processes in relation to gender and decision-making;
4. Identify gaps and loopholes in the current electoral system to address gender and decision-making; and conduct individual country research on gender analysis of national electoral systems and barriers to equal political representation for women;
5. Identify key social and economics barriers to women’s representation in Parliament and all levels of decision makings in Tuvalu
6. Provide strategic and practical recommendations for advancing women’s representation at all levels in Tuvalu.



Source: PIAS-DG maps database

# 1. Introduction

Since Tuvalu's Independence in 1978 only one woman has been elected as a Member of Parliament; she was given a Ministerial portfolio. Mrs Naama Maheu Lataasi was the first and only Tuvaluan woman to become a Member of Parliament elected from the Nanumea Constituency. Although women have taken part in elections as candidates and voters, none has made it into the political arena, except in 1989 and in 1993 when Mrs Lataasi won a seat to Parliament. Therefore in the past 27 years and since independence, women's participation in the political arena has been and continues to be dismal.

Despite the formally non-discriminatory nature of both the Constitution and electoral system, the ratification of CEDAW by Tuvalu in 1999 and other regional and international instruments which pledge the advancement of women, Tuvalu women have found it extremely difficult to actively and consistently participate in the political development of Tuvalu. Men have been practically the only sex in Parliament.

This dismal performance is mainly due, amongst other factors (education, self confidence, financial status), to the social and cultural structure of the Tuvalu society, whereby women normally stay at home and care for children. As a result their decision making role is confined to the home by tradition. Tuvalu culture and tradition is structured in a way that men are considered the normal and most qualified decision makers. The traditional meeting halls known as Falekaupule or Maneapa allow only males to "speak" and make important decisions; women's presence in the Falekaupule are mainly to serve food and be patient observers. This is the root cause of the poor political participation of women in Tuvalu, which was identified by the research.

However, the introduction of the Falekaupule Act in 1997 and the reform of local governance in 1999 have created change for women who are now actively involved and participate in local government elections. They participate in the Falekaupule Assemblies where issues are debated and decisions approved. There has been an increase in the number of women being selected in to various development committees at the local government level. Governance activities at the grassroot level provide a platform for fairer participation of women in decision making process and excellent learning opportunities for women to become leaders in their communities.

The increase in the number of highly-educated women taking up professional jobs and middle to senior management positions in the Government is also a positive trend.

## 2. Background information on Tuvalu

Tuvalu consists of nine coral islands dispersed over 1.2 million square kilometres of Pacific Ocean stretching in a north south direction over some 560 kilometres between latitudes 5 degrees and 11 degrees south and longitude 176 degrees and 180 degrees east. The nearest neighbours are Kiribati and Nauru to the north, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to the west and south-west, Samoa to the south-east, and Fiji and Tonga to the south. The country has a total land area of only 26 sq. km, but an Exclusive Economic Zone of 900,000 sq. km. Although Tuvalu is blessed with abundant marine resources, the level of commercial exploitation is still low and does not yet make major contribution to the economy. Agricultural development has extremely limited potential.

The total resident population is currently around 9,500 and growing at average rate of 1.7 per cent. An estimated 47 per cent of the population lives on the main island of Funafuti which has a population density

of just under 1,400 people per square kilometre compared with national figure of 350 per sq. km. The latter figure is one of the highest in the region.

Classified by the United Nations as a least developed country (LDC), Tuvalu gained independence in 1978 after separating from Kiribati (then Gilbert Islands) after being part of the British Colony of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. The people are predominantly Polynesian with a language that is closely related to Samoan.

### 2.1 Demographic and social indicators

The population of Tuvalu increased by 5.7 per cent during the inter-census period 1991-2002, i.e. from 9,043 people to 9,561 total population respectively. There were more females compared to males residing in Tuvalu during the census. The resident population consisted of 4,614 males and 4,745 females, a surplus of 131 females, resulting in a sex ratio of 97, i.e., 97 men for every 100 women (Census 2002 pp 17). Fifty five per cent of the population was between the age group 15-59, 36 per cent below the 15 years age group and approximately 9 per cent above the 60 years age group. Table 1 depicts the composition of Tuvalu’s population.

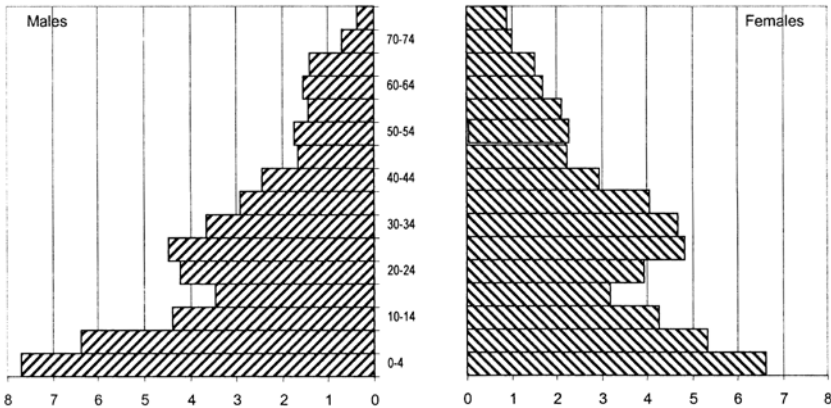
**Table 1: Tuvalu Population**

Island	Broad age group (%)			Dependency Ratio	Sex Ratio	Median age		
	0-14	15-59	60+			Total	Male	Female
Funafuti	35.5	58.2	6.3	71.7	101.3	23.6	22.6	24.6
Outer islands	37	52.6	10.4	90.2	94.3	23.5	19.2	28.1
Tuvalu	36.4	55	8.7	81.9	97.2	23.6	20.8	26.4

(Source: Tuvalu Census 2002)

The dependency ratio in Tuvalu was 82 in 2002. In comparing the capital Funafuti and the Outer islands, Table 1 shows that dependency ratio for the outer islands is far bigger than the capital. This is due mainly to the fact that there are more economically dependent component of the population (age groups 0-14 and above 60) living in the outer islands.

Another important characteristic in the Tuvalu population as shown by Figure 1 is the large dent in the **Figure 1: 2002 Tuvalu Population Pyramid**





15-20 years age group, which is also a similar feature of the 1991 census report. The reason for this distinct feature in the 2002 population pyramid is the high out-migration of youth to seek education and employment outside Tuvalu. Out-migration is mostly temporary, consisting of young people temporarily moving to seek education (secondary and tertiary) in countries like Fiji, New Zealand and Australia (approximately 80 per cent of this category attend school in Fiji). In addition to education, others, especially young males, have obtained employment as seafarers in overseas shipping companies. A very low percentage in this group has permanently migrated to New Zealand under the Pacific Access Migration Scheme.

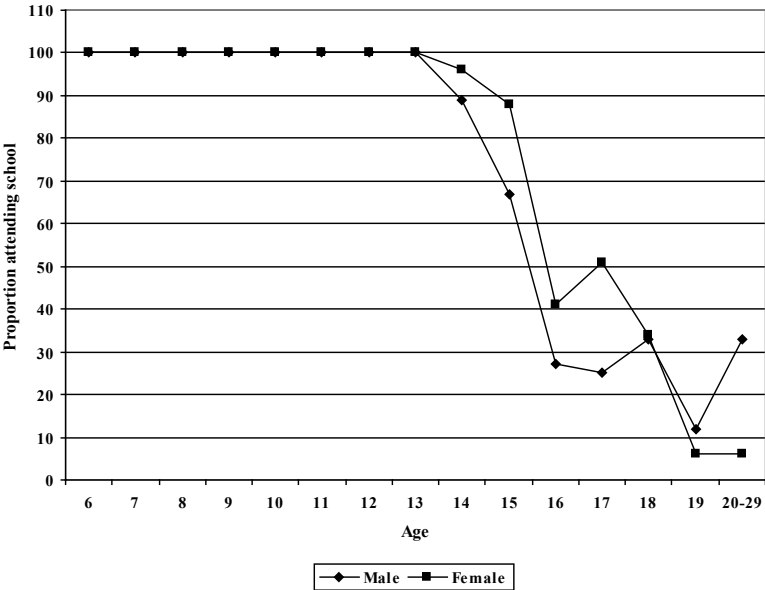
### 2.1.2 Education

Education is free and compulsory from 6 to 13 years of age. As expected, a 99.9 per cent enrolment rate in this age category was found in the 2002 census. However, an alarming trend in school drop outs occurs immediately when young pupils transit to secondary school level of education where school fees are introduced. Figure 2 shows this alarming trend, which suggests negative impact and consequences on the quality of labour market entries in Tuvalu. Less than 1 per cent of the resident population (above 6 years) had no schooling, 53 per cent of males and 49 per cent of females had completed primary education and almost 38 per cent of males and 33 per cent females had completed secondary school level of education.

The trend for male enrolment improves for the age group 19 and above. This is probably due to males entering formal vocational training at the only Maritime Training Institute, equipping themselves as quality seafarers to be employed in overseas shipping companies. On the other hand, female enrolment remains low, showing the limited educational opportunities available at the tertiary level for girls to enter and progress academically.

Normally for tertiary level education, the Government awards limited scholarships providing both males and females with equal opportunity to vie for a scholarship.

*Figure 2: Resident population aged 6-29 years, by sex and school enrolment*



**Table 2: Scholarship award by year and sex**

Year	In-Service			Pre-service			Grand Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
1991	3	0	3	24	10	34	37
1992	5	1	6	18	21	39	45
1993	9	5	14	26	16	42	56
1994	9	1	10	6	9	15	25
1995	3	4	7	13	18	31	38
1996	16	5	21	22	30	52	73
1997	16	3	19	16	22	38	57
1998	18	4	22	3	2	5	27
1999	21	12	33	34	36	70	103
2000	20	10	30	32	47	79	109
2001	25	11	36	32	38	70	106
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>676</b>

It is clear from table 2 that in the years 1991 to 2001, men were more likely to be trained compared to women in the In-service training category. From 1991 to 2001, 78 per cent of scholarships were awarded to males as opposed to 32 per cent for females colleagues. The pre-service training awards have more equal share of awards between males and females, with females gaining the upper share of 52 per cent, i.e., 249 awards out of the 475 scholarships for the years 1991-2001. Hence, there exists an equal chance of awarding a scholarship to a female or male student in the pre-service category.

**Table 3: Total Number of Scholarship Awards by course, year and sex from 1991-2001**

Course	1991-2001		Total
	Males	Females	
Further Studies	78	89	167
Cadet	10	0	10
Certificate	44	32	76
Diploma	97	107	204
Degree	115	72	187
Postgraduate Certificate	0	1	1
Postgraduate Diploma	1	0	1
Masters	23	4	27
PHD	3	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>676</b>

As clearly indicated in Table 3, both males and females stand an equal chance of receiving scholarships at the Certificate and Diploma level; however there exists a big difference and gender bias in the degrees and postgraduates scholarship awards. At the Degree, Masters and PhD levels of awards the majority of scholarships awarded were given to men i.e., more than 90 per cent of awards were received by males whereas females received a mere 10 per cent in the ten year period 1991-2001. This big difference is the true reflection of the Government civil service structure, where awards for Masters and PhD are usually given to very senior positions like Permanent Secretaries and Directors with the majority holders of these positions being men. However in 2002 -2005 there was a significant increase in the number of women graduating with Master's degree with 7 more women obtaining a Master's Degree compared to 9 men.

## 2.2 Labour force

The available quality of labour in Tuvalu is determined by the level of education and the level of economically active people. In the labour force 14.7 per cent of males and 13.9 per cent of females had secondary school qualifications, and 9.4 per cent of males and 7 per cent of females had tertiary qualifications. At the other end of the spectrum, 17.8 per cent of males and 26.7 per cent of females had no educational qualification.

*Table 4: Resident population 15 years and older, by sex, island/region and labour force indicators*

Island/region	Labour force Participation rate			Employment-population Ratio			Unemployment rate		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Funafuti	61.0	70.4	51.8	49.6	61.0	38.4	8.9	6.6	12.0
Outer Islands	56.0	68.9	45.2	20.9	31.7	11.8	4.6	3.6	5.9
Tuvalu	58.2	69.6	47.9	33.2	44.9	22.7	6.5	4.9	8.6

(Source Census 2002, Tuvalu)

*Table 5: Activity Status by sex and island /region*

Island Region	Labour Force – Economically Active					Non labour force/Not economically active				
	Working			Un- Employed	Total	Student	Home duties	Retired/ disabled	Other reason	Total
	Formally Employed	Fishing Agriculture Handicraft								
Males	1265	64%	598	38	1960	192	366	57	243	858
Females	713	36%	661	129	1503	159	1210	68	196	1633
Funafuti	1268		153	139	1560	119	614	42	221	996
Outer islands	710		1106	87	1903	232	962	83	218	1495
Tuvalu	1978		1259	226	3463	351	1576	125	439	2491

(Source – 2002 Census, Tuvalu)

Labour force participation in 2002 was at a rate of 58.2 per cent, where males labour force indicators were considerably more positive than female labour force indicators, this is shown in Table 4.

The education levels and labour force indicators interestingly show that men always seem to have the upper hand and advantage over their female counterparts. This trend is consistent throughout the different age groups. This is probably due to the influence of culture and the way Tuvalu people live.

Most people in Tuvalu are either employed in the Government sector, work in corporations, are self employed and/or living through subsistence activities such as fishing, agriculture and handicraft production.

Table 5 shows that 39 per cent of the population was engaged in subsistence activities; the bulk of which are located in the outer islands, where more than 60 per cent of the population aged 15 years and older lives, and 32 per cent of the labour force is engaged in subsistence activities. Sixty four per cent of the people employed in the formal sector employment are concentrated in Funafuti, which is to be expected for the capital of the country.

**Table 6: Resident population 15 years and older by sex and occupation**

Resident Population	Occupation							Total
	Professional/ Technical	Administrative Managerial	Clerical Related	Sales Workers	Service Workers	Agriculture/ Fishery	Production Workers	
Male	260	132	42	55	113	14	651	1267
Female	271	44	187	85	91	0	38	716
<b>Total</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>689</b>	<b>1983</b>

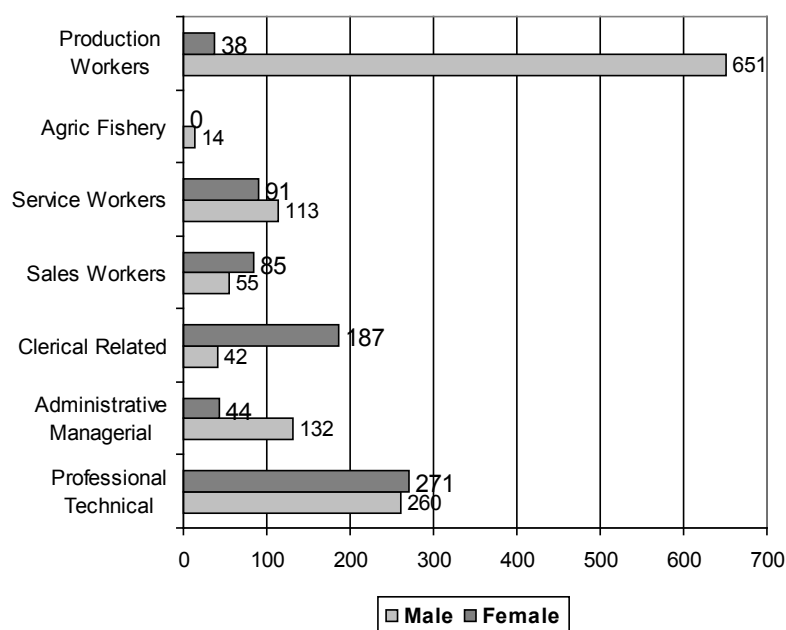
**Table 7: Percentage distribution in employment and industry**

	Industry of employment					
	Public administration/ Public services	Real Estate/ Business services	Transportation/ Storage/ Communication/ insurance	Wholesale Retail/ Hotel/ restaurant	Electricity/gas/ Water/ Construction	Others
Males	29%	16%	11%	7%	34%	3%
Females	51%	27%	4%	14%	2%	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>3%</b>

The distribution by sex of employees of the Tuvalu labour force is marked, with a majority of men employed in the primary and production sector, the administrative and managerial sector and as service workers. Females dominate as clerical and related workers, sales workers and professional and technical workers. The distribution by sex of employment in the different industries follows the same pattern as that of the occupational distribution. Notable numbers of women hold mid- and senior-level civil service posts, although there are currently no women in parliament and only one woman has ever held a ministerial position. In the more traditional outer islands gender equality is also advancing surely but slowly.

In 2002 women reportedly held 51 per cent of professional and technical jobs and 25 per cent of mana-

**Figure 3: Occupation by Sex**



gerial and administrative positions. These compare with 46 per cent and 16 per cent respectively in 1991. Overall, females occupied 35.5 per cent of all formal employment in 2002, slightly lower than the 36.7 per cent recorded in 1991. Tuvalu has shifted towards a more equal social and economic status between women and men

The formal sector is divided up into seven major occupational sectors where 35 per cent of all employees are employed in the elementary and production sector, 27 per cent at the professional and technical sector, followed by clerical and related work sector (12 per cent), service workers (10 per cent), administrative and managerial workers (9 per cent), sales workers (7 per cent) and 1 per cent employed in the fisheries and agriculture sectors.

The public sector and its corporation provide 69 per cent of employment, showing that in a small island nation like Tuvalu, the Government dominates the economy. The private sector accounts for 28 per cent of employment followed by 3 per cent in non-profit organisations (civil society and NGOs).

### **3. Gender and Development in Tuvalu.**

The debate on gender equality and empowerment is an issue that has attracted a lot of attention globally over the last three decades and has gathered momentum and importance at the closing of the last century as reflected in the Millennium Development Declaration. The issue of gender inequality reflects political and socio-economic structures that favour men in society, paving the way for grave injustice towards women at all level of governance.

The Government of Tuvalu’s commitment towards the advancement of women dates back to the mid 1970s, when the Tuvalu National Council of Women (TNCW), a non-governmental organisation was established. As for the Government, it was not until the National Development Strategy Plan IV (1988-1991) that it had for the first time a section which specifically aimed at increasing the capacity for and the recognition of women in more active roles in the economic and social development of the country. Since 1988 the advancement of women has formed a key part of all of Tuvalu’s National Development Strategies.

In the latest Tuvalu Development Strategy “Tuvalu’s Kakeega II”, under the area of Social Development, one of the policy objectives is the promotion of gender equity and the role of women in development. This objective is to be achieved through the two main priorities and strategies:

1. Ensure that the role of women, gender and development are integrated into the implementation of the national strategies
2. Provide small business and entrepreneurial training and access to appropriate credit facilities for women.

Tuvalu’s endorsement of the Pacific Platform of Action for the Advancement of Women (PPA) in 1994 marked a starting point for concrete and meaningful Government policies toward gender issues. Tuvalu’s ratification of the Convention of Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1999 was the main turning point in the formal recognition of women’s role in the Tuvalu society, especially at the national level. This historic achievement, which was a very important milestone for women in Tuvalu, formed the main thrust in the establishment of the Department of Women’s Affairs and other gender related initiatives in Tuvalu.

Following the Beijing Fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995, the Department of Women’s Affairs was established in 1999 within the Ministry of Health, Women and Community Affairs to work in partnership with TNCW to promote the advancement of women. Further commitment by the government is reflected through the endorsement of the National Women’s Policy and its Action Plan aimed at reinforcing “the elimination of discriminatory legislation and practices by government departments and agencies that hinder women’s ability to participate and benefit from development. On the international front, Tuvalu has:

- 1994 endorsed the Pacific Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women (PPA)
- 1995 ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 1999 ratified, without any reservation, the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

## **3.1 National Women’s Machinery**

### **3.1.1 The Department of Women’s Affairs**

The Department of Women’s Affairs is located within the Ministry of Home Affairs. A Director, responsible to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry for a range of gender and development responsibilities including policy formulation, implementation and management, heads the Department. Three other staff members assist the Director. They are a Monitoring Officer, Information and Research Officer and a Women’s Development Officer. Funds available under the National Recurrent Budget provide the means for the department to conduct and carry out its responsibilities which include personal emoluments, stationery and travel, training workshops, support for income-generating projects, technical advisory support, women in business activities and training attachments.

A major part of the budget is funded through donor funding, in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which currently is funding the Gender Support Facility Project,

which aims to promote the development approach that recognises and invests in the potential contribution of women and ultimately results in fair and equitable distribution of resources and services for all men, women, families and communities.

### **3.1.2 The Tuvalu National Council of Women (TNCW)**

The National Council of Women Management Committee consists of 17 women who represent the women in the eight island communities that make up Tuvalu. The TNCW is a non-governmental organisation that the women of Tuvalu set up in the late 1970s to direct and manage women's affairs in the then newly independent island nation. The Tuvalu National Council of Women has a demonstrated capacity in Women in Development, and has been an advocate for women's equality, while the Department of Women has the resources to attract and retain "Gender in Development"(GID) expertise and to provide GID inputs into national planning and decision making.

The TNCW management committee is the formal link between the Government and women in the island communities. It has its own constitution and is also registered as a charitable organisation under Tuvalu law. The Secretariat consists of a Secretary and a few staff who are responsible for carrying out the functions of the organisation. Projects that have been carried out by the TNCW to date include:

1. the setting up and operation of the Women's Handicraft Centre;
2. a country wide handicraft marketing system;
3. numerous small income generating projects supporting individual and community enterprises; micro-credit schemes; women in fisheries,
4. the provision of training to women in a wide range of areas including women in business, micro-credit schemes, HIV-AIDS and development, leadership roles, good governance, media and good governance, family health,
5. coordinating and organising the Tuvalu Women's Forum.

### **3.1.3 Local and Island Level Government**

The women's groups on each of the outer islands of Tuvalu are well organised and strong if not the dominant force in community development and resource mobilisation. On each island there is one women's group and this is still organised around the dominant church, the Ekalesia Kelisiano of Tuvalu, which started women's organisations (Komiti o Fafine) when missionaries first came to Tuvalu in the 1800s. The purpose of women's groups then and until separation from Kiribati was to train and supervise women in home-making, village hygiene and Christian teaching, and to generally provide the pastor's wife with support and free labour. The power to execute these home-making functions and to exercise individual human rights in the villages throughout Tuvalu has been influenced by the Government's assumption of social sector responsibilities such as health, education and community development since independence.

The role of women at the community level has thus been modified to focus on resource mobilisation (money and female labour) for meeting community level economic and social obligations. They command a lot of the resources on each of the islands and are a powerful force in the conduct of island affairs. Women's groups have their own office bearers who change annually in formal women's assembly meetings. They are linked to the local Falekaupule and Kaupule through the Women and Community Affairs Departments

in the Kaupule and to the national government through the NCW committee and the Department of Women's Affairs.

### **3.2 Constraints to Gender Equality and Equity in Tuvalu**

There has been a national recognition of the importance of gender equality and equity in Tuvalu. However, efforts to facilitate this are still at the point of development of sound mechanisms. As noted by Chung (1999: 5), "it is not the initiation of sound programme that changes women's lives, but it being put into practice". For instance, the Corporate Plan of the Department of Women, which was developed and approved for implementation in 1999, has taken few steps towards realising its development programs for women nation-wide.

The major constraints to implementing gender equality include:

1. the lack of cross-sectoral support from other government departments;
2. lack of resources and capacity of the Department of Women's Affairs to advocate and provide gender training, gender budget analysis, policy and sectoral analysis, and the compilation of sex-disaggregated data for analytical purpose; and
3. the continued decrease in government's financial support to women over the years. Even though in 2000 the budget estimate for the Ministry of Health, Women and Community Affairs was allocated 14 per cent (A\$2,042,693) compared with 11 per cent (A1,287,627) in 1999, of the total core budget, the core budget in 2002 for women actually fell to 6.5 per cent and it continued to fall to 5.57 per cent in 2003. The decrease in budget allocations was a policy decision by Government and applied to all Government departments including the Women's Department. (This direction was deemed necessary given the continuing decreasing trend in Government's revenue earnings from fisheries license, the Tuvalu Trust Fund and the devaluation of the US dollar).

Combating these constraints is vital to the development and advancement of women. However, Tuvalu's respect for "tradition" is likely to mean that substantive progress towards gender equality will be slow unless specific measures are taken. The road forward for the advancement of women in Tuvalu requires more than a bandaid on current wounds or a 'curative' approach. All spheres of women's roles must be tackled through a dynamic and 'preventative' approach. For example, community educational awareness programs to educate the community of their roles as good citizens in the development of our small island nation must be pursued. Areas such as knowledge of domestic laws, the legal system, international conventions, electoral systems, the rule of law, democracy, good governance and leadership training are vital subjects that Tuvalu women need to be made aware of. Unless citizens are aware of their legal rights, there will be few changes.

## **4. Gender and Cultural Context**

Tuvalu is a patriarchal society and the status of women in Tuvalu has long been determined by their roles as wives and mothers. Their standing in society depends very much on their behaviour and how they obey and respect the norms of Tuvalu society. The social norms dictate that men are the heads of the



households and as such are the rightful people to make decisions for the family. The place of the woman is the home and she is expected to know everything to do with the home environment when she is a grown woman, including the responsibility of bringing up children.

Women have never been present when men are assembled in their meetings or in the Falekaupule. Women have their own meeting houses or their own meetings and, according to one of the Funafuti Chiefs Natano (pers comm. 20 December 2005), this was mainly to enable the men to deliberate on issues that concerned the welfare of everyone in the community. Natano explains that these cultural practices have merits as they contributed to maintaining peace, order and sustainability in our communities and were never construed to be discriminatory. These practices were put in place with high regard for women and the important roles that they play in the home and in our society. Despite the merit found in the rationale behind the exclusion of women in community meetings, it is clear that women have been discriminated against in this arena.

Practically, women are the implementers of men's decision-makings and hence they cannot hold titles or head their families or participate in the decision-makings of the Falekaupule.<sup>1</sup> According to the traditional leader of the Funafuti community (Natano, pers comm 20 December 2005) the exclusion of women from the Falekaupule was not to discriminate against them because they are women or that they do not have the faculty to reason like men, but to protect and spare them from any violence, whether verbal or physical, that might arise in the Falekaupule's deliberations.

In traditional Falekaupule meetings women are rarely present and in most cases were never present. Natano (pers comm. 23 December 2005) reveals that this has been a tradition in the past and the reason for such a practice is to enable young and older women get together in their own meeting houses and learn traditional skills that are expected of women such as weaving blinds, baskets, mats and skirts, as well as cooking etc. The men on the other hand would meet in their own meeting houses to deliberate on matters that would enable them to gather food either from their plantations or the sea so as to take care of their families as well as those households with no men. Natano states that this is important as it ensures peace and sustainability for everyone in the community. He contemplates further that any attempt to change this social pattern would bring chaos and disorder to the social cohesion of island communities.

The consequences for the absence of women's voices in the Falekaupule meetings has resulted in the lack of understanding by women on very important issues such as the Falekaupule Trust Fund and how the fund provides for women's development in each island community. The Falekaupule Trust Fund was set up to provide a sustaining source of funds for island development purposes only. This special trust fund is managed by a board which consists of directors representing the eight islands in Tuvalu. The Falekaupule Trust Fund is invested outside Tuvalu and its investment strategy is similar to the Tuvalu Trust Fund. Since its inception in 1999, the Falekaupule Trust Fund has a current capital value of AUD\$20 million dollars, and already close AUD\$2.7 million has been distributed to the eight islands. In a study by Buchan and Cosslet (2003) on the social and economic wellbeing of Tuvaluans, it was revealed that though the level of awareness among women and men had increased since the previous study in 2001, the level of awareness about the fund was significantly greater among men and very low among women and youths.

With the introduction of the Falekaupule Act in January 1997, anyone 18 years old and above is eligible to participate in the decision making process of the Falekaupule quarterly assemblies. However, as noted by Sinclair (2001) participation depends on the traditional culture of each island. For example, in Vaitupu, men and women above 35 or 40 years can participate and vote; in Nui and Nukufetau, only men 50 years and above can participate and vote; while in Funafuti, anyone who is 18 can participate and vote on matters

in a Falekaupule Assembly. Important matters are taken to another assembly of *matai*<sup>2</sup> where only *matai* are allowed to participate and vote. A woman *matai* may participate in the decision making process but is not be eligible to cast a vote (pers. Comm. Teagai; 26/12).

Although the Falekaupule Act paves the way for the inclusion of women into the traditional decision making process, it does not replace the existing traditional structures for decision making in each islands which still exclude women. Sinclair (2001) also stated that as a result most women's projects submitted to the Falekaupule by women for approval is often neglected.

## 5. Constitutional Framework & Women's Political Representation

Tuvalu's commitment to gender issues on the one hand has been very positive and encouraging considering the endorsement of conventions like CEDAW and the PPA. On the other hand progress has stopped at the ratification and endorsement front. Tuvalu has not translated these commitments, especially the articles under CEDAW into new laws, amendments to current laws and/or policies. The lack of progress has been mainly due to limitations in capacity at the Attorney General's office to review, revise and amend laws as required under the CEDAW protocols. The Department of Women has also lacked the professionalism, capacity and funding to write the CEDAW report. Lastly there was and still is, a lack of political will to fulfil the requirements under the CEDAW.

The Constitution provides that members of Parliament shall be elected under a system of universal, adult suffrage (s.87). The Constitution of Tuvalu states that "a person shall be qualified to be elected as a Member of Parliament if ..... he or she is a citizen of Tuvalu; and has attained the age of 21 years" (s.48); and is not disqualified on any ground (s.9, The Electoral Provisions (Parliament) ordinance 1980). No distinction is made between men and women in Tuvalu for Parliamentary membership. A person is entitled to be registered as an elector for Parliamentary elections if he/she is a citizen of Tuvalu and has attained the age of 18 years. Other requirements may also be prescribed from time to time (e.g. residency) by law.

Tuvalu has a first past the post electoral system (single member plurality). Tuvalu adopted this system from the Colonial powers and it has survived with every election in Tuvalu since Independence in 1978. Tuvalu is divided into eight main constituencies along the eight different islands and has no political parties. So far elections in Tuvalu have been free and fair and relatively peaceful.

Tuvalu's Constitution and electoral laws clearly provide for both males and females to take part in elections as equals, and discrimination of any sort is forbidden and not tolerated. Therefore, the political playing field is formally level for both women and men to contest in any election. However as shown in the next section, a totally different reality exists under the surface of the Constitution and Laws of Tuvalu.

Contesting for election in Tuvalu, especially for women, is a very difficult to near impossible task. There are many constraints a woman has to overcome before her name is put forward for nomination. These constraints or barriers include the cultural and traditional values in the Tuvalu society, the traditional view of women as someone who belongs at home, the male dominated family arena, convincing the husband and family members to support the political participation, the financial support to contest in the election, etc. The men in the Tuvalu society do not have to overcome the cultural barriers: it has been and will always be the nature of Tuvalu men to take part or to be at the forefront decision making in the Falekaupule, Kaupule and island communities in all their adult life, hence parliamentary representation is a natural transition for men in Tuvalu culture. In addition, men's social status is recognised by society.

## 5.1 Electoral Laws

The Electoral Provisions (Parliament) Act 1980 divides Tuvalu into eight electoral districts as set out in Schedule 1 to the Act, in alphabetical order as follows:

**Table 8: Electoral Districts & Number of Representatives**

Electoral District	Area	No. of Representatives
Funafuti	Funafuti Island	2
Nanumaga	Nanumaga Island	2
Nanumea	Nanumea Island	2
Hui	Nui Island	2
Niutao	Niutao Island	2
Nukufetau	Nukufetau Island	2
Nukulaelae	Nukulaelae Island	1
Vaitupu	Vaitupu Island	2

Any person who is a citizen of Tuvalu can be registered as an elector on reaching the age of 18 years and be registered on the electoral register of his home islands (s.5). The Act provides a number of criteria to determine a person's home island which includes 1) birth in that electoral district or 2) that his mother or father (giving both parents equality of rights) was born in that electoral district (s.5 (3)). The average number of women voters in the last election was around 50 per cent.

Currently there is no woman member of parliament. As stated Tuvalu has only ever had one woman member who held the position of a Cabinet Minister form 1989 to 1993 and was a backbencher from

**Table 9: Men and women in decision-making positions as of 2005.**

Boards / Committees	Males	Females
Tuvalu Philatelic Bureau Board	4	1
Vaiaku Lagi Hotel Board of Directors	5	1
Tuvalu Electrical Operation Board	6	0
Tuvalu Telecommunication Cooperation	6	0
Tuvalu Development Bank	5	0
National Fishing Cooperation of Tuvalu	5	0
Price Control Board	3	1
Development Coordinating Committee	12	1
Public Service Commission	4	0
Lands Management Committee	..	..
Project Working Committee	16	4
Project Coordination Committee	20	3

## Box 1: Ms Naama Maheu Latasi

**M**s Naamal Maheu Latasi is the first and only Tuvaluan woman to successfully contest an election in the Nanumea constituency and to win a seat to Parliament from 1989 to 1993. Ms Latasi is the daughter of a prominent Nanumea politician and her mother was from the island of Kiribati. The support from her own family, women and especially her husband is key to her being success in the political arena

Ms Naama Latasi was accorded a Ministerial portfolio of Health, Education and Community Services. Prior to this historical moment, Naama was heavily involved in the development of island communities, especially in the advancement and development of women. Ms Naama was a member of the Nanumea Women's association, the Kiribati women's association and she also made sure that she participated in the Funafuti Women association (Funafuti is her husband's home island). All this time she was also the Girl Guides' Commissioner and was the mentor of many upcoming young women leaders. At the national level, she was the vice-president of the newly established Tuvalu National Council of Women. Therefore Ms Naama Latasi had vast experience in women's affairs and was proven to be a capable leader in her involvement in the various women's associations and organisations.

Her invaluable experience in women's affairs, education and exposure to developments in the outside world through conferences, deeply assisted her in managing her Member of Parliament role and her Ministerial Portfolio. Ms Naama lives on very strong principles, where the welfare of family and a nation is paramount. During her term she was well respected by her male colleagues in both Cabinet and Parliament. Her views are also very well respected outside Tuvalu especially on the advancement of women in small island Tuvalu.

Raising the standard of women, the participation of women in national development within the perimeters of culture and tradition, rights for women as equal to men in the decision making arena and income generating projects for women are the major achievements she managed to accomplish during her term in office.

Naama Latasi identified that disadvantages of women have more to do with adherence to traditional roles and conventions and believes that women's representation is necessary.

1993 to 1997. Three women candidates from three different islands contested the 2002 General Elections but were not successful.

Under the Falekaupule Act every Tuvalu citizen on reaching the age of 18 years, is entitled to vote at Kaupule elections in the Falekaupule area in which he or she resides and pays local rates to the Kaupule unless exempted (s.7). All eight Kaupule are composed of 6 elected members each.

Under the Island Courts' Act 1965, the magistracy consists of 1 President, 1 Vice-President, 1 ordinary member and 2 alternate members, with the President, Vice President and 1 member making a quorum, which means that in any civil or criminal proceeding, the matter shall be heard and determined by 3 members sitting together. Magistrates are selected through the Island Councils and the selected candidate's name is forwarded to the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Public Service Commission. The appointment of the candidate will be made upon the approval of the Chief Justice. There are currently 7 female

magistrates serving in the Island Courts of Tuvalu, compared to the past where only one woman magistrate served in the Magistrate Court of Tuvalu (pers. comm Kaitu 24/12). Interviews also revealed that the first female Island Court magistrate was appointed to the Island Court in Nanumea in the 1980s and another in Nukulaelae in the early 1990s. A woman was also appointed as Census Commissioner for the 1991 Tuvalu Census.

There is no Tuvaluan law that bars women from participating in politics and public life is open and opportunities are there to participate. However, despite the formal legal equality of opportunity, women form a minority in corporate bodies whose members are elected by the government, compared to those that are being elected by the civil society organisations as indicated in the table below.

## **5.2 Land and Matrimonial Laws**

Women are legally discriminated against in the decision making process of family clan matters and in the distribution of properties in the Native Lands Ordinance. The Tuvalu's Native Lands Ordinance (1986) Cap 22, section 9 (ii) states that;

“In the distribution of an estate between the sons and daughters of an owner, the share of the eldest son shall exceed that of his brothers and the share of sons shall exceed the shares of daughters. If there are no sons then the share of the eldest daughters will exceed that of her sisters”.

Furthermore section 20 of the Tuvalu Native Lands Ordinance states in a case of divorce, the paternity of the child shall reside with his/her father when she/he reaches the age of 2 years.

The above section and its provisions truly reflect and promote the traditional thinking that men are the breadwinners and caretakers of our Tuvaluan families and society.

The same pattern of differential treatment is found in Cap 20 in the law on marriage. An ex-nuptial child of 16 years and below 21 who wishes to get married would have to obtain the consent of the father. The provision does not consider the mother at all. Basically, the provision discriminates against women in Tuvalu as it does not allow women in such situations the same right as fathers to consent to their daughters getting married under age. The provision is more favourable to men.

## **5.3 The Falekaupule Act 1997 and Women**

The Falekaupule Act 1997 provided the mechanism for substantial reforms at the local government level. One of the most significant and historical aspect of the reform is the official recognition of traditional governance (chiefs and elders) whereby the chiefs and elders are directly responsible for managing island affairs with the traditional governance system working hand in hand with National Government, which based their system on a Western style governance. It is aimed at improving linkages between customary government and national-level institutions and encouraging wider participation on the part of communities

The Falekaupule Act provides opportunities for women to participate in the quarterly Falekaupule meetings prompted by their local governments under the Falekaupule Act 1997. From observations, women are slowly taking advantage of this opportunity and are participating in the decision making process of their Falekaupule. There is definitely an increasing trend of women's participation not only in local government elections but also in the various development committees in the Kaupule (formerly known as Council) (see

Table 4). The momentum for this positive trend started in 1999 but it was not until 2001 that a significant increase in women being elected to various development committees. In 2001 five of the eight islands elected an average of 2 women to partake in decision making at the Kaupule committee level, while the remaining three islands (Funafuti, Nanumaga and Nui) did not elect any women to the committees. In 2003, seven of the eight islands have women participating in the various committees, except for Nui Island which had zero women participation (Buchan and Cosslet, 2003 pp 28).

Currently three are women elected as Kaupule Members, 1 at Niutao and 2 at Nukufetau. This is the first time that a number of women have been elected at the helm of local government. This is an encouraging trend in increasing women's representation in the decision making helm of the Kaupule set-up. The involvement of women in the different committees shows that women's input to development in all the islands is fundamental for the progress of social, economic and political development at the local government level.

**Table 10: Number of Women in decision making Kaupule Committees 2005**

Island	Elected Kaupule Members	Kaupule Committees							Courts	
		PHC	School	IDCC	CFC	Disaster	Pre Sch	Budget	Island	Lands
Vaitupu	0	3	6	7	0	1	0	1	1	0
Nanumea	0	10	4	5	1	1	5	2	0	0
Nanumaga	0	6	5	6	0	2	0	3	0	0
Niutao	1	4	5	3	1	0	0	2	0	0
Nui	0	4	4	2	1	0	0	2	1	0
Nukufetau	2	4	3	3	2	3	0	3	1	0
Funafuti	0	10	16	4	0	2	5	2	2	0
Nukulaelae	0	6	5	2	0	0	4	2	2	0

Key: PHCC (Primary Health Care Committee); Primary School Committee; IDCC (Island Development Coordinating Committee); CFC (Center of Fisheries Committee); Pre Sch (Pre School Committee).

The Falekaupule era provides for people empowerment whereby, through the mandated Annual Falekaupule Assembly, all community residents of legal age and regardless of sex can participate in community planning and decision-making while providing them the avenue through which they can air their grievances and other concerns of common interest, thus, institutionalizing democracy at the grassroots level.

## 6. Civil Society Organisations

Despite the low representation of women in public boards, women dominate largely in non governmental organisations, particularly those that deal with women's issues such as the Tuvalu National Council of Women, Tuvalu Association of Non-Governmental Organisations, Women in Business and islands women's associations. The dominance of women at the non government sector stemmed from the continuing strong networking of women associations in the church, at island and village level, which were

established long ago by the church and traditional leaders. This is in conformity with CEDAW's Article 7(c) which also makes reference to women's participation in non-governmental organisations (NGO) and associations.

As noted by Pulea (1996), women in Tuvalu freely and actively participate in community associated activities. In Funafuti, the various island communities have built Falekaupule which enable them to group and assemble to maintain the respect for values and customs of their particular home island whilst participating fully in the national life. Although women do not actively participate in the decision making structure in the Falekaupule meetings,<sup>3</sup> issues of great importance to women are normally channelled either through their husbands, through the *matasi* or the traditional mechanisms of each Falekaupule.

The Tuvalu Association of Non-Government Organisations (TANGO), under its 2005-2008 strategic plan, is focusing on strengthening capacities of its members in the areas of leadership skills, managing sustainable human development, good governance, cooperation, and networking between institutions such as Government, Kaupule and TANGO. As mentioned TANGO members are made up women's organisations both at the National and island level. This strategic plan provides avenues for women to learn and acquire the skills to actively and efficiently participate in decision making and also in the developments of their organisation and community and island.

## 7. Statement of results

### 7.1 Stakeholders Meeting

A stakeholders' meeting was held on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2006 to brief the different stakeholders in government, the private sector and civil society organisations about the aims, objectives and the methodology of the research. Invitations were sent out to selected members of parliament, secretaries, heads of departments, leaders of non-governmental organisations and island community leaders. Approximately half of the invited stakeholders attended. Among the 25 representatives were the Speaker to Parliament and two members of parliament. Only one assistant secretary and five heads of departments from the government attended. The rest of the representatives were leaders of non-governmental organisations.

The discussion focused on four main issues:

1. Description of the research, its aims, objectives and the methodology adopted.
2. Whether women should be included at levels of decision making in Tuvalu, and if so why.
3. Constraints that women face when they are contemplating running as candidates and how these constraints could be removed.
4. Tuvalu's electoral system and whether the electoral process and electoral legislation pose difficulties for women voters as well as for women candidates.

#### **Issue 1#: Should women be involved at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu and why?**

It was evident from the discussions that the majority of the stakeholders agreed without any reservation that women should be involved in decision making in Tuvalu, at any level. Amongst the reasons raised, the most common ones that emanated were:

- Women are basically good managers in the home and as such should be involved together with men in any planning process and at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu, making the development process holistic and more sustainable for all citizens of Tuvalu;
- Tuvalu has made several commitments to the advancement of women both to the Pacific region as well as the international community;
- There are more women than men in the country and so they must have a voice in any decision making that affects their livelihood;

## **Issue 2#: What are the constraints that women face in running as candidates in the general election?**

Some of the common problems that were perceived by the stakeholders were:

- The electoral process is not friendly. Despite the fact that it does not formally discriminate against women and men from participating as voters as well as candidates, there is still evidence of inequality in the practices that go on before Election Day. These practices are greatly influenced by culture and family obligations, hence sometimes leaving the voter with no choice but to vote under family obligations. As a candidate, a woman may not have the financial means to provide for the practices that male candidates normally would carry out to win over votes (vote buying);
- The influence of culture and tradition regarding the place of a woman in Tuvaluan society plays also a major part in discouraging women from running as candidates. The multiple roles of women in the home and the fear of being blamed if anything goes wrong in the home or the family contributes a lot too;
- Lack of self confidence of women to put forward their names as candidates. There is belief that the lack of self confidence of women is a result of women's lack of understanding and participation in areas of leadership, governance and democracy.

## **Issue 3#: Electoral System and Processes**

The discussion on this issue highlighted three major factors about the electoral law, the electoral system and associated processes.

- The electoral law does not allow women voters of one constituency to vote in support for women candidates running in another constituency;
- Though the law is gender neutral in principle, the practices that go on in reality in every electorate reflect the inequality of power between male and female candidates, favouring men candidates over women;
- Tuvalu's electoral system is the "Block Vote" which is not conducive for women candidates as voting is mostly influenced by culture and family ties.



## **Issue 4#: Resolutions**

In discussing resolutions as remedies for increasing the participation of women in parliament and in every decision making level, the stakeholders came up with the following;

- Put in place a provision in the electoral law for a quota of women elected at the general election;
- Trainings for women in areas such as leadership training, governance, democracy, legal literacy, gender and public speaking;

### **7.2 Talk-Back Show**

A talk-back show was also conducted on January 10<sup>th</sup> 2006 in the afternoon with the assistance of the Director of Women Affairs, Saini Simona; the President of the National Council of Women, Katalaina Malua, a crown counsel, Saini Malalau and a representative of civil society, Siuila Toloa. Promotion radio spots had been repeatedly aired on the radio two days before for the public awareness day.

The objective of the talk-back show was to widely inform the general public about the research and to seek their views on the issue of women participating at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu. One of the topics discussed was whether having women participate in the political arena would make a difference to the nation and especially to the livelihood of the people of Tuvalu. The first part of the program concentrated on the research itself, its aim, objectives and the methodology adopted while the second part of the program was dedicated to the public to express their views. A toll free line was arranged with Tuvalu Telecommunication Corporation to enable the general public to call in to the studio to express their views. The outcomes of the peoples' views regarding the above issues are;

## **Issue 1#: Should women be involved at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu and why?**

The majority of the callers strongly believed that women should participate at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu. Some of the common reasons are;

- Women are commonly seen in the country not only as the main implementers of men's decisions at the micro level but they are also forever busy with their development projects and programs. If women can handle these tasks successfully then why not have them present at all levels of decision making;
- Parliament is not a traditional setting where women need to be cautious of culture. Parliament is a western concept and is mandated in the Constitution of Tuvalu where equality between men and women are stipulated;
- Tuvalu is a nation that is made up of women and men therefore the development of the nation should be decided together by men and women. Men could never understand the issues that affect women;

- Women make up more than 50 per cent Tuvalu's population which justifies the need for women to have a voice in Parliament or at any level of decision making processes so there issues of concerns are raised and attended to by government;

### **Issue 2#: What are the constraints that women face in running as candidates for the general election?**

The most common factors that the callers shared in the talk-back show were;

- Influence of culture and tradition on women's self esteem. The majority believed that the place of a woman as determined by culture is the most difficult obstacle that women are facing in empowering themselves to run as candidates at any level of decision making;
- There is also a lack of support from husbands and families. This has to do with the gender stereotyped roles that women and men have in our Tuvalu culture. A question that frequently crossed the minds of potential women candidates is "who should take over my multiple roles in the home? Child caring, cooking, washing, home care etc"
- Lack of education on various issues affecting women and the country as a whole.
- The electoral process does not favour women candidates as voting is mostly done on family basis and culture plays a vital role in it.

### **Issue 3#: Electoral System and Processes**

Only a few callers were able to make comments regarding the electoral law and those comments were in favour of;

- Making changes to the electoral legislation to provide a quota for women in parliament;
- Biases in the practices that go on in the electorates, especially in terms of voting where voters tend to vote more on family ties rather than deciding as to who should be the best person to represent him/her in parliament;

### **Issue 4#: Would it make a difference if women are in Parliament?**

The majority felt that if women can run their homes and organisations successfully this proves to the nation that women can definitely make a difference if they are in Parliament. Some of the common comments are;

- Women do not think and plan as men. Women normally prioritise the welfare of everyone when planning and implementing the plans. Women have been successful in implementing their given tasks. So there is indeed a great difference because women politicians would plan and make decisions not only for the benefit of women but also for everyone in the nation;
- Good practices and examples can be drawn from the country of New Zealand as well as other countries;

## **Issue 5#: Resolutions**

The majority of the callers believed that in order to increase the participation of women in parliament and at all levels in decision making, the following need to be put in place;

- Gender equality training needs to be carried out at all levels of society;
- There is an immediate and urgent need for voter education to be carried out to minimize the practice of casting votes based on family ties as culture;
- Training to enhance the self esteem of women.

### **7.3 Individual Based Interviews & Questionnaire**

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to the selected participants in the three sectors: 35 participants representing the Government Sector, 44 from civil society and 21 from the business sector. 95 participants responded and returned their questionnaires. The results of the participants responses were synthesized within their own sectors to reflect a more concise reflection of what each sector perceived and felt about the issue of increasing the political participation of women in Tuvalu's parliament and most important of all their involvement in any decision making at all levels. A summary analysis of the three sectors highlights the main issues raised.

#### **7.3.1 Government Sector**

### **Issue 1#: Should women be involved at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu and why?**

#### **Findings:**

1. Of the 34 respondents, 94.6 per cent responded positively that women should be involved at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu, while 5.4 per cent responded that the involvement of women in decision making needs to be confined only to public arenas but not to the Falekaupule setting. The respondents felt that the Falekaupule is the heart of Tuvalu culture and traditional values in any Tuvalu community and it is where any Tuvaluan finds his/her true identity.
2. The majority of the respondents declared that the legal system in Tuvalu allows equal opportunity and rights for both women and men to participate in decision making. Moreover, Parliament is not a traditional setting and women should work together in partnership with men in Parliament to build our nation. Respondents also felt that Tuvalu is a country that is made up of both men and women therefore women should be rightly involved at all levels of decision making.
3. Respondents also felt that women are good decision makers, patient and are always striving to achieve their goals. Women always make sure that what they set down as goals are always implemented. Respondents also felt that as women make up more than 50 per cent of Tuvalu's population they should have a voice in Parliament and in all decision making in Tuvalu.

## Issue 2#: How would you express your support?

### Findings:

- The majority of the respondents felt that they would express their support of women's issues by lobbying and advocating women issues at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu. This should be achieved by conducting meetings at national, Falekaupule and community levels, seeking support on any issue relevant to the advancement of women.
- The respondents also felt that another way of expressing their support to women's involvement in parliament and at all levels in decision making is by lobbying for more women's training workshops to educate and empower them on women's issues including national development issues. In this way, women will become more aware of political issues, parliamentary information, obstacles to women's participation etc.
- Lastly respondents felt that there is a need to put in place a quota for women in parliament. This will ensure that women's issues and concerns are raised in national dialogues and debates, hence a high possibility that they would be incorporated into national plans and policies.
- A small number of respondents felt that voting for women is a way of expressing their support for women participation in the political arena.

## Issue 3#: Electoral System and Processes

### Findings:

1. Responding to Part 1 of the question on the electoral system and processes, 82.3 per cent of the 35 respondents felt that the electoral system that we have in place in Tuvalu provides equal opportunities for women and men as voters in the general election. There is no discrimination against women in the law and so the system is working properly. The remaining 17.7 per cent felt that the electoral system does not provide voters in reality the freedom to vote freely as voting is heavily influenced by family obligations. Respondents also felt that the system disadvantaged them by limiting their chances of voting in support for a woman candidate who is contesting from another island district.
2. In part 2 of the question, 70.5 per cent of the respondents stated that the current electoral system in place fares as well for women candidates as it does for men candidates. They reason being that the criteria for one to be eligible as a candidate are clearly the same for both men and women. The opportunities for men and women to run as candidates are the same. Alternatively, 32.9 per cent of the respondents felt otherwise. They believed that despite the neutrality of the law in providing equal opportunities to men and women to contest the general elections, there are de facto processes that hinder women from contesting the general elections. These relate to: (a) how strong your family ties are, (b) how involved and responsive have you been with the needs of your big family. Moreover voting through family ties and relationships is a strong reality of voting in Tuvalu.

## **Issue 4#: What are the constraints that women face in running as candidates for the general election?**

### **Findings:**

1. The majority of the respondents felt that culture is the main constraint that women face in contesting the general elections. The respondents asserted that the role of a woman in our Tuvaluan society restricts women to the home sphere where their main tasks are to look after the family welfare, children and husband. For a woman to venture into the decision making arenas whether public or in the traditional setting is not a norm and is usually frowned upon by society. This stereotyping of women is heavily embedded in the minds of the Tuvaluan society and especially women who are made to believe that making decisions (at the Falekaupule level and in Parliament) are not women's responsibilities, but men's responsibilities.
2. A second factor is the multiple roles that Tuvaluan women have adopted in their lives. The respondents believed that the worrying factor amongst women as to who should take over their multiple responsibilities at home hinders them from contesting general elections.
3. Respondents also felt that women's lack of self-confidence as potential leaders is another contributing problem. Respondents felt that culture, the lack of knowledge and education among our women contributed to this problem. Respondents thought that women felt inadequate because they do not have the education and training required for them to feel confident in contesting the general elections and become political leaders.

## **Issue 5#: Resolutions**

### **Findings:**

1. Responding to ways of increasing the participation of women in the political arena as well as every decision making level in Tuvalu, respondents claimed that women and their organisations need to be empowered. Empowerment can only be brought about by providing appropriate education and training for women and their organisations. In this way, women would have the knowledge and skills required to make them feel confident to contest not only in general elections but also for positions in public boards of directors or in any national committee instituted in Tuvalu.
2. Ranking second is the need to legislate for a quota for women's representation. Respondents felt that given the current dismal rate of women's representation in our Parliament, there is a need for electoral legislation to be modified so as to allow a quota for women in Parliament.
3. Lastly, respondents felt that the following also need to be considered;
  - Incorporate into the school curriculum the issue of gender equality;
  - Review discriminatory cultural practices that hinder the full participation of women in decision making in the traditional setting;
  - Encourage women to support the advancement of women by voting for women in the general elections and in any other elections, e.g. at the Kaupule level.

## 7.3.2 Business Sector

### Issue 1#: Should women be involved at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu and why?

#### Findings:

1. Of the 21 respondents, a majority of 95.2 per cent responded positively that women should be involved at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu. Only 4.8 per cent disagreed on the basis that Tuvalu culture does not allow women to participate in traditional meeting places and so this must be respected. Of those who responded positively, their argument was based on the fact that women are not only understandably known as good managers but also as being able to make fair decisions. This is because when women plan, they think of everyone's needs in the home and try to compromise their decisions so as to ensure that everyone in the family is being fairly attended to.
2. The second argument for those in favor of women being involved in decision making and in politics is that women are human beings and so have the same right as men to participate in the political arena as well as in any decision making process in Tuvalu. Respondents felt that it is right for women to be involved because when men's plans devastatingly go wrong, not only men suffer the consequences, but also women. So to ensure that women do not unnecessarily suffer because of men's inadequacy, it is paramount that women are included as they have the right to be involved in any planning process that affects the livelihood of men and women in our society.

### Issue 2#: How would you express your support?

#### Findings:

1. The majority of the respondents stated that one way of expressing their support of women's involvement at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu is by ensuring that women get to participate in training workshops and meetings. This is important because without the presence of women or those in support of women's issues, there would be no one to lobby, promote and contribute effectively on behalf of women in such training workshops and meetings.
2. Respondents also felt that voting for women is necessary to ensure that women's issues, concerns and interests are raised and debated at the national level. This would guarantee that women's concerns are considered in national planning and developments.
3. Lastly respondents felt that to express ones' support of women's issues, there is a need to lobby for changes to be made to cultural practices that are discriminatory in nature to women.

### **Issue 3#: Electoral System and Processes**

#### **Findings:**

1. Of the 21 respondents only 17 responded to Part 1 of this question. Of the 17, 76.1 per cent responded that the electoral system that is in place fares well for the people of Tuvalu and especially women. This is because there are no legal restrictions or discrimination against women as voters. However, the 4.7 per cent that responded negatively argued that they know very little about the electoral system despite the fact that they have voted in past general elections. Likewise respondents felt that women know very little of the importance of their vote and as such, are easily swayed by family influences.
2. Part 2 of the question brought about a majority of 57.1 per cent who believe that the electoral system is neutral and treats both male and female candidates contesting in the general elections equally. Nevertheless, 19.0 per cent believe that this neutrality is only a façade hiding the reality that contestants face during elections. Respondents felt that voting is still based on family relationships. This minimizes the chances of a woman to come out of an election a winner.

### **Issue 4#: What are the constraints that women face in running as candidates for the general election?**

#### **Findings:**

1. The majority of respondents felt that culture is the main factor that hinders women from contesting general elections. The multiple roles of women in our Tuvaluan society place women in a 'lock and sink' situation. Respondents felt that this stereotyped perception of women makes women feel inferior to men in everything.
2. Respondents felt that another contributing factor is the lack of knowledge and understanding among women on how to go about getting into Parliament. There is a lack of skills that are necessary for women to have in order for them to feel confident about themselves and how they can contribute to the building of the nation and most important of all the advancement of women in Tuvalu.
3. Lastly respondents also highlighted the following factors but not with the same significance.
  - • Financial constraints to finance women candidates' campaigns
  - • Lack of support from families and husband;

### **Issue 5#: Resolutions**

1. The majority of respondents claimed that the most useful way to increase the participation of women in politics and in all levels of decision making is to empower women by providing access for them in Parliament, meetings and in national committees. Respondents felt that this can be done by modifying the electoral law to include a

quota for women in Parliament or changing the electoral legislation to a preferential system whereby women would stand more chances of winning in the general election. Likewise it is important to have a gender equality policy in place for all government sectors to consider in their development planning processes.

2. Education and training in areas such as leadership, gender, human rights, development issues and lobbying skills is another way of increasing women's participation in the political arena. Respondents felt that once women are equipped with the right information and skills, women would have the confidence to contest and there would also be a very high possibility of them emerging as winners in the general elections.
3. Lastly respondents felt that "women should vote for women" is also an effective way of ensuring that women are present in Parliament. This would take care of the problem of voting based on family relationships as well as unethical campaign practices that usually went on before the election period.

### 7.3.3 Civil Society Sector

#### **Issue 1#: Should women be involved at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu and why?**

##### **Findings:**

Of the 40 participants who responded, a majority of 94 per cent responded positively that women should be involved at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu, while 6 per cent responded negatively arguing that it is not the place of a woman in our Tuvaluan society to make decisions. Those in favour for women to participate in politics as well as in all levels of decision making in Tuvalu argue that;

1. Women are notably good managers at home and so should be given the opportunity to be involved in politics as well as in decision making together in partnership with men. The majority of the participants believed that if men and women work in partnership, the tendency for national projects developments to be implemented successfully would be quite high. This is because national decision making for the building of the nation would no longer be done single handedly by men, but by both men and women.
2. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well as Women's Rights embedded in the Bill of Rights within the Tuvalu Constitution were frequently raised by participants as substantial grounds for the inclusion of women in all decision making in Tuvalu. The participants argued that since Tuvalu has ratified CEDAW, it is time that more concrete and practical actions are put in place to translate the various commitments made by the government to the United Nations as well as to other international entities for the advancement of women and gender equality.
3. The low participation of women in decision making as well as in politics was also frequently commented upon by participants as a negative factor against women in



terms of ensuring that women's concerns and issues are brought up to national dialogue and development;

4. Of the 6 per cent of those who disagreed, apart from culture, it was argued that women's physical make up characterize them as weak and inferior, and do not project them as potential players in the political arena of Tuvalu.

## **Issue 2#: How would you express your support?**

### **Findings:**

1. The majority purports that one way they would express their support of women's involvement and participation in the political arena and every decision making level in Tuvalu is to render their support to women's issues and concerns by raising them in public meetings, conferences, as well as in radio programs and other forms of media publications on women's issues;
2. Participants also believe that another way of expressing one's support to women's issues is to vote for women. Participants claim that voting for women would ensure that women would have a voice in the decision making process of that particular entity;
3. Thirdly, participants noted that it is also important to lobby for workshops and training for women. To have these in place would ensure that women would become more educated and knowledgeable on development issues, hence enabling them to contribute with sound understanding to discussions and dialogues on issues affecting them.

## **Issue 3#: Electoral System and Processes**

### **Findings:**

1. Of the 40 respondents, only 33 responded to Part 1 of this question. Out of the 33 respondents, 67.5 per cent responded that the electoral system that we have in place in Tuvalu fares well for women as voters while 15 per cent maintain that the electoral system is not an enabling system for women as voters. The majority of respondents declared that the current electoral system does not discriminate or restrict women's freedom to vote in the general or by election. The 15 per cent against the electoral process asserted that it does not allow individual women to cast their vote as they wish because of cultural influences and family obligations. Moreover, respondents claim that the electoral law itself restricts their freedom to cast their votes in support of women candidates running in other districts;
2. In responding to Part 2 of the question on the electoral system, of the 32 respondents, 57.5 per cent respondents stated that the electoral system does not hamper the participation of women as candidates in the election. This is because the electoral law provides equal opportunities to both men and women to stand as candidates in their respected districts. However, 22.5 per cent argued that although the electoral system provides equal opportunities to men and women to stand in the election, the processes

that go on before the election such as campaigning practices do not provide women candidates with much chance to win. This is because women do not have the financial means to compete with men in campaigning activities. Moreover, they do not have the aggressiveness required to be as bold as men in approaching voters to vote for them.

#### **Issue 4#: What are the constraints that women face in running as candidates for the general election?**

##### **Findings:**

1. Of the responses that were collated, cultural practices and the traditional perception of women in our Tuvaluan society rated highly as the prevailing factor that hinders women from running as candidates in general elections. Respondents felt that the traditional role of a woman in Tuvalu which restricts her to the home and domestic environment, projects to women that they are inferior and that decision making is a man's job. To venture into the decision making arena would mean to them breaking the norms of our Tuvaluan society.
2. Ranking in second place is the lack of knowledge of how the parliamentary system works and how a woman can conduct herself as a leader. There is a lack of leadership skills as well as understanding of the development issues affecting our small island states and especially women.
3. Ranking third is the lack of support from families and spouses for women running as candidates. Respondents felt that since women play so many roles in the home, the possibility of the family faring well in the absence of a woman would be quite dismal.
4. Lastly is the lack of finance to assist women with their campaigns. Respondents felt that the lack of finances is one of the contributing factors that discourage women from running as candidates.

#### **Issue 5#: Resolutions**

##### **Findings:**

1. In responding to ways of increasing the political participation of women in the political arena as well as in all levels of decision making, the majority of respondents claim that training and raising the awareness of women in leadership, lobbying and advocacy, presentation skills and understanding the issues that affects livelihoods of women in Tuvalu as well as development issues affecting our small island nation are the most important factors that should be considered. Respondents believe that providing and increasing opportunities for women in training and education is the key to increasing the participation of women not only in the political arena but also in all levels of decision making in Tuvalu.
2. Ranking as second, respondents felt that there is a need for the electoral law to be modified so as to allow for a provision for a quota for women in Parliament. The respondents also noted that this change need not only be confined to the electoral law itself but also to all government policies. Respondents believe that having a quota in

place in the electoral law as well as in government policies would ensure that women would be fairly represented in Parliament.

3. Lastly, respondents felt that it is important to provide adequate support to women's organisations. Respondents believe that when women organisations are strengthened, the possibility for them to assist and encourage potential women candidates to run in the general elections would be quite high.

## 7.4 Community Based Consultations

The following analysis was taken from the community consultations that were carried out with seven island communities residing on Funafuti, the capital of Tuvalu. It must be noted that the attendance of community members in these consultations were not representative of their communities and so this analysis of community based consultations must be treated as only a snapshot of what people in the community think about the issue. The communities consulted involved the following;

1. Niutao
2. Nui
3. Nanumaga
4. Nanumea
5. Funafuti
6. Nukulaelae
7. Vaitupu
8. TANGO.

The island community of Nukufetau was not consulted as the community was too busy preparing for an important upcoming celebration during the research time frame. All community consultation results have been analysed together to provide a general snapshot of what the eight communities think regarding the issues researched.

### **Issue 1#: Should women be involved at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu and why?**

#### **Findings:**

1. Of the eight communities consulted, five of them responded that women should be involved at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu. The remaining three communities had reservations regarding the involvement of women in the decision making process in the Falekaupule, but also responded that women should be involved in every other decision making processes in Tuvalu.
2. Those in favor of women's participation in the political arena felt that since women are good managers in their homes, they should be given the opportunity to be involved in the planning processes and especially in the political arena where development decisions are being made;
3. Respondents also felt that since women make up more than half of the population of Tuvalu, their interests and concerns should be heard in Parliament. Respondents claim

that women are known to make good decisions and also noted that women make their decisions and strive hard to implement them into realistic activities;

## **Issue 2#: How would you express your support?**

### **Findings:**

1. The majority of the respondents claim that they would express their support by casting their votes on potential women candidates in the general election.
2. Respondents also believe that supporting women's issues in public meetings, Falekaupule assemblies and kaupule meetings is quite an effective way to promote women's participation in decision making in Tuvalu. However, it is noted by respondents that support for women's issues in Tuvalu can only be strengthened if the women and the general public are made aware of the importance of having women in Parliament as well as in all levels of decision making in Tuvalu.
3. Respondents also noted that it is important to encourage women to become more effective in their communities by taking part in decision making as well as in women's programs in the community. Respondents noted that in order for this to be achieved, it is imperative that a lot of gender awareness programs be conducted for the general public and womenfolk.
4. A small number of respondents felt that expressing support for women to be involved in Parliament would be more effective by putting in place a quota system whereby some confirmed seats for women are maintained in Parliament.

## **Issue 3#: Electoral System and Processes**

### **Findings:**

Of the 8 communities that were involved in the consultation, the majority declared that the electoral law fares well for the people of Tuvalu. This is because there are no restrictions or discrimination against women in the electoral law. The electoral law projects equal opportunity to women and men candidates to contest in the general elections. However, a small number of respondents declared that though this may be so formally, but it does not reflect the reality. Voting is still being heavily influenced by family obligations rather than voting on merit.

## **Issue 4#: What are the constraints that women face in running as candidates for the general election?**

### **Findings:**

1. The majority of respondents felt that training and providing appropriate education to women in areas such as leadership, gender, governance, democracy, civic education and women's issues would be the most empowering means to increase the number of women contesting in the general elections.

2. Respondents felt that there is a need to change the voting system from the current one to a system that would ensure that women have more opportunities to contest and win general elections.
3. Respondents also believe that women's organisations need to be strengthened so that they are able to run programmes that would encourage and empower women in the country to contest in the general elections.

## **Issue 5#: Resolutions**

### **Findings:**

1. The majority of respondents stated that culture and traditional practices that the people of Tuvalu maintain nowadays are the main hindrance to the effective participation of women in decision making positions and most important of all, in contesting general elections.
2. The multiple roles of women at home make it very difficult for women to contest the general election. Respondents felt that because of the multiple roles that women play in our Tuvaluan society, the husband may feel neglected and self degraded by having the wife working out of the home while he stays and looks after the home and the children. It is also the way of our Tuvalu society to place the woman's role only within the home so she is not burdened with decision making processes. This has contributed to women having low self-confidence.

## **7.5 Outer Island Phone Interviews**

### **Issue 1#: Should women be involved at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu and why?**

#### **Findings:**

1. The majority of respondents felt that women should be involved at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu. However a few of those who were in favour of the issue thought that, it is important to note that we need to respect our culture and as such there is a need for women to respect that culture dictates the boundaries for them in terms of their involvement and participation in the decision making processes in Tuvalu.
2. The respondents felt that women are known to be good managers in the home and as such it is important that women should be encouraged to contest in the general elections as well as at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu. Respondents felt strongly that with women working together with men in Parliament as well as in other levels of decision making in Tuvalu, the chances and possibilities of implementing development projects in Tuvalu would be highly successful. Respondents also raised the fact that there are more women than men and on top of that women, more than men, are known to persevere under difficult circumstances.

## **Issue 2#: How would you express your support?**

### **Findings:**

1. The majority felt that voting for women candidates is the best way of expressing their support for women to be involved in decision making at all levels in Tuvalu.
2. Likewise, respondents also felt that supporting women's issues as raised in public meetings as well in traditional meeting forums is a sure way to promote women's issues and concerns in Tuvalu. Respondents felt that this could only be made possible if women themselves make an effort to participate in community meetings, workshops and other national forums.

## **Issue 3#: Electoral System and Processes**

### **Findings:**

1. The majority of respondents felt that the electoral system in place in Tuvalu is perfect and easy to carry out for voters. However, a small number of respondents felt that the system does not favour women as voters as much as men. This is because women felt that their votes at most times are being influenced by the head of the family clan rather than casting their vote according to merit.
2. As candidates, the majority of respondents felt that the electoral law treats both men and women quite fairly as it does not discriminate women and men in terms of conditions provided for one to be eligible to contest the general election. Again a small number of respondents felt that the electoral system in place does not favour women contesting because women candidates do not have the financial means to compete with men in campaigning. Moreover, women candidates at most times do not have the support of the family clan and immediate families to grant them enough confidence to contest the general elections.

## **Issue 4#: What are the constraints that women face in running as candidates for the general election?**

### **Findings:**

1. The majority of respondents felt that culture and the traditional practices that we have in place are the main constraints that women face in contesting as candidates for general elections. Respondents felt that cultural and traditional roles of women in our Tuvalu society greatly influence the way Tuvalu women perceive themselves. As they are traditionally confined to the domestic environment, women tend to think of themselves with very low status compared to men. As such, the place and role of a woman in Tuvalu is clearly defined. To venture out of the domestic environment would mean challenging the norms of our Tuvalu society and this is frequently frowned upon by the elders.
2. The lack of understanding among women is also an important factor that women consider when thinking of contesting for the general election. Respondents felt that

knowledge and relevant skills are relevant assets that a woman would need to acquire to enable her have the confidence to contest for the general elections.

3. Respondents felt lack of finances is another constraint that discourages women to contest for the general elections. Respondents felt that for someone to run as a candidate, would mean that person has a lot of money or that he / she has acquired a lot of money to enable her / him to finance her / his campaigning activities. Respondents felt that since women constituted a large number of unemployed people in Tuvalu, there is very little chance that they would be successful in a general election.

### **Issue 5#: Resolutions**

1. The majority of respondents felt that it is paramount that women are provided with the appropriate training in areas such as leadership, governance, democracy and gender. Providing such training would greatly empower women and especially women with potential to be political leaders.
2. Respondents also felt that strengthening women's organisations would be an appropriate strategy to empowering women. Respondents believe that when women's organisations are strengthened, they would be in a position to run appropriate programs that aim at empowering women in their various roles in society.
3. Lastly respondents felt that it is time that Tuvalu adopts a greater stance towards increasing the participation of women in politics as well as in decision making at all levels in our society. The idea is to put in a quota for women in Parliament.

## **8. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS**

The following discussion provides an analysis of the collated results of the five methods used in the research. The views expressed are those of the authors of the report and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. The discussion will focus on the four issues that were raised in the research;

1. Support for women's involvement in decision making and in politics in Tuvalu;
2. The current effectiveness of the electoral law for women candidates in the general elections as well as for being members on public boards and committees;
3. Barriers that hinder the participation of women in politics and in decision making;
4. Ways of increasing women's involvement and participation in decision making and in politics;

The aim of this discussion is to provide the overall results of the research and cover the issues that it raised. How far the results of this research can be extrapolated is up to the reader and audience to determine. However, it must be noted that the sample of the research is fairly representative and as such, issues raised as well as recommendations put forth must be considered widely and carefully.

There is overwhelming evidence reflected in the different consultations held, that the people of Tuvalu feel that women should be involved and participate at all levels of decision making in Tuvalu, including

in politics. This result indicates quite strongly that Tuvalu is going through a transition era, as reflected in the different responses, except than for a small number of the sample. The evidence indicates a great shift in thinking by the people of Tuvalu from culture and tradition oriented ideologies to a more rights-based school of thinking towards life and the development of Tuvalu as a nation.

Based on the results of the different consultations, it is evident that the majority of the respondents believe that culture and traditional practices are the main constraints that hinder the participation of women in Tuvalu. The respondents did not elaborate and dig deeper into what constitutes the cultural norms/values and traditional practices that prevent women from taking part in decision making. What are the values and traditional roles of a Tuvaluan woman that prevent her from participating in the *Falekaupule* and Parliament? The respondents' referral to culture and traditions as the basis preventing women from advancing to the political platform was very general.

It also became apparent through the research that people have become empowered through education in different fields of life, hence their ability to critique their own cultural and traditional beliefs. There is also substantial evidence that people do know their rights and the importance of having women participate at all levels of decision making. Likewise there is evidence that respondents have a substantial understanding of commitments made by the Tuvalu government to international conventions and declarations. This reflects a good understanding among the people of what their government has committed itself to e.g. CEDAW, and the importance of fulfilling such commitments. Moreover, evidence also shows that people do understand that women's rights are guaranteed in the highest law of the land which is the Tuvalu Constitution. However, there is lack of understanding and commitment amongst the stakeholders as to how to translate these commitments into Tuvalu laws and gender policies. There is a need for deeper research into these issues.

Then why the dismal representation of women at all levels of decision making and politics in Tuvalu? Of course in reality, there have been no women in Tuvalu's Parliament except in the late 1980s and early 1990s when Tuvalu's Parliament was graced by the presence of only one female representative from the electorate island of Nanumea, Honorable Mrs. Naama Maheu Latasi. Although there have been improvements in the percentage of educated women and in women's appointment to middle to senior management levels in the Public service, in the overall picture there is still a very low representation of women in both the government and private sectors. The same situation exists on boards of both government and non governmental organisations.

With the exception of Vaitupu Island where women have the freedom to sit and participate with men in making decisions in their traditional *Falekaupule*, other islands' decision making is still dictated by cultural norms. As mentioned earlier, nonetheless, the evidence points to a shift among the people of Tuvalu. This can be construed as a result of the increase in the number of women and men getting well educated.

Other issues also need to be considered. Firstly, there is evidence that a large number of people in Tuvalu do not understand what the electoral legislation of Tuvalu provides for them as voters and as candidates. Moreover, people have very limited understanding of Tuvalu's electoral system and how the system disadvantages women not only as contestants in general elections, but also in terms of eliminating women's votes in support of women candidates.

Tuvalu currently practices the Block Vote system, according to which a voter casts his/her vote for two candidates. This means that the two candidates who score the highest are automatically categorized as winners, thereby becoming members of Parliament. The balance of votes cast on losing contestants is not counted. The majority of respondents only understand the registration and voting part of the election



legislation. There is a need for the election office to go further than just announcing winners; by showing to the electorates the percentage and proportion of voters represented by the winning candidate against the total voter population within that particular constituency.

The second reason that contributes to the dismal representation of women in politics and in decision making is the lack of confidence among women about their ability to participate as well as men in making decisions for the welfare and development of the community that they belong to. Understandably, confidence can only be gained when a person has acquired the required knowledge and skills to enable one to carry out a job successfully. A large number of respondents felt that women lack the education required to give them the confidence to contest the general elections, including the lack of knowledge of how a government system works, how Parliament works as well as its rules and regulations.

Even when women are well educated, it takes a lot of effort for women to pluck up their courage to compete with men in any decision making arena. This is because women first of all need to accept the fact that they are worthy to sit together with men and deliberate on important issues. Secondly, women need to feel comfortable by knowing that men accept this changing role of women, and most important of all, that men can play the multiple roles that women play at home. It is only when these issues are resolved and supported by men, that the chances of women having the full support of their husbands and families will be realised. Then, the chances of a woman contesting the general elections successfully would be high.

Last but not least is the issue of lack of finances to assist women with their election campaigns. The results illustrate that electoral practices such as campaigns do not provide a level playing field for women. Most women in Tuvalu are unemployed and have difficulty accessing finances to even help meet their daily basic needs. As noted by respondents, to contest the general elections means that one has to have quite a sizeable amount of money to finance a campaign.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of responses gathered from the different consultations that were held, the following measures were identified (as those commonly raised by the respondents) as means to facilitating a conducive environment to increasing women's participation and representation at all levels of decision making and in politics in Tuvalu:

1. Government, Kaupule and Non Government Organisations to provide educational opportunities for women in all development areas and especially in areas such as gender, leadership, governance, democracy, human and legal rights. This would include training in advocacy and lobbying skills as well as presentation skills;
2. The Government, through the Department of Women, to work together with women's organisations to put in place appropriate gender policies to promote and encourage their participation at all levels of decision making and in politics;
3. Government to review the current electoral system, provide advocacy and awareness programmes on various electoral systems especially those that are being used in other Pacific Island Countries.
4. Government through the Attorney General's office to research the possibility of reforming Tuvalu's electoral system – analysing the preferential, proportional and first past the post systems in relation to democracy.

5. Donors/development partners, through Government, to conduct research on quotas for women in Tuvalu's Parliament
6. Government, in collaboration with Falekaupule, to review discriminatory cultural practices that disadvantage the effective participation and representation of women at all levels of decision making;
7. Donor/development partner funding required for Government to research Tuvalu cultural values that prevent women from participating in decision making processes.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The Tuvalu social structure, its traditions and cultural was identified in the survey as the main obstacle to the advancement of women into the political arena. Although there are other factors such as the lack of: education, knowledge of parliamentary issues, self confidence, financial support and family support and the electoral system itself, culture has been the number one constraint in women's effort to compete fairly with men.

Education plays a key role in order for women to effectively participate in the decision making process and in politics. There is a need for quality women like Ms. Naama M Latasi to pave the way for women to move forward. It is up to women to participate, since the constitution and laws do not prevent women from playing a role in nation building, accessing jobs in government, and/or in Parliament.

Changing culture to suit the political needs of women would be a very challenging option to carry forward in Tuvalu. It is not an issue which is solvable overnight; hence women's participation in politics should be actively pursued by women. The Falekaupule system has provided opportunities for women to show their capabilities. It is not the changing of culture, however, its how one uses the available opportunities to be visible in eyes and ears of the chiefs, elders and heads of families. One has to use the opportunities given by culture to have an effect and inform changes to culture.

Electoral reform is a viable option given Tuvalu's experience with its current system. The current electoral system is the simplest to implement, but not necessarily a majoritarian one and does not reflect the real majority representation of voters. The electoral system should be a system that provides people with a more proportional representation of stakeholders/candidates relative to the population of voters, i.e., a more democratic electoral system.

# Appendix 1

*A. Table 11. Summary of findings from all stakeholders*

Issues	Stakeholders	Talk Back Show	Individual Questionnaires and face to face				
			Government	Business Sector	Civil Society	Community bases	Outer Islands
Issue 1 Women in decision Making	-Overwhelming support -Tuvalu pledged commitments to advancement of women -More women than men	-Women to participate -Parliament is not traditional setting	-94.6% support -5.4% only in public not in Falekaupule -Legal system is fair -more women than men should have voice in Parliament	-95.2% supports women -4.8% against due to culture -It is a right	-94% supports -women work in partnership with men -fulfil international commitments to CEDAW, etc -stereotype view towards women	-5 island communities support -3 against -Parliament vs. Falekaupule Participation	Outer Islands -majority supports
Issue 2 Express of support			-Lobbying at all levels of decision making -introduce reform electoral system -quotas -voting for women	-education -skills development -voting for women -lobby change in cultural values which discriminates	-support women's issues -vote for women -education skills develop	-vote for women -support women's issues in all levels -effective participation in communities -very few for quotas	
Issue 3 Electoral System and Processes	-Legally fair -cultural barriers during voting	-Introduce reform - quota system -individual vs. family choices	-82.3% fair electoral system -17.7% system not fair, due to culture -voting strongly influenced by family	-75.3% fair system -4.7% against -lack of knowledge	-67.5% fair system -15% against system -influenced by culture	100% fair system	- majority fair system -cultural influence

Issues	Stakeholders	Talk Back Show	Individual Questionnaires and face to face				
			Government	Business Sector	Civil Society	Community bases	Outer Islands
Issue 4 constraints to women in general elections?	-electoral system not friendly -Tuvalu culture, social status, lack of: self-confidence, education, finance, leadership skills	-Cultural barriers -lack of support, education -family vs. individual choices	-Culture the main barrier -family commitment -lack of education, self confidence, leadership skills	-Culture the main constraint -lack knowledge, leadership skills -lack of finance and family support	-Cultural barriers -lack of knowledge in Parliament Issues -lack of family support lack of finance	-lack of education in all levels -reform electoral system -empower women through women's organisation	-Culture main barrier -lack of understanding -lack of finance
Issue 5 Resolutions	-Introduce quota in electoral system -Education	-Gender equality training at all levels -voting training -individual choices	-Empowerment of women -electoral reform, allow quota -gender synthesized school curriculum -review cultural values that discriminate against women -vote for women	-Empower women through local government, education, decision making committees -quality education -leadership skills -access to information -voting for women	-Educate women in all skills -electoral reform -quotas -support women's organisations	-Culture the main barrier -education empowers women	-education in all levels -strengthened women's organisations -electoral reform-quotas

## Appendix 2

### A. Methodology

The research adopted a combination of different approaches to collect people's views in regard to the problem. The different approaches are detailed in the table below;

Methodology	Justification
1. Radio Programs	To create awareness of the public of the nature of the research and what it hopes to achieve.
2. Radio Spots	To create awareness, promote public participation in the research activities.
3. Radio Talkback Show	To encourage and seek public views on the issue of women's representation in Parliament and whether it would make a difference.
4. Stakeholders Meeting	To inform the various stakeholders of the research and what it hopes to achieve.
5. Interviews	To seek the views of those included in the sample.
6. Questionnaire	To seek the views of those included in the sample.
7. Community Consultations	To seek the views of the island communities.
8. CSO Consultation	To seek the views of the leaders of the various CSOs.

### B. Research Sample.

The sample for the research was taken from five groups of people that make up our society in Tuvalu. They involve Civil Society Organisations, the Government and the Island Communities, the individuals residing on the main island of Funafuti and a limited number of representatives from the outer islands. The sample constitutes the following;

Components	Estimated Number	Actual Number
Government	50	39
CSOs (TANGO) consultation	57	47
Corporations	25	19
Outer Islands	49	29
Island Communities	200	105
Total	381	239

### C. Analysis Tool.

The data collected was collated and synthesized together with the intention of identifying common responses to the seven questions raised in the questionnaire. A triangular approach was adopted to enable

the researcher analyse the large number of data collected. The individual responses from the Government officials, the individuals, Corporations were analysed together in the Individual Analysis Matrix while the Civil Society Organisations and Island Communities consultations were analyzed in the Group Analysis Matrix. A separate analysis matrix is allocated to the outer islands to reflect a snapshot of the views of the outer island people in relation to the issue researched. The results or findings collected from the three Analysis Matrixes were considered together to reflect the overall perceptions of those who took part in the study. It is therefore wise to be reminded that the findings and recommendations of this research be viewed only as a snapshot of what the people of Tuvalu people think regarding the issue of advancing the political representations of women in all decision making in Tuvalu.

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## Notes

1. Falekaupule means the traditional assembly in each island of Tuvalu which, subject to this Act, is composed in accordance with the aganu (custom) in each island; and Falekaupule established by Section 4 (1) of the Falekaupule Act.
2. Head of a family clan.
3. Decision-making structures vary from one island community to another. Some communities allow women to participate equally with men in the decision making process in the falekaupule meetings whilst others do not, as in the case of the Funafuti island community.

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**For more information about the research process and methodology, please contact the authors directly.**



“Women’s participation in legislative decision making 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 directs attention to issues that may otherwise be overlooked. Increased gender equality in decision making lends to better development decisions being made. This set of research reports provides a comprehensive analysis of both social and electoral barriers to women’s parliamentary representation, which we hope will assist our member countries and the region as a whole, to progress notions of participative democracy and respond to the current gross under-representation of Pacific women in national parliaments.”

*Greg Urwin  
Secretary General, Pacific Islands  
Forum Secretariat*



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