

Tuvalu

'I really wanted to become a member of the Kaupule because many issues that concern us as women are often not discussed or not given priority. Now, I can bring in concerns on health care services and education for our children. For example, I raised the issue of a teacher that used corporal punishment to discipline our children although this is not allowed.'

Ms Semolina Faiva Tavita, the second woman on Nukulaelae Atoll in Tuvalu to be elected to the Kaupule (implementing arm of the local government).¹

Tuvalu is a group of nine small islands and atolls in the western Pacific. The economy is constrained by its remoteness and lack of access to markets, and although independent it still relies heavily on aid from Australia, New Zealand, the European Union, Japan, Taiwan and the Republic of China.

Tuvalu is a patriarchal society where men inherit land. Land will only be passed to a daughter if there are no sons, she is the only child, or the only surviving child. Historically, daughters were expected to move into the husband's family when they married and their children included in their father's clan with access to his land.² Gender equality is considered a relatively new concept. One of the challenges in raising awareness on gender issues in Tuvalu is the limited number of words in the Tuvaluan vocabulary and the difficulties this creates in explaining 'foreign' concepts.³

Leadership and Decision Making

Since independence, only three women have been elected to the National Parliament. In the most recent elections in 2015, only three of the 29 candidates who stood were women. One woman won her seat and is currently the only woman in a 15-member Parliament.⁴

Despite the relative gender balance within the public service, men still dominate senior positions. There are currently 41 senior positions in the central Government, including permanent secretaries, senior assistants, assistant secretaries and directors. From 2009 to 2013, women occupied only 22 per cent of these positions.⁵ The present composition of the public service shows a positive trend of 47 per cent of women in senior positions across all levels, however, only 32 per cent of women hold positions in the highest two levels of senior management. There has been progress for women's representation in the Foreign Service with Her Excellency Limasene Teatu appointed as the first Tuvaluan woman ambassador. She is Tuvalu's Ambassador to Taiwan.

The inclusion of women in key decision making bodies, including the Parliament, is an outcome in Tuvalu's National Gender Policy and the National Strategic Plan.⁶

Economic Empowerment

Tuvalu is predominantly a subsistence economy. Women struggle economically as the cultural norm is to undertake domestic responsibilities only.⁷ Financial security is an issue as women lack ownership and control over land and assets. Family homes are usually built on property owned by men.⁸ Women in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in outer islands face challenges due to transportation

delays and the handling and packaging of handicrafts. There is a need for more business and financial literacy, and to work closely with banks and the private sector to deliver small business development programs for women.⁹

Ending Violence Against Women

Violence against women in Tuvalu often remains unreported. Around 40 per cent of women will experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.¹⁰ However, there is a ‘culture of silence’, with women being raised to accept, tolerate and even rationalise domestic violence. The criminalisation of domestic violence in 2014 through the Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act is expected to encourage women to report cases, and to facilitate access to justice for women.

Enhancing Agency

Although Tuvalu has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, several laws still discriminate against women, such as laws related to inheritance of land, adoption of children, marriage, custody of children and national and local level governance arrangements. There have been calls for comprehensive legal reform to ensure equality under the law and full alignment with international human rights standards.¹¹

Key Statistics

Leadership and Decision Making

- **6.7 per cent** of Tuvalu’s National Parliament is made up of women (1 out of 15 members).
- **6.2 per cent** of local government (known as *Kaupule*) is made up of women (3 out of 48). Two of the three women are Presidents (highest position) of the *Kaupule* for the outer islands/atolls of Niutao and Nukulaelae.

Economic Empowerment

- **51 per cent** of women participate in the labour force (includes formal and informal economy).
- **17 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 in their lifetime.¹²

Enhancing Agency

- Tuvalu has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- **30.5 per cent** is the contraceptive prevalence rate of women aged between 15–49.
- **130** is the Gender Parity Index for secondary school enrolment (gross) in 2015 - for every 100 boys enrolled, there were 130 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\$1.8 million over ten years (2012-2022) on initiatives supporting gender equality and women's empowerment in Tuvalu. Approximately AU\$36,000 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 Tuvalu Country Plan Summary 2015-2018](#) valued at AU\$1.8 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](#). Tuvalu 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. [Progressing gender equality in Tuvalu](#)
2. [Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships lead to action on diabetes epidemic](#)

Further Information

- [Tuvalu National Gender Policy](#)
- [SPC Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments \(2013\) Tuvalu](#)
- [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat - 2012 Tuvalu 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 Tuvalu Report (2011) 3rd and 4th Periodic report to the United Nations on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Government of Tuvalu.

³ *Pacific Women's* Tuvalu Country Plan 2015-2018

⁴ [Pacific Women in Politics](#)

⁵ [SPC Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments \(2013\) Tuvalu](#)

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

⁷ [SPC Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments \(2013\) Tuvalu](#)

⁸ [Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat \(2016\) Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration Trend Assessment Report 2012-2016](#)

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ [SPC Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments \(2013\) Tuvalu](#)

¹¹ *Pacific Women's Tuvalu Country Plan 2015-2018*

¹² [SPC Stocktake of the Gender Mainstreaming Capacity of Pacific Island Governments \(2013\) Tuvalu](#)