

Nauru

‘If you are someone who aspires to become a leader, you have to be a transformational leader.’

Ms Gabrissa Hartman and Ms Kay Aliklik, participants of the Women’s Practice Parliament held in the lead up to Nauru’s national elections.¹

Nauru is a small island state in Micronesia. Traditionally, Nauru is a matrilineal society where women have a strong voice at the family and community level, but patriarchal values are evident in policy and laws. Gender equality is considered a new concept.²

The country has faced significant economic challenges following a decline in phosphate mining, Nauru’s major export commodity. Alleviating some of the economic challenges, the single island is home to Australia’s Offshore Processing Centre (OPC) for asylum seekers. This has brought job opportunities and benefits for landowners, but Nauru still faces substantial economic difficulties.

There are significant health challenges in Nauru; the country has a high rate of non-communicable diseases, high incidence of sexually transmitted infections, the second highest rate of adolescent fertility in the Pacific, and inadequate sexual and reproductive health services.³ Debilitating sickness such as diabetes starts young and life expectancy is among the lowest of the Pacific island countries.⁴

Leadership and Decision Making

Social norms and perceptions of ‘appropriate’ gender roles for women and men pose an obstacle to women’s full participation in leadership and decision making. Nauru has two women members in its National Parliament, out of a total of 19.⁵ However, there has been an increase in the number of women holding senior management positions in the public sector from 17 per cent in 2013 to 25 per cent in 2016.⁶

Economic Empowerment

Since the decline of the phosphate mining industry, there are limited economic opportunities for both men and women. Most employment opportunities in Nauru are through the OPC and the public service with labour force participation rates showing a gender gap (79 per cent men and 49 per cent women).⁷ Salaries tend to be equal between men and women with most employed women working in the public service.⁸ Barriers to women’s economic opportunities include a lack of skilled employment, financial literacy and savings capacity, limited local banking and credit solutions, and increased care responsibilities.⁹ The lack of financial services makes it difficult for women who wish to become entrepreneurs. Further, the lack of reliable care options for young children also makes it difficult for women to return to work.¹⁰

Ending Violence Against Women

Violence against women is anecdotally reported to be widespread in Nauru,¹¹ with an estimated 48 per cent of women having experienced physical and/or sexual abuse in their lifetime.¹² There has been an increase in service provision including the establishment of a dedicated Domestic Violence Unit at the police headquarters, a safe house and a 24-hour domestic violence hotline.¹³ Despite this, violence often goes unreported as survivors are stigmatised and at risk of further abuse from the perpetrator.¹⁴ In such a small island speaking out about violence is extremely challenging as there is no anonymity. The Government of Nauru's National Women's Policy (2014) includes 'the elimination of all forms of violence against women' as a policy goal, providing a mandate to government agencies to address violence against women. The Child Protection Policy (2016) and the Domestic Violence and Family Protection Act (2017) are important developments in improved legal protection and services for survivors of violence. In response to these two new Acts, the Department of Home Affairs has established an 'Integrated Model for Family Violence and Child Protection'.¹⁵

Enhancing Agency

Nauru's Constitution affords women formal equality before the law. Nauru became a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2011. The National Women's Policy (2014) guides the Government's work on gender equality. In January 2016, Nauru submitted its first CEDAW compliance report outlining the current status of discrimination against women and interventions to address it. In 2016, an amendment was passed to the Crimes Act (2016) strengthening the legal, legislative and policy environment and rights for women and children in Nauru.

Key Statistics

Leadership and Decision Making

- **10.5** per cent of Nauru's National Parliament is made up of women (2 out of 19).¹⁶
- **35.6** of management and decision making positions are held by women.¹⁷

Economic Empowerment

- **49 per cent** of women participate in the labour force (includes formal and informal economy).
- **30 per cent** gender gap in the labour force participation rate (male to female).

Ending Violence Against Women

- **48 per cent** of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their partner in their lifetime.

Enhancing Agency

- Nauru became a signatory to the CEDAW in 2011 but has **not** ratified.
- **35.6 per cent** is the contraceptive prevalence rate among women aged between 15-49.

- **108** is the Gender Parity Index for secondary school enrolment (gross) in 2014 – for every 100 boys enrolled, there were 108 girls enrolled.

Note: Statistics in this section are from the [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste](#) report unless otherwise stated.

Partnership with *Pacific Women*

Through *Pacific Women*, the Australian Government will spend approximately AU\$5 million over ten years (2012-2022) on initiatives supporting gender equality and women's empowerment in Nauru. Approximately AU\$638,000 has already been spent delivering activities in-country (FY2012-2013 to FY2015-2016). More information on the partnership and nature of support is included in the [Pacific Women Nauru Country Plan Summary 2014-2016](#). Details on activities currently underway in-country with various partners is available via our [interactive map](#). The list of program partners can be found [here](#). Nauru is also supported by *Pacific Women's* regional program, details of which can be viewed on the interactive map under regional activities.

Stories of Change

1. [Pre-election women's practice parliament in Nauru](#)
2. [Nauru takes stock of its gender mainstreaming capacity](#)

Further Information

- [SPC Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments \(2015\) Nauru](#)
- [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat – 2012 Nauru Gender Profile](#)
- [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#)
- [United Nations Statistics Division, Minimum Set of Gender Indicators](#)

¹ [Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development \(2016\) Annual Progress Report 2015-2016](#)

² *Pacific Women's* Nauru Plan 2014-2016

³ [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#)

⁴ Government of Nauru (2007) Nauru Demographic and Health Survey

⁵ [Pacific Women in Politics](#)

⁶ [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#)

⁷ Government of Nauru (2011) Census Report

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ [SPC Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments \(2015\) Nauru](#)

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#)

¹² [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste](#). For the 2013 Family Health and Safety Study in Nauru, more than half of eligible women refused to be interviewed. Given a low response rate (38%) and small sample size, the findings of this study may not be representative of the entire population.

¹³ *Pacific Women's Nauru Country Plan 2017-2019 (draft)*

¹⁴ [SPC Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments \(2015\) Nauru](#)

¹⁵ Department of Home Affairs has established this model as a mechanism to coordinate the implementation of these two Acts. This has been submitted to Cabinet but the status is unclear as at July 2017.

¹⁶ [Pacific Women in Politics](#) as at May 2017

¹⁷ Managerial positions include politicians, senior government officials, and corporate and general managers in the public and private sector.