

Tonga

'We believe that in collaborating with each other, putting our resources, efforts and strengths together, we can achieve much with regard to women, because after all, we are working towards the same goal.'

Ms Tupou'ahau Fakakovikaetau, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the Women's Affairs Division, Tonga.¹

Tonga is a Pacific Island nation that comprises 176 islands, 36 of which are inhabited. It is governed by a constitutional monarchy with approximately 70 per cent of Tonga's population residing on the main island of Tongatapu. Tonga's economic structure revolves around five main sectors - agriculture, trade, public administration, tourism and finance. Tonga ranks 101 out of 188 countries included in the Human Development Index.²

Leadership and Decision Making

Tonga underwent democratic transition in December 2010. While no women were elected during the 2010 general elections, the King appointed two members to the Legislative Assembly – one of whom was a woman. Tonga held its second general elections under the new electoral system in 2014, with 106 candidates, 16 of whom were women. While no women were elected in the 2014 elections, a seat in the Legislative Assembly was vacated in 2016, following which Tonga's only woman member of Parliament was elected in a by-election.³

Despite this, Tongan women hold 30 per cent of management and decision making positions in the public and private sector.⁴ These managerial positions include politicians, senior government officials, and corporate and general managers in the public and private sector. In 2016, women held 15 per cent of seats on State Owned Boards – a decrease of five per cent from 2012.⁵

Economic Empowerment

At 47.9 per cent,⁶ Tongan women are represented better than their counterparts in other Pacific Island Countries when it comes to participation in the non-agricultural sector. The labour force participation rate (in both the formal and informal economy) for women in Tonga is 42 per cent, compared to 63 per cent for men.⁷ There is gender parity in bank account ownership at 41 per cent for both women and men.⁸

The Constitution of Tonga and the traditional principles of inheritance through the legitimate male lineage guarantee land rights to men, and inheritance passes through the male heirs. Women are excluded from land holding unless there is no male in the lineage, and even then, they only have occupancy rights.⁹ Lease land is difficult to access, which restricts women's ability to act as economic agents in their own right.¹⁰

Ending Violence Against Women

A 2009 national violence against women prevalence study in Tonga found that 40 per cent of ever partnered women reported having experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. More than half of the women who experienced physical violence by a partner reported that their children had witnessed the violence at least once.¹¹ Tonga's Family Protection Act (FPA) came into effect in 2014. While implementation is underway, further training is required for the general public, health care providers and judicial agencies on appropriate implementation of the FPA.¹²

Enhancing Agency

Tonga is one of six countries globally that has not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.¹³ However, through its national Gender and Development (GAD) Policy, adopted in 2001 and reviewed in 2014, Tonga has pursued national planning measures in support of women's empowerment. The GAD Policy advocates raising awareness on gender equality through the school curriculum as a way of overcoming negative stereotypes. The Policy also seeks to address the disparity between women and men in education, employment and decision making.

Key Statistics

Leadership and Decision Making

- **3.8 per cent** of the Tongan Legislative Assembly is made up of women (1 out of 27 seats).¹⁴
- **30 per cent** of management and decision making positions are held by women.¹⁵

Economic Empowerment

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

Ending Violence Against Women

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

Enhancing Agency

- Tonga has **not** signed or ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- **34.1 per cent** is the contraceptive prevalence rate of women aged between 15-49.
- **104** is the Gender Parity Index for secondary school enrolment (gross) in 2013 - for every 100 boys enrolled, there were 104 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\$10.1 million over ten years (2012-2022) on initiatives supporting gender equality and women's empowerment in Tonga. Approximately AU\$780,000 has 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 Tonga Country Plan Summary 2014-2017](#) valued at AU\$2.6 million. 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](#). Tonga 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. [Tonga targets 2025 for gender equality](#) (p.74)
2. [Thinking and working politically following a set back](#)

Further Information

- [SPC Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments \(2012\) Tonga](#)
- [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat – 2012 Tonga 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 \(2015\) First Progress Report 2012-2015](#)

² [United Nations. Human Development Indicators 2015](#)

³ [Pacific Women in Politics](#)

⁴ [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste](#)

⁵ [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#)

⁶ [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste](#)

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ [Grinder, J. \(2016\). The gender gaps in access to and usage of formal financial instruments: Evidence from demand-side surveys in five countries. Pacific Financial Inclusion Program.](#)

⁹ [SPC Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments \(2012\) Tonga](#)

¹⁰ [International Finance Corporation \(. 2010\). Tonga: Gender and Investment Climate Assessment.](#)

¹¹ [Ma'a Fafine mo e Famili. 2012. National Study on Domestic Violence Against Women in Tonga \(2009\).](#)

¹² [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#)

¹³ [Asian Development Bank \(2016\) Gender Statistics: The Pacific and Timor Leste](#)

¹⁴ [Pacific Women in Politics](#) as at May 2017.

¹⁵ Managerial positions include politicians, senior government officials, and corporate and general managers in the public and private sector.