

# Women's Leadership Stories - Cook Islands

Stories of inspiration from  
women in local government



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# Introduction

Equality in local government makes good sense. Local governments whose composition reflects the diversity of the community have an enhanced understanding of the different needs, access to a wider range of knowledge and skills, and encourages creativity which in turn leads to better service delivery and prosperity for the whole community. That is why out of a wide range of words identified during women in local government networking events across the Pacific region the words 'Diversity, Creativity, Prosperity' have stood out as the most fitting to describe the work and goals of women in local government now and in the coming years.

Despite the existence of affirmative action measures at the sub-national level in almost all Pacific island countries (a little known fact), women's political representation at this level continues to remain significantly low. Nevertheless, regional trends indicate that women's political representation at the sub-national level is gradually increasing and in most cases is higher than at the national level. Across the local government workforce, women's representation in senior management positions is also low. Although these women have contributed an enormous amount to the growth of the sector and their communities, anecdotal evidence suggests there are still significant social, economic and cultural barriers at all levels in the sector that will be difficult to overcome alone.

In response, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) Pacific and International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) have been working together since 2008 to integrate gender equality commitments into local government and enhance the visibility, value and level of support for women employed, elected and involved in local government and help add to their numbers. This work aims to:

- encourage the participation of women in leadership roles in local government
- encourage councils to engender workplace policies, practices and service delivery
- establish women in local government networks and coalitions with women's civil society organisations

## Karibaiti Taoaba

Regional Director, CLGF Pacific

# Foreword

## Kia Orana

Our women's stories are exciting stories. These stories have been an important fellowship and experience for our women. They all thought that their story was not worthy to be shared. Yet those that agreed to be interviewed and recorded in this publication have opened their private life and home for the world to understand and learn what our women and their families in the Pa Enuā feel, live, and hold important.

In 2010, the Cook Islands National Council of Women (CINCW) in partnership with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) Pacific set down an ambitious program to begin to work with our women entering decision making positions in the Pa Enuā (Island) Governments. We decided to take a step back from the national level. The reason was being the numbers and opportunity for encouraging our women in the Pa Enuā to take up leadership challenges. There are over 50 seats in local councils throughout the country.

The key aims of the Akateretere Anga Tau O Te Pa Enuā (meaning leadership in the Islands) Program is to:

- Establish island women in local government networks and coalitions to help drive gender equality goals
- Provide mentoring and capacity development opportunities for women candidates in the lead up to the 2014 local government elections
- Encourage Pa Enuā Governments to engender workplace policies, practices and service delivery

Pāti I te 50 nooanga I roto I te au konitara enua, e toru vaine me kore e 6% rai vaine I roto I te akateretereanga o te pa enua.

There are over 50 Island Council seats throughout our islands, but the numbers and percent of women in these seats is only 6%.

E numero maromaroa teia, no te mea kua pupu vaa to tatou kavamani ki teia nei ao e ka tauta pakari tatou kia riro mei te 30% vaine ki runga I te au ngai akateretereanga e te angaanga. (MDG Goal 3).

This is a sad number because our Government has committed globally to a 30% women in leadership positions in local council and national parliament (MDG Goal 3).

E rua rai mataiti toe kua tae tatou ki te tuataua akava ia tatou no teia MDG Goal 3 (koia te vaine e akateretere nei mei te 30%). E e rua mataiti toe kua tae tatou ki te rimangauru anga mataiti kua riro tatou e na tatou rai arataki.

It will be just under two years before we have to report back on the Millenium Development Goal 3, and also in less than 2 years we will have reached 50 years of self-government.

E tika te kake nei te numero vaine I roto I te kavamani, ina e mea tau rai tei reira. Akapeea I reira I roto I te au ngai akateretereanga (konitara, paramani) eaa ta tatou e rave nei kia akamata to tatou au tamariki tamaine mapu I te I tae atu I teia takainga?

Yes it is true that the numbers of our women throughout management roles in Government has improved, but this would have happened without supportive policies anyway as women have worked hard to be able to compete with male executive for these positions. But what about the leadership positions in Parliament and Local Council government? What are we doing to support our young women to make a confident step in this direction?

Tena te akaarianga o te akateretereanga tau, kia riro te tane e te vaine I te angaanga kapiti I runga I te kaingakai tuku anga tika. Me akapera I toku manako ka kite tatou I te ririnui o to tatou baseleia I te neke pu anga. Kare au manako e te tarevake nei au, no te mea kua kite au I te tu paruparu o te tuku anga tika e te akamana anga ture I toku tuatau I roto I te are paramani.

There are many important examples of why it is important for our women and men to work together on the decision making tables of our islands. I believe if we achieve this, then our people will see the strength of leadership and progress. I don't believe my vision is incorrect, because I have been in Parliament once and have seen the weaknesses when there haven't been enough women to help shift perceptions and strengthen decision making processes.

Tena te apii anga o te aronga akaaka (me tatau tatou I roto I te evangelia tapu na Mataio) E ao to tei akaaka te ngakau....no ratou te baseleia o te ao.

There is a lesson about the humble people (if we read in Matthews gospel – 'blessed are the humble, they shall inherit the kingdom of God')

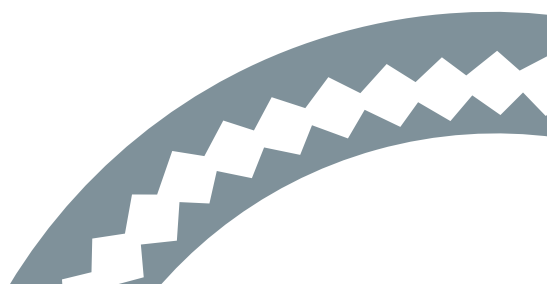
Te Atua te aroa no tatou. Kia orana.



### Vaine Wichman

Maine Akatere Au/President

Konitara Vaine Tini o te Kuki Airani/Cook Islands National Council of Women



# Messages of solidarity

Increasing women's inclusion in decision making structures and local government generates new information, ideas and priorities to inform a community or nation's future development. This booklet takes us on a journey of change and challenge with women who identify as grandmothers, mothers, sisters and daughters. We are struck by the hard work and limited resources that each woman faces. Whether it is organisation building and management, peace dialogues, standing in local elections, investing in business or education – we gain a sense of courage and determination from these women to drive change for themselves and their communities. I congratulate the team at the Commonwealth Local Government Forum for capturing the breadth and depth of the lives of women in our region. This work makes a valuable contribution to building local democracy and understanding of women's issues by raising women's voices. IWDA joins our friends and neighbours in supporting the rise of women to ensure equal representation at all levels of society.

## Joanna Hayter

Chief Executive Officer, International Women's Development Agency

The participation of women in all forms of decision making particularly at the local, divisional and provincial level, is a pre-requisite for sustainable peace and development. This has been an important focus of femLINKPACIFIC's work to implement UN Security Council resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) in Fiji and with our Pacific partners. This commitment has been enhanced through the opportunity to produce and share the stories of a number of the women featured in this publication through our own community media productions since 2000, and I look forward to a continued collaboration as we collectively demonstrate that the women across the Pacific region have the wisdom and expertise and the right to indeed share in decision making for sustainable peace and development.

## Sharon Baghwan Rolls

Executive Director, FemLINKPACIFIC

Participation in local government is an extremely effective way for women to share in decision making processes about critically important community needs such as basic service delivery, community infrastructure, health care facilities, transportation and local economic development. As the level of government closest to the community, local government is also best placed to enable greater interaction with the daily lives of women in the home, in the marketplace, and in community groups. Now is the time for a stronger focus on what women in communities across the Pacific can contribute to the democratic process. I hope that the stories contained in this booklet will provide readers with a new perspective on why women are important for local government as well as inspire other women to pursue their potential and right to be involved in local government.

## Megan Praeger

Regional Program Coordinator, CLGF Pacific

# About the WiLG Network

Women's networks and coalitions in the Pacific play a very important role in promoting awareness of gender issues and encouraging a sense of support and camaraderie amongst women at all levels. Preliminary research has found that women in local government are often outside the sphere of existing women's networks and have limited access to capacity building and knowledge sharing opportunities. Increasing the levels of exchange and support for women in local government, in particular those seeking leadership positions, to ensure their visibility and credibility, require the cultivation of a dedicated network.

The Pacific WiLG Network is intended to bring together local government employees, councillors and other women and men eager to discuss new ideas across the local government sector. The network is an informal think-tank committed to promoting gender equality, enhancing local governance and empowering communities that have the needs of women, men, girls and boys at heart.

The primary purpose of the network is to:

- Raise awareness of the contributions and achievements of women in local government
- Promote strategies to accelerate the advancement of women in decision-making positions
- Provide professional development opportunities for women in local government at all levels
- Provide networking opportunities nationally, regionally and internationally
- Promote best council practices in engendering workplace policies, practices and service delivery



# Leaders for Women in Local Government

**Rongomatane Ada Ariki (Nicholls)**

ARIKI OF ATIU ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

**Piri Touna**

ATIU ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

**Poroa Arokapiti**

MANGAIA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

**Inangaro Taia**

MITIARO ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

**Tohoa Tuteru**

RAKAHANGA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

**Tuerei Taimai**

RAROTONGA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

**Josephine Lockington**

AITUTAKI ISLAND

**Taputukura Mariri**

MAUKE ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

**Tepou Meri (Matelau) Rasmussen Ford**

OMOKA VILLAGE, TONGAREVA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



# Rongomatane Ada Ariki (Nicholls)

## ARIKI OF ATIU ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“ I was invested as the Ariki (Paramount Chief) of Atiu Island: one of three Ariki on the island. I was only 24 years old. I would ask my aunties and uncles for advice on the role of the Ariki. ”

MY DAD COMES FROM ATIU AND MY MUM COMES FROM RAROTONGA. THEY HAD SIX CHILDREN: FOUR GIRLS AND TWO BOYS. I'M THE ELDEST CHILD. I WAS BORN IN 1948. I WENT TO PRIMARY SCHOOL IN ATIU.

From the age of six, I started going to meetings with the villagers and chiefs on Atiu. I went with my parents. I just sat there and listened because at that age I didn't have a say. Sometimes I got bored and ran away to play with the other kids. Usually, I followed my parents and saw what they were doing. Back in those days, my brothers and sisters weren't that interested in attending all the meetings.

I was in the Girl Guides and went to Sunday School. I went to college on Rarotonga. In 1966, I was chosen to be the Green Queen (I represented Nga Pu Toru<sup>1</sup>, and green is our Atiu colour in sports) to raise money for the Pacific Games in Samoa, to be able to send our athletes. When I left school, I became a shop assistant and then. I applied to work in the Philatelic Bureau where I worked until 1978. After that, I joined the Government in the treasury department. I was a clerk there.

During this time, I was still young but was attending the Are Ariki<sup>2</sup> because my matakeinanga<sup>3</sup> had already decided that I was to succeed my dad on the title. My dad had passed away in 1964. So in 1966 I attended my first House of Ariki meeting and was a non-voting member in that house in those days.

I recall the first few sittings in the Are Ariki, I did feel a bit scared because I was sitting among all these older and wise Ariki. But I tried my best and my supporters and my uncles and aunties who were in my matakeinanga really supported me as I developed more confidence to take my place

Also back then, because I was still a young woman, of course my thinking was on what young people think of in that time, I wanted to enjoy my youth with my friends and our social life in Rarotonga. But I knew even before my dad passed on I would be approached to take this title.

When dad was still alive he had shared with my mum that I would be taking the title. She was concerned as she said 'kare au e inangaro tetai tamariki kia mate'(I don't want any of my children to die)<sup>4</sup>. My dad convinced her that none of us would

When my dad passed, my mum looked after the title in Atiu while I was in Rarotonga at Tereora College and during my working years.

He held it in 1956 and by 1964 he passed on, so he was not long on the title.

In 1972, I was invested as the Ariki (Paramount Chief) of Atiu Island: one of three Ariki on the island. I was only 24 years old. At the beginning, I would ask my Uncles and Aunties for advice on the role of the Ariki. Why I did this was because I wanted to be sure of what was expected of me as a young Ariki. My uncles and aunties taught me a lot of the background knowledge of my tribe in relations to our genealogy, our lands and our values for presiding over our people. Also back then after attending some of the first House of Ariki

1 TRADITIONAL NAME FOR THE THREE ISLANDS OF ATIU, MAUKE AND MITIARO.

2 HOUSE OF CHIEFS.

3 MY TRIBE.

4 IN ATIU CUSTOM, THE POSITION OF ARIKI MUST BE BESTOWED ON THE RIGH PERSON. IF THE PERSON IS NOT THE RIGHT ONE, PAST EXPERIENCE HAS ADVISED THAT THAT PERSON DIES YOUNG OR EARLY. THE ISLAND BELIEVES THIS IS BECAUSE THE PERSON CHOSEN TO THE TITLE WAS NOT THE CORRECT ONE.



meetings in Rarotonga, I would come back and talk to my elders and share the decisions made in the House with them to get their feedback and to ensure that my representation and decision making was along the lines of our island and my status as Ariki.

I still recall the day of my investiture...kare a roto iaku (*there was nothing inside me*), I was scared. In our custom, there are some ancient practises and chants that have to be observed.

We went into the church and then out to the marae o ngati te akatauirā (*the sacred court of the tribe of Akatauirā*), I was in fear.

I remember the marae ceremony....my fear showed .I couldn't breath properly...then the kingmaker (the person that presides over the investiture) began the chant. In our custom if his chant freezes at any point it is a sign that the breathe of the person to be invested will also be stopped or shortened. This is why I was feeling the significance of the situation, afraid for my life. Anyway he started and went clearly through his chant right to the end. And I cried all the way through it. Around me all my elder relatives were quiet, the old women cried quietly (probably some praying) ...and then the karakia (*chant*) ended without any stop. And I breathed at last after all that.

That is why in Nga Pu Toru (*the three Heads*) the title is given with a lot of discussion and significance and is not to be taken lightly.

Being the Ariki involves a lot of hard work and sacrifice of personal time to do the work and support the wishes and plans of your tribe and people. I have to go to lots of community meetings on Atiu. My role is to take my people's concerns to the Island Council and to represent them there. I am a member of the Island Council but I do not have a vote. I also attend lots of church meetings. Some friends have commented on my tireless role supporting the church and I have told them 'well it was my ancestors that mou mai I te evangelia (*held the Gospel*). The role of the Ariki is unpaid, I work because of my love of the people.

In 1975, I moved to Aitutaki with my fiancé – Ernest. I worked for the government there. We got married in 1978. We have two children: a boy and a girl. In a way this time, I would say I put on hold my title responsibilities, and an uncle looked after my chiefly responsibilities on Atiu.

We moved to Atiu at the people's request in 1984 with our son who was 7 years old. Since then I have always lived on Atiu. I worked for the Island Government in the treasury department while my husband was the Senior Public Health Officer in those days. I joined the National Council of Women in 1984.

In 1985, I had my daughter and that was another job. During these years I continued to work steadily to support island plans, to keep peace and growth activities on the island in between raising and caring for my family and attending to title obligations.



I became President of the House of Ariki, a position I held from 2007 until 2009. In the House of Ariki, during this term I was able to support a national program to repopulate the Kura<sup>5</sup> bird back to Nga Pu Toru. Apparently the environment information advises that the Kura was already living in our islands, but for some reason had left and working with the island of Rimatarara in French Polynesia I oversaw the final discussions and agreements for the transferring of the kura. This program had been in the discussion and pipelines since 2000, and I was happy that during my term it came to a close with the releasing of 27 kura into our Atiu forests to repopulate the island. It took a bit of time but it is satisfying for our people that during our time we have been able to close this transfer of kura program to our island for the sake of our future generations to enjoy and look after this resource. The island of Atiu is also known as Enuamanu<sup>6</sup>.

Initially the people of Rimatarara did not want the birds to be transferred because in their thinking the birds once introduced into a different environment might die. But now with the results back to them showing a growth in numbers they are very happy like us with the outcome of this project.

During my term as President of the Are Ariki I presided over the House honouring the passing of our Statesman Tom Davis, the 40th celebration of the existence of our Are Ariki, and also during my term the people were able to witness the ancient art of fire walking as introduced by the Are Ariki during the 40th anniversary celebration.

The first time fire walking was seen in the Cooks was in 1993 when the Pacific Arts Festival was held in Rarotonga. But during my term the members of the Are Ariki and visiting Ariki took part in the fire walking event which was historic.

I walked over the fire. I never burnt. At first I was a bit scared but when I saw the Tahitian going over it before me even with the rocks red—hot, I went.

After 2009 I decided to rest from being House of Ariki President and focussed back on my island Atiu affairs.

In 2011 I was nominated to be Patron of CINCW. I took up this challenge and continue to oversee the affairs of all our women in the Cook Islands and their families, through Council activities and representation.

This position allows me to support through my chiefly status the CINCW activities.

Going forward, my advice to our young women is 'Akamaroiroi e taku au tamariki tamaine tamaroa, kia rauka I ta ratou e anoano nei kia meitaki to ratou oraanga' *keep going forward, keep strong, keep working my women and men, so that you will get what you are aiming for to improve and make your lives better.*

5 A GREEN AND RED AND YELLOW SMALL BIRD THAT USED TO INHABIT ATIU IN THE EARLY YEARS.

6 THE ISLAND OF THE BIRDS.



# Piri Touna

ATIU ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“During my time on the Council I was the only elected woman during that period. They didn't want to listen to me because I was a woman. But it was good to be part of the decision making.”

**THE STORY OF MY LIFE IS A HUMBLE ONE. WE ARE 12 PEOPLE IN MY FAMILY AND I AM THE SEVENTH CHILD OF EIGHT GIRLS AND FOUR BOYS. OUR FAMILY WAS A HARD WORKING FAMILY IN AGRICULTURE. MY DAD WAS AN AGRICULTURE OFFICER IN ATIU. HE WAS ATIUAN AND MY MUM WAS HALF ATIUAN AND HALF RAROTONGAN.**

With all the children from our extended family we were 20 people at home. Luckily we had a big home and my father worked hard to support this big family. I'm sad to say that none of us 12 children got to High School because we spent so much of our time working and planting to support us.

When I was at school that was the happiest time for me. I didn't want to stay home. When I was 16 years old they begged me to stay home but I kept going, repeating school. I couldn't come to Rarotonga to finish school. I had to stay.

When I left school at 18 years old, I started my youth life. I enjoyed sports just to get out of the house. I think I'm short from carrying a lot of heavy loads. In sport, I was a tennis champion and into netball and running. I was the tennis champion for five years in a row on Atiu. I was also very active in church youth activities and the Girls Guides.

I was 32 years old when I met my husband. He was working at the forestry department on the island. We stayed on Atiu and we have six children. I'm a mother and I work hard at planting. I used to attend to our old people to help them clean their homes as I felt sorry for them. I was elected as a welfare committee looking after young and old people in my village. I also started working with the National Women's Committee. During these times, I started coming to workshops on Rarotonga on welfare and women's issues.

In 1989, I was the secretary for the National Women's Committee of Atiu. I was in that role for five years. When we had our second child, I stepped down to look after them. When I had children, I became more humble. Things became calmer at home and I disciplined my kids too. I continued on my journey as a church member, I was strong in my faith. Having my family made me want to learn more about the Bible. I joined the Assembly of God Church where I am now an elder. That has helped me to find my goal. I started to change my attitudes, to become very strong supporting young women in their leadership. I am also a leader at the hospital committee, the school committee, a village leader and in the sports association.

That's when I started to join the Island Council election campaign. I stood in 2001. In 2001, I was elected onto the Island Council in a by-election for one year. In 2002, I was re-elected by my village. In 2004, I didn't stand again. It was too much work, there were too many meetings. I had to take care of my family, my crafts and my planting too. In 2007, I decided to join the campaign again after my family convinced me to do so but I wasn't elected that time.

During my time in Council that was another hard working time. I had to do my duty in my village. Lots of community work in the village, cleaning roads and looking after beautification at village level. On the Council I was the only elected woman in that period. They didn't want to listen to me because I was a woman. But it was good to be part of the decision making.

Today, I am the Government Representative on the Island. I am thinking of standing again this coming election.

# Poroa Arokapiti

## MANGAIA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“ Today we see that we should share our leadership and deciding our future. But it is not like the man can't do the work, or that the women can't do the work, but that if they join and share their strengths, the work goes ahead more steadily. ”

I WAS BORN ON THE ISLAND OF MANGAIA IN 1961. I HAVE THREE SISTERS AND ONE BROTHER. OUR LIFE IN THOSE DAYS REVOLVED AROUND HELPING OUR PARENTS AND FAMILY. I MISS MY PARENTS; THEY HAVE BOTH PASSED AWAY. THEY FED ME, LOOKED AFTER ME, AND RAISED ME. ALL THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE THEY PASSED ON TO ME, HAS BECOME IMPORTANT ASSETS FOR LIFE FOR ME. THERE ARE SOME THINGS THEY TAUGHT ME I NEVER MANAGED TO LEARN ALL OF THEM. FOR INSTANCE TODAY, THERE ARE SOME THINGS I WISH TO DO, BUT BECAUSE DAD IS NOT AROUND, I MISS HIM. LIKE HIS BUILDING AND FIXING MACHINE SKILLS, TODAY.

For mum, she was always there in good times and bad. She had a very humble way. When we went to school the food was ready, when we come back from school the food is ready. When I used to go fishing over the years, she never failed to wake in the night when I came back from fishing to clean the fish, and cook it.

Sometimes I feel her around me. For instance today when we waste leftover food I think of her. She never wasted anything, she kept even the leftover for use later,

The times when we kids get sick, she wakes in the night, all night and massages us.

I think of the times when they had their bad times, it was usually during when my dad was drinking. We were little kids then. Sometimes coming back from his session, maybe he hadn't finished his anger, he would pick on mum, and sometimes hit her.

My mum though she was a woman that always tried to protect and keep us safe.

During my time at school, there were more than 500 school children on Mangaia. Life in school was good. When I was 15 years old, I was initially selected to go to the Solomon Islands to learn to become a mechanic.

The ways of the youth got in the way. A lady friend got pregnant, and because she was scared that I might not come back was reported to the authorities at the time, and so couldn't go to the Solomon. She had asked the authorities that I must stay behind and feed her and baby. Dad was not happy because it had gotten out of hand and had gone to the authorities. He got involved and committed to looking after the unborn child when it would be born. His thinking was because I was selected from throughout the Cook Islands I shouldn't be penalised this much and as a result lose this opportunity.

So I missed going to Solomon. During that same time the meatworks company at Ocean Beach Invercargill New Zealand advertised throughout the Cook Islands for workers to work there. My parents agreed for me to go and I left for New Zealand in 20 December 1977. In New Zealand, I worked in an abattoir. I used to work for six or seven months at a time and then come home for a few months to Mangaia. I took money back each time for my family. This went on until 1990 when the abattoir closed down. There were 5 of us from Mangaia of a total of 20 Cook Islanders. I was the youngest.

When I was in NZ I got involved in many communities the maori, the papaa, the Japanese, the Iranians to name a few. I joined the cultural practises and kapahaka of the Whanake Rangataua tribe. In the papa'a clubs I joined in the sports of rugby, cricket, darts, touch rugby, tennis, volleyball and karate. Among the Japanese students I learnt

alongside them fixing the machines at the abattoir. How I got involved with Iran and Iraq friends was because at Ocean Beach they stunned the sheep ready for processing. So these friends would come for a certain time in a season prepare their sheep for the processing lines according to the ways of their religion – halal. This was where I saw how respectful these people were to the way they slaughtered the sheep. They would be in a closed building but facing the east, and before cutting the neck they would say halal. Their culture requires their animals to be slaughtered to die slowly. I was more or less beside them after the event, helping to shackle and hoist the sheep on the chain of the processing line.

Looking back today, I find that experience of mixing and learning other cultures and respecting other people's ways sometimes makes me see issues in the Cook Islands that maybe ahead of my people's time. For example I can sit in a meeting and hear the main issue to be discussed and I already have a sense of the broader picture but for me it's a challenge to bring the thinking of my people with the broader picture.

My meatwork wages helped to build my family's life in Mangaia. I bought a truck, and small machines for my dad and mum to use. When he had all the things he wanted then I decided to buy myself a bike. I would send money home regularly.

However in this time, the meatworks industry was changing. Fletcher a big company in NZ began to buy out most the meatworks in the South Island and some in the North Island. The consolidating of the meat industry showed up inefficiencies and so there was a bit of downsizing that happened. In that time it was done by a marble draw, in other words by the luck of the draw. Ocean Beach of course was not lucky in the draw in 1990, most of the departments closed and only the blast freezing of Ocean Beach got consolidated under the alliance. We were given opportunities to put our name on the board to be considered for transfers to the other sites where the slaughter operations had moved. But when I looked on

the board there were many names before me, it may have taken a long time waiting for me before getting a confirmed transfer. So I decided to come home.

So 1991 I moved back to live in Mangaia. I stayed with my parents for two years. I spent a lot of time fishing and getting involved with sports on the island.

In 1992 I was asked by a senior police officer on the island to join the police force. The Police Commissioner at the time was Tepure Tapaitau. My application had been late but because the police leaders must have seen something in me, they made me the 11th recruit out of what was supposed to be a group of ten. Somehow I got in without any papers compared to the other ten officers during our training in the Inatio Akaruru Academy. When I got to Rarotonga, I had to look for some old school papers to help my entry into the police academy but there were no records at the Ministry of Education. So Mrs Karotaua at the Education gave me an IQ test and told me that a 40% pass is a great pass. I managed to get 65%. This was the paper that I took to police leaders to decide my fate. I was told later that three of the four police leaders refused my entry on the grounds that I had no education achievements like the other recruits. The only police leader that supported me gave his personal guarantee to the others that I would make the grades and top the class in my time and would go on to become a great police leader among them.

My inspector encouraged me to study to help my work. The Monash lecturers came to Rarotonga to deliver the course to us. During this time the Government budget was playing up and all of a sudden the next term they couldn't afford to bring the Professors to complete the last four units of the course. So bad luck no Diploma. But I took up studies and got my Certificate in Law from the University of the South Pacific through distance education.





Two tutors for Monash were really supportive of me in that time. They believed that my diverse life experiences would make a good police officer. At first, I didn't believe them. I had already done my frontline experience and was transferred to the Criminal Prosecution Service preparing cases for court and then I became a Criminal Investigator looking into the hard cases like rape and murder. Ultimately when I had completed all these areas of policing I would be posted back to Mangaia to take over the Station. But a police colleague from my island went back before me and so I stayed on in Rarotonga building my experience in the police force.

I have had the opportunity to study amongst senior police officers while still a probationary constable in a very technical area of scene of crime officers training (finger prints). The trainers that came to deliver this training zeroed me out from the rest of my superiors for the vast experience I had before joining the police.

In 1996 I was posted back to Mangaia to cover the police officer while he was offshore. While I was at home, I realised my Mum wasn't well. I applied to join the Mangaia force but HQ wouldn't let me. Eventually I resigned to take care of my Mum and nephews on Mangaia.

In 1996, I stayed in Mangaia and I continued my studies at USP. I was approached to take a job with the Internal Affairs Office working for the Government to look after the young and the vulnerable. My work involved working with children, the disabled and the elderly. There were 14 applicants for this post, I wasn't interested in applying but got asked to take it. My real thinking was to come back and begin my small business as a crayfish initiative. During this time with craypot fishing we found our crays' are vegetarian hence the reason we don't get much success using the pots.


Once again I got involved in sports and became President of the Sports Club and the Fishing Club. It was through sports that I became aware of the need for gender balance. Especially when I saw how well it worked when men and women played touch rugby together. You would see all the community coming together when both men and women played. Yet when the season for netball or rugby 7's came along there was not the strong community support and presence at the games. My other community activities like dancing and farming also showed me how important gender balance was.

In 1999 I became involved in supporting a political party. I joined because I wanted to help find a good road that would help our people. I was nominated unanimously as the Secretary for the Cook Islands Party on Mangaia and hold that title today.

Looking back in my life I must say family is number one. When you think of your parents, when you were young with them alive, you can see how you grow strongly. Growing up beside my sisters I can always see them helping me in my life.

When you see a home with only a father and the kids the home is not that strong. Yet a home with only a mum, okay it's not the same, but the mother still tries hard to take the responsibilities and duties of being a father. Let's look at what the Bible says. God took out the side of the man and made a woman Why? To strengthen the life of the man and the family. I think back while I was in NZ, in some of the departments at the meatworks there are men and women working together and the atmosphere is great. I've worked in some departments only men and sometimes we can work all day without much talk and the atmosphere is serious. I remember my days mixing in different cultures, when the young men and women are together and the performances and sports are held the environment is joyful. I had a culture group in Invercargill, with young men and women who were part Mangaian so were not very knowledgeable in teaching our culture. I had





to teach both the boys and girls actions to make our team a great performing team in Invercargill. In my time in police, I believe it is important to have a balance of men and women in the force, to work together. I found in that time the women police officers are always willing to help and go the extra mile to ensure your case gets closed. Here at home today, getting involved in leadership in the sports I find that for a sports code to be successful you need to have men and women working together. The case of touch rugby and even the shared sports like volleyball, tennis, darts, and soccer.

I thought all men thought like me in terms of supporting our women and men to work together. When I was approached to be a male champion of women by the Cook Islands National Council of Women, I agreed. That took me on a tour of the Pa Enua. All the islands were different. I heard important men like Pastors speaking up against women being outside of the home. I felt empowered to say that I disagreed. Everyone here agrees that women do a good job in the home but I say that since we know women do a good job in the home what's to stop them from doing a good job for the Island too.

Today we see that we should share our leadership and deciding our future. But it is not like the man can't do the work, or that the women can't do the work, but that if they join and share their strengths the work goes ahead more steadily.

Not all men are good in decision making, not all women are good in decision making but if there is balance in the sharing of the decision made and taken the work goes ahead.

Teia taku korero I taku au tamariki tamaine, mokopuna tamaine; kia ka toou rama ei turama I toou arataa, e tu e ara, auaa e noo ua. Here are my words of wisdom to my daughters and my granddaughters: 'let your light shine to light your way, stand up and stay awake, don't just sit around.'

# Inangaro Taia

MITIARO ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“ I encourage the youth to get involved. I’d also say ‘yes’ to standing as a Councillor on the Island Council. ”

I WAS BORN ON THE 4TH OF NOVEMBER, 1976. ALTOGETHER THERE ARE 11 OF US. THERE WERE 5 GIRLS AND 6 BOYS. I GREW UP ON MITIARO AND WENT TO MITIARO PRIMARY SCHOOL UNTIL I WAS 13 YEARS OLD.

Then I moved to Rarotonga and stayed there with my grandma. We stayed in Black Rock and I always walked to school from home and back. I remember my grandma’s saying when she would encourage me to go to school and work hard to pass my school work. She would say ‘kia mou roa te tumu peni I runga I toou taringa, mea mai koe iakoe’ (when the pen is on your ear, then you will make something of yourself). In other words make sure you pass your school to help you get somewhere or to get a good job. During this time, mama taught us how to sew, make bed and cook. She was a cook up the hospital. I would say I learnt a lot of my life skills from her. During this time I was part timing at the laundry, after school and during Saturday and Sunday. All my money from this work would go straight to my aunty to help with our upkeep, I never saw any of it. Life in Rarotonga was different, a bit hard to me, and I would always be homesick.

At Tereora College, I remember the head girl during that time Tarita Hutchinson and the Deputy Head Boy – Robert Dashwood. Tarita always encouraged us girls to study and work hard for the future, to look to jobs in Government and in the private sector and other job opportunities. Robert advised us to stay focussed on school work and away from the normal temptations of our youth. Harry Ivaiti was the Principal at the time and he would also encourage us Pa Enuat<sup>7</sup> students, so that we wouldn’t get into trouble while studying in Tereora. I recall he encouraged us to take the typing option as he believed it would be a good skill to master for the future.

I moved back to Mitiaro when I was about 15 years old when my grandpa passed away. In Mitiaro, I looked for a job and got a job working as a house girl for the Ariki<sup>8</sup> who is my Aunty. Then I started my family. I’ve got three children. For a time, I worked for the Government as an Environment Beautification Officer. I worked in this position for four years until I lost my job during the 1996 Economic Reform. This was the time when public servants were placed into Transition Services and eventually were let off from the government job they held. By then on the island, we had started exporting *maire*<sup>9</sup> to Hawaii to get income. During this period, a lot of our people from the island began to leave. I didn’t think of leaving because I had my housegirl job with my Aunty. Maybe because I was born and raised on the island, and being used to this lifestyle, I didn’t feel the need to go overseas like my friends. I worked for Aunty until 2003.

In 2003 I met and married my husband. We separated in 2007. When I was married to him I had already started building my own house. I would save my money each month from housekeeping and my *maire* exports and would put most of that money on buying building materials. My family helped me to build my house and I would order the building materials each month or when I had a good amount of money to buy a good batch of building materials with. I began building my house in 2000 and completed it in 2005. Without a regular income it was impossible to get a bank loan. Everything had to be paid in cash.

7 THE ISLANDS OUTSIDE RAROTONGA IN THE COOK ISLANDS.

8 TRADITIONAL CHIEF.

9 ORNAMENTAL LEAVES USED TO MAKE LEI FOR EXPORT TO THE HAWAII MARKET.



The reason I began building my house young was because Aunty who is one of our paramount chiefs on the island, gave me land and with my young kids growing up she always encouraged me to build a house while she is still alive. The Pastor of our Cook Islands Christian Church also helped complete the house with my family labour.

While I was with my husband, I had a dream to have a restaurant and lodge for visitors. So I extended my home for that reason. In 2007, I built a unit to rent out to tourists. It's a small business.

Today, I have been cooking and catering and selling cakes and assorted baking products to our people who are here on holiday, and even those who stay on the island. Also other lodges on the island like the Sea Breeze have asked me to provide the meals for their guests and this has helped develop my restaurant and catering service. Each Christmas I open my café to serve family and off shore Mitiaroans who return for the holidays.

In 2008, the post of Women's Development Officer came up. I took a chance and applied for it. I got the job because of my work with the community and with women's groups. This was a good time for me. In 2009, I went to Fiji for training in community development. It was very practical and I shared what I had learned at school with some of my family and friends here on the island who are developing their bread making business and also at the Mitiaro School where I teach life skills in cooking, sewing and tie dying to the school children.

While I was training in Fiji at the SPC/ Community Education Training Centre, I always remember Mrs Koroi who was our instructor. She shared and taught us a lot of skills and knowledge on sewing, business planning, cooking and preserving and skills that would help us be good community workers.

Today, I have three units to rent out and my own house. I continue to work as a Women's Development Officer with the local government. This is the first conference I have attended. In Mitiaro, I sit on the Council of Women as the Government Representative.

My advice to my daughter would be to 'follow my footsteps', to continue the business I have started. My daughter or my son, maybe one of them will be interested in running this business.

When I go back home, I'll encourage the youth to get involved. I'd also say 'yes' to standing as a Councillor on the island Council. But to do that I'd have to convince them to vote for their own interests and not just for the candidate who can give them something for their side-pocket.

# Tohoa Tuteru

RAKAHANGA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“ On Rakahanga in the past, ladies weren’t even allowed to talk in meetings. There is a by-law that means on our island, women can’t be elected. We are trying to change that. ”

I COME FROM A FAMILY OF ONE—JUST MY PARENTS AND ME. I ATTENDED SCHOOL AND MY EDUCATION IN THE HOME WAS IMPORTANT TOO. WHEN I WAS 11 YEARS OLD, OUR 11 PLUS EXAM PAPERS WERE SENT FROM THE ISLAND TO RAKAHANGA FOR MARKING. I WAS THE ONLY ONE OF 18 PUPILS AWARDED A SCHOLARSHIP TO CONTINUE MY EDUCATION IN RAROTONGA. BUT THE CHANCE WAS NOT GIVEN TO ME BECAUSE OF CUSTOM. I WAS THE ONLY CHILD, MY PARENTS COULDN’T LET ME GO.

When I was 12 years old, I set my goal and my goal in life was to serve my people. Years passed, and my strong desire to serve my people of Rakahanga allowed me to move forward. I used my spare time to help with women’s groups, community activities and church activities. At the age of 18 years, I was chosen by my people of Rakahanga as the ‘Women of the Year.’ The first time this was awarded to a woman. I was chosen because of my church and community activities. I got married to Tuteru in 1995. He was the Island Secretary back then. Now he’s a manager of the Cook Islands’ Bank and an Island Counsellor.

My interest was still strong to serve my people. I went to Fiji to study women’s community development. I went there to advance my career. Back on the island, I worked as the local government Women’s Development Officer. I help write funding proposals. When I first came back from Fiji I helped set up projects with fabric arts, weaving, home gardening and sewing. Later on, I helped the women on my island with materials for our coconut oil production. I helped the men get funding for a chipper machine for composting wood chips for taro production. They call me a ‘Jack of all trades’: that’s my nickname.

On Rakahanga in the past, ladies weren’t even allowed to talk in meetings. There’s a by-law that means on our island women can’t be elected. We are trying to change that. We need to work together as women to put together a proposal to the Island Council to allow women to stand as candidates. We have to change minds too about women being elected. Many years ago, the only woman Counsellor we’ve ever had on Rakahanga died of ill health a few months after being elected. We have to convince people that the custom will allow women to be elected and to flourish.



# Tuerei Taimai

RAROTONGA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“ Tuerei has vast experience working in local government in New Zealand and the Cook Islands. Today she is an elder in the Matavera Cook Islands Christian Church and in the women’s group. ”

**MY NAME IS TUEREI TAIMAI, MOST PEOPLE CALL ME MAMA TU. I WAS BORN IN ATUPA ON RAROTONGA IN 1935. I AM THE DAUGHTER OF MARETA TEARIKI KOKAMA AND TEREMOANA HIROVANAA, THE THIRD CHILD IN OUR FAMILY.**

I was educated at St Josephs Catholic School in Avarua. I left with my Elementary School and Junior Typing Certificate. In those days there was no other school certificate. My aim was to be a nurse but that didn’t happen. I left school at 16 years old to help my family.

My first job was with the Cook Islands Trading Company collecting customer docketts from the shop, preparing their end of month statements and delivering them back to where each customer worked. I spent two years there and then I moved on to the United Island Traders where I was a wage clerk. After that, I worked for the Scott and Watson Factory as the pay clerk for 232 workers.

In 1955, I married Ngati Tetonga. We have eight children. In 1974, our third daughter died when she was just 14 years old. In 1959, I went to New Zealand for a holiday with my husband and oldest daughter. We ended up staying there for 40 years. My first job in New Zealand was as a typist for Customs. The work was similar to what I had done in Rarotonga but the pay was better. In 1964, we moved from Wellington to Lower Hutt City. I got a job as a copy typist and later became pool head typist. I moved on to a role with the Railway Workshop to help out Pacific Island labourers mainly from Tokelau and Samoa with worker safety rules.

In 1976, the Pacific Island Women’s Conference was held in Auckland organised by Paddy Walker. She encouraged Pacific Island women to help our people and told us we had talent and had to use it to get involved in what was happening. My first project after the Conference was to set up a branch of the Pacific Lower-Hutt –Women’s Pacific Island Support Group.

Throughout the Pacific, I helped to push for community houses in Pomare where lots of Pacific Island people and Maori people were living in state houses. We wanted to get a space where mothers could get together with a nurse and a doctor holding a clinic there once a week. We also pushed for the Petone Community House, for a Wellington Pacific Island Resource Centre and a Lower-Hutt Community and Learning Centre.

In 1987, I left the railways and moved to join the Lower-Hutt City Council as a community worker. My manager there had created the roles of Pacific Island Community Officers and Maori Community Officers. My first project in this job was to organise a Pacific Island Forum. There are six islands and we wanted each one of them to form a group so they could be represented in Council community meetings. Language was a problem; all the Pacific Islanders were lumped together. I kept saying that there are many groups and that I could only represent the Cook Islands.

I represented the Pacific Islands on the Area Health Board from the top of Wellington down to Nelson. We visited these areas once a month. I was also on the Social Welfare Steering Committee and on the Executive Committee that established the Ethic Council. I pushed for recognition of the Cook Islands with the creation of the Hutt Valley Cook Islands Association and advocated for the inclusion of Cook Islands Studies at Victoria University as well as Cook Island and Samoan languages.

Outside of work, I was active with the Cook Island Sports Association. I was involved with the Lower-Hutt Pacific Resident Women's Project to take action against women and child abuse. Through that I was involved in the Women's Centre for Pacific Island Women, the PTA and the Police Committee. The arts have always been important to me so I was also on the Lower Hutt Arts Council. For the 50 Anniversary of the Lower-Hutt Council we organised a display of arts and crafts from the Mamas and Papas.

In 1990, I was awarded the New Zealand Commemoration Medal. In 1993, I stood as a Labour Party Candidate on the Lower-Hutt City Council. I also attended the Labour Party New Zealand National Conference as a member of the women's group. In 1996, I was awarded a Member of the British Empire and became a Justice of the Peace.

In 1997, my husband and I came back to live in Rarotonga. Here I have been involved as a driver for the Are Pa Metua and a member of the National Council of Women. I left because of my husband's ill health. He passed away six years ago at the age of 81 years old. We had been married for 51 years. I was a member of the Petone Multicultural Church where I taught Sunday School. I am now an elder in the Matavera Cook Island Christian Church and in the women's group. I have 18 grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Today I am once again a member of the National Council of Women and Vice-President of the Are Pa Metua.



# Josephine Lockington

AITUTAKI ISLAND



“ My interest is in working and helping our women. ”

MY NAME IS JOSEPHINE LOCKINGTON, I WAS BORN IN 1945. MY PARENTS WERE FEEDING PARENTS, I DIDN'T KNOW MY REAL PARENTS. I WOULD SAY THAT I WAS THE FIRST FEEDING CHILD OF THESE TWO PARENTS. MY MAMA KNEW ALL THE WAYS OF WOMEN, MAKING TIVAIVAI, COOKING, MAKING COSTUME. I GREW UP IN THIS ENVIRONMENT OF CREATIVITY AND DEVELOPING THINGS. I WENT TO SCHOOL, PRIMARY SCHOOL. I NEVER WENT TO COLLEGE. IT JUST SO HAPPENED IN THAT TIME WHEN YOU GOT TO GRADE 9 THAT WAS THE LAST CLASS YOU ATTENDED THEN. YOU HAD NO CHOICE TO CARRY ON SCHOOL.

In those days I had an arranged marriage. What I had really wanted to do was to go to training college. This didn't happen. Even though it wasn't what I wanted I must say that my arranged marriage turned out to be an important and happy one for me. My husband became a strong friend and never hit me. Although we might have disagreement, we made sure our children didn't see our differences. We had 6 children, 4 girls, and 2 boys.

Today I am still active in the Girl Guides and in the women's organisation. During my time I have held various positions in the community. I have been President of the Island's Women's Council. My interest is in working and helping our women.

My husband and I had a business, but it was closed down. I would say my husband had too much love. For instance he would give a lot of credit and couldn't go back and get the payment. I would say we were not supposed to have a business.

I've travelled for the Girl Guides organisation and for the women's group. In 1984 I attended the South Pacific Commission Community Education Training Centre where I learnt skills to become a motivator and trainer of community development among women and youth. I left my family for one year to attend this training.

When I came back I was employed by our Government in 1985 as a women's development officer.

When the Cook Islands Red Cross came on to the island in 1998, I became a member of that organization. I'm still on that organization besides the Girl Guides and the Vaine Tini.

While working as a WDO I travelled a lot to women's development training and meetings. I have travelled to Australia, other *Pa Enua*<sup>10</sup> for women's development.

I retired from my work as a women's officer in 2010, but my interest and love for my people keeps me working and active in these positions.



In June 2012 I was given the Queen's award for my service to my women, to my community and to our country. It was the British Empire Medal. We have 17 grandchildren and 4 great grand today.

Back to my family life. I don't know who are my natural parents. When I married my husband I began searching for who I was from. I didn't know then that the Ariki of Atiu – Ada Rongomatane was a family. My birth mum was an Atiuan from within the family of Kea. When people ask me about her I can't tell them anything. But when people ask about my feeding parents I know their life and background. Today I feel for my kids, because they want to know their family tree. They ask me mum which part of my family tree should they take. I advise them if they can to take both. The reason, because myself in Aitutaki I am on the land of my feeding parents. But my kids know that I am also from Atiu.

I am so lucky that my husband who as I believe been sent from heaven has been my greatest support and backbone in all the things I have achieved today. He looked after our children when I travelled. He cooked the food when I am at work. So this is a bit of my life story. Thank you for listening and allowing me to share it.





# Taputukura Mariri

MAUKE ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“ I’ve been lucky in my journey, I wonder where I’ll go to next? Maybe I’ll become Prime Minister of the President of the Cook Islands National Council of Women. Only God knows what the future holds for us. ”

I WAS BROUGHT UP IN MAUKE BY MY GRANDPARENTS. OUR LIFE REVOLVED AROUND CHURCH AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES. WE WERE QUITE POOR. MY GRANDFATHER ALWAYS ENCOURAGED ME TO GO TO SCHOOL, TO BE ABLE TO PUT THE PEN BEHIND MY EAR AS WE SAY HERE. AT THE SAME TIME, I HAD TO LOOK FOR FOOD. EITHER MY GRANDFATHER OR GRANDMOTHER OR I WOULD GO FISHING, OR TEND OUR ANIMALS OR LOOK AFTER THE VEGETABLES. THAT WAS OUR EATING. I KNOW WHAT'S IT'S LIKE TO BE POOR SO I LISTENED TO WHAT MY GRANDPA SAID ABOUT SCHOOLING.

Then I had to go to secondary school, to leave Mauke Island, to leave my grandparents. In Rarotonga, I stayed with my parents. It was different there. Not enough time to play. With my parents, education was the most important thing. After school, I went to more classes to typing and short-hand classes at St Josephs.

When I finished Form 6, that was the highest class then, I got a job working as a junior clerk with the Ministry of Justice. When I left, 12 years later I was a senior clerk. I left my job to go to Mauke to look after my grandmother as my grandfather had passed away some 10 yrs before and my grandmother was not well. With my husband, we started a business there. I was lucky enough to get another government job in Mauke doing the same thing I'd done in Rarotonga. I stayed in Mauke for twenty years, ten years as Deputy Registrar/District Administration Officer for Ministry of Justice on Mauke and ten years as Finance Manager for the Island Local Government. In Mauke I was involved in island life, with the church, school and sports activities. We even visited other Pa Enua as part of our sports activities. Making friends on other Pa Enua and having them visit us, that was one of the highlights of my time on Mauke.

When one of my daughters was ready to go into her final year of high school, we faced a difficult decision about whether or not she should go to Rarotonga to finish high school. My husband wanted to stay in Mauke and he didn't want her to go to Rarotonga. But I couldn't forget what my grandparents had done for me when they sent me to Rarotonga, despite the fact that they needed me to help them on the island.

So I resigned from my good job and convinced my husband that we should all move back to Rarotonga. It was a big move; we had to start all over again. We worried we wouldn't find work in Rarotonga and not have enough to eat. But again I was lucky, I got a job working with the National Council of Women. I'm now the coordinator for the Commonwealth Local Governance Forum women in local governance project here.

I've been lucky in my journey. I wonder where I'll get to next. Maybe I'll become Prime Minister or the President of the Cook Islands National Council of Women. But only God knows what our future holds for us.

# Tepou Meri (Matelau) Rasmussen Ford

OMOKA VILLAGE, TONGAREVA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“I have been involved over the last 20 years in island governing as the women’s development officer. I have always enjoyed living on my island home because I was brought up here and am free to do things I want to do and am happy here.”

I WAS BORN ON THE 21ST OF JULY 1953. I HAVE 2 BROTHERS, AND 3 SISTERS. I AM THE FOURTH BORN. I WAS BORN IN OMOKA, PENRHYN. MY MOTHER’S NAME IS KATARAINA TAI, AND MY DAD’S IS PETER VIGGO RASMUSSEN. I WENT TO SCHOOL AT OMOKA SCHOOL AND ALSO TO AVARUA WHEN I WAS IN THE LATE PRIMARY CLASSES. THE YEAR I WAS AT AVARUA WAS IN THE LATE SIXTIES. I WAS IN TEREORA COLLEGE FROM 1968 TO 1971.

When I was about 13 we were sent to Rarotonga to Junior Secondary. I was at Tereora when some of our young women and men from the north were there in the senior classes like, Robert Woonton and Niki Rattle. Our Principal was Mr Falloon.

While at Tereora, we stayed in our family house in Panama. From time to time our parents would come to visit us in Rarotonga, and when they came back to Penrhyn an uncle would come to watch us.

For me living in Rarotonga and going to school back then was a challenge. I was always homesick, and couldn’t always focus on school work, especially in the first year. But as the years went by and I got used to staying in Rarotonga, I began to enjoy school because I had made friends. School back then was disciplined and the children had to learn to respect the teachers.

It was at Tereora that I learnt and began to grow my love for sewing and cooking, because I enjoyed these subjects. I completed Upper Fifth.

In 1972, because I had been already asked to be married to my husband today, I prepared to get married. His father Tapa Ford had already sent a telegram to my parents to begin arranging my marriage to his son.

Anyway one day this man Tapa Ford (my future father in law) and Tini Ford (his son) arrived. In the evening of that same day, I saw them coming to our house (the father and the son), and after they left, my mother asked me what I thought, I had asked about what – and she had shown me the ring.

After a lot of thinking I agreed to honour their wish and my parents and we were married in Nikao CIC<sup>11</sup> Church on the 1st of July 1972. In those days you humbled to the requests and wishes of your parents and your family.

Pastor Teina Tuarau married us. Not long after that we left for Auckland to work. We lived there for one year, and then I left him and came back with my mum and also to give birth. Within one week he was with us in Rarotonga. Our first daughter (Jane) was premature and she was born in 1973 in the Rarotonga Hospital.

We worked in Rarotonga for a while. I was a cashier at the JPI<sup>12</sup>. Not long after that I was shifted to the back office as the overall cashier for the shop and all the other branches and then did the banking and payments to the workers. I worked there for two years. My husband was working in the workshop at the airport.

We decided to come back, and with the small money we made from the time in Raro, we bought cement to start our house in Penrhyn. It took us about 5 years before we were to finish it. We didn’t stay in it right away because we lived with my mum and dad helping and looking after them.





During this time I stayed at home and helped my mother and looked after my children. Weaving was a way of making income them.

My husband was the island weather observer for the Government on the island.

Our children came along after that, Teupoo (1975), Nooroa (1976), Meli (1986), Matakura (1988), Mose and Junior.

When I was in Rarotonga, after some tests I was treated for some women health issues and then I found that I was pregnant after all those years. Our last was born in 1996.

In 1991 I attended community education training in Suva for 9 months. In 1992, I came back from CETC and I was employed as the Women's Officer for the island under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. My responsibilities included working with our women in weaving, sewing and cooking activities.

Over 20 years I have worked in this position. I went back to Suva to train in 2007 for an advance training course. I remember in Fiji we went to Kadavu Island (by boat). We had to climb to the village that we were going to live at. I found that experience very interesting and enjoyed it because it was something very new for me.

Because we are used to our way of life, I always found it a great experience to go to national workshops throughout and learning the ways and crafts and activities of women throughout our islands.

Back in 1991 the CETC<sup>13</sup> didn't have computer training. But in 2007 they did and so it was something for me to learn about computing. I found taking the course in the later period an eye opener because the delivery of the course was more advanced and there were evening classes, and also the CETC had grown, and there were more accommodation and a larger dining and community place for the students.

When I came back into the job on the island I began to develop women's activities and training workshops for transferring skills learnt at the CETC and helping our women develop their skills.

I became involved in leadership activities on the island when I was involved in the Girl Guides (GG). I became the Commissioner for the GG on the island, and also took on the responsibilities of Secretary of our Church Women's Council.

At CETC I received the Leadership Award as well as the overall excellence award for all the subjects I enlisted in (both years).

I have been involved over the last 20 years in island governing as the women's development officer. I have always enjoyed living on my island rather than Rarotonga and New Zealand maybe because I was brought up here and am free to do the things I want to do and am happy here.

In my married life my husband and I have always worked together. He was transition during the reforms and was unemployed for 8 years and my work helped keep our home life and family going.

13 COMMUNITY EDUCATION TRAINING CENTRE (OF THE SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY)



My husband was approached and he asked me how I felt if he ran for Council mayor. I agreed to support him because the life of a mayor and councillor is a life of sacrifice and the women behind the members are often called on to feed and prepare island gifts for dignitaries and visitors to the island. I was also continuing to keep my commitments to my women's officer responsibilities at the time.

This last council member's election 2010 I ran because I was asked by my people to do so. They had originally asked me to run for Mayor but I didn't want to do it due to my husband also contesting. Anyway I missed by a slim margin but it was an important activity for me as I knew what would be involved would mean more commitments on top of what I am already doing.

I think besides my training, my upbringing and my aspirations to do the best I can, I would say my husband has been a great influence in helping me to achieve some of the challenges I have completed or overcome today.

I was nominated the Cook Islands Woman of the month in August 2012, being recognised for my work in helping our women.

I suppose my greatest wish now having done what I have done over the years is for our people to come back to our islands. To do this we must find ways to provide them with jobs and incomes to come back to. We must develop and maintain high standards of services in our school on the island.

For instance, our youngest son has had to school away from the island to be able to receive a good education.

My advice to my children is - 'Eiaa e mataku I te Tangata, matuku ra I te Atua'<sup>14</sup>.

# Women's Pathways From the Pa Enuā

**Tuki Wright**

PUKAPUKA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

**Mata Isamaela**

AITUTAKI ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

**Teoire Terekainuku**

AITUTAKI ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

**Lucy Tutaka**

MAUKE, COOK ISLANDS

**Tuaine Parima**

MANGAIA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

**Tokoā Samuela**

MAUKE ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

**Kura Mamia Rio**

TE TAUTUA VILLAGE, PENRHYN, COOK ISLANDS



# Tuki Wright

## PUKAPUKA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“ Because of my business, I was the first Woman of the Year in the Cook Islands. I joined a lot of women’s organizations because I love working with the people. Doing work with the community is my passion. ”

I WAS BORN INTO A FAMILY OF 13. MY MUM IS FROM PUKAPUKA AND MY DAD IS FROM A MIXTURE OF OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDS. DURING MY CHILDHOOD, I WORKED LIKE A DOG. THERE WAS A TARO PATCH IN THE MUD AND IT WAS A LADIES JOB TO DO THE PLANTING. THE WOMEN WOULD GET ALL MUDDY. PUKAPUKA IS AN ATOLL.

I was very busy with working and school. At school I was a leader in all my classes. I loved school. In those years, we had only eight classes. When I was 12 years old, I decided on my life goals: I wanted to put God at the centre of my life, I wanted to be rich and I wanted to be a leader. To action my goals, I wanted to further my education, to study hard and to see the world.

When I got to Grade 8, I was top of my class. I was sent for more education first to Rarotonga and then to the new school on Aitutaki built for the Northern children. I went to Aitutaki with my Father, I was only 13 years old. I was clever not in terms of university but in the Bible. I spent four years there and then I went to Rarotonga for nursing school.

I applied for a job as a nurse in Rarotonga. I was a nurse for eight years. I met my husband who was one of my patients. He would come in every day, sometimes twice a day, to have his dressing changed but really to see me. He said he fell in love with me the first time he saw me. He’s an Australian and the only white man to get married on Wale (Pukapuka). We have five children.

When I was nursing, I was tired all the time because of the children. My husband wanted me to stay home with the children but I told him I wanted to work. I got another job as a shop-keeper. That got me thinking, I told my husband that we should have a shop of our own.

I love to save money. I’m strict with money. I wanted to start small with the business. We started doing printing and design. We ordered some fabrics and t-shirts and I started learning to print them on my kitchen table. After six months of practising, I became an expert. We started with \$100 and then the business grew and grew over the years. Our house became covered in fabrics and materials. So we decided to get a place in town, we’re still there.

Because of my business, I was the first Woman of the Year in the Cook Islands. I joined a lot of women’s organisations because I love working with the people. I love singing in our Church too. Doing work with the community was my passion: I’d go to four meetings a day.

In the 1980s, I was vice-president of the National Council of Women. I held that role for a long time. I am still a representative for the Girl Guides and in my church. I’ve represented the Cook Islands Women in the World Council of Churches and travelled all over the world for conferences.

When I had a stroke in 1998, I was in New Zealand. It was lucky because the medical treatment there for stroke saved my life. When I had my stroke, I was jealous of my friends walking normally. But I had told myself, if you want to walk again you have to mentally push yourself. Maybe I had the stroke to be a role model- that’s what people say to me.

Today, I am the Chairperson of the Cook Islands National Disability Council.



# Mata Isamaela

AITUTAKI ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“I want to push myself further. I ask myself: why can't I too become a Member of Parliament?”

I WAS A STUDENT AND I WAS WELL LOOKED AFTER BY MY PARENTS. I WAS PICKED AS A CAPTAIN OF MY CLASS. I WAS A CHURCH JUNIOR MISSION VOLUNTEER. AFTER THAT, THOUGH, I FAILED EVERYTHING.

Today, I am the mother of five children. I am married to one of the Aitutaki Members of Parliament.

On my Island, I was a community representative and a secretary of my sports club. In my Church, I am head woman Deaconess. I am the women's Ministry leader too.

Since 2008, I have been a member of the Aitutaki Women's Council. I was chosen by my community to become its President. We get together several times a year. We come together to make decisions, to do activities and to show our crafts.

I want to push myself further. I ask myself: why can't I too become a Member of Parliament?



# Teoire Terekainuku

AITUTAKI ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



MY NAME MEANS A MOTHER TO EVERYONE. I WAS BORN IN 1949 AND I GREW UP IN THE CHURCH. AT EIGHT YEARS OLD, I REALLY WANTED TO JOIN THE BROWNIES BUT MY MOTHER WOULDN'T LET ME. I WENT AND SPOKE WITH THE HEAD OF THE BROWNIES TO SEE IF SHE COULD PERSUADE MY MOTHER. THAT WORKED AND LATER ON I BECAME A GIRL GUIDE. WE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND MUCH ABOUT THE BIBLE BUT I LOVED SUNDAY SCHOOL. WHEN WE TURNED 12 YEARS OLD, WE HAD TO WEAR A HAT TO CHURCH.

I went to Araura Primary School from Grade 1-8. When I reached Grade 8, I stayed there for three years as I didn't want to leave school. I kept repeating it. I never passed my School Certificate though. At home, there wasn't a lot of support for education and we had a lot of house work to do.

I left school when I was 16 years old without my Certificate. In 1967, when I was 18 years old I got married. My husband was a school teacher. Together we have five children. It was a bit of an arranged marriage. He wanted to marry someone else but his family insisted he marry me. He was very abusive and drank too much. Despite that, he was a good teacher.

In 1972, we moved to New Zealand. I was involved in the Pacific Health Care Trust. I went to a training course to become a care-giver. My mum still wasn't supportive of me even then. In 1986, we moved to Aitutaki but our marriage remained the same. My eldest son stayed in New Zealand to become an engineer.

In 1988, I moved back to New Zealand with the children. I wanted them to have access to a better education. In 1989, I moved back to Aitutaki with my grandson and my youngest son. Seven years later, in 1996, I went to Auckland to visit my new grandson. I was supposed to return to Aitutaki but I told my son I didn't want to. I stayed on in New Zealand living with my eldest daughter and her children.

In 2004, I met my second husband. The next year, I divorced my first husband so I could marry my second husband. In 2007, together we moved to Aitutaki. We renovated a house there. I started working as a special needs support worker for a young boy so he could attend school. Aside from that job, I make some money preparing and selling food and coconut oil.

My husband had an accident in 2010 working on repairs after Cyclone Pat. I have retired from the school but I am still active in the church. I want to be a youth mentor.





# Lucy Tutaka

MAUKE, COOK ISLANDS



“ I love to volunteer in all areas of the community. ”

I WAS BORN WITH SIX SISTERS; I AM THE FOURTH CHILD. I AM A PERSON WHO LOVES TO LISTEN TO OLD STORIES AND CUSTOMS. I LOVE TO LEARN ABOUT MY GENEALOGY. I AM A PERSON WHO IS ALSO VERY STRONG IN MY CATHOLIC FAITH. I WAS EDUCATED IN ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL AND THEN IN THE GOVERNMENT COLLEGE FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL. I JOINED SPORTS TEAMS AND IN PARTICULAR LOVED NETBALL.

Later on, I had a child but without a man. Later on, I met and married a lovely man from Rarotonga. Together we have three children. My eldest son is following his mum to University. My second son is on Mauke. From my daughter, I now have four grandchildren.

In my life, I love to volunteer in all areas of the community. I used to work in the Disability Centre with Sister Emma back on Mauke. My sisters are all more highly qualified than I am with their Masters Degrees.

Later on in life, I decided to go back to school. I came to Rarotonga to learn how to become a teacher. You know, it's hard living on another island. I didn't feel comfortable. I'd left my family behind in Mauke and I promised myself that I would work hard. I also placed my trust in God to get me through.

In 2007, I qualified as a Primary School teacher. I began my post-graduate degree at USP but decided not to pursue it so I could spend time with my grandchildren. They are my gold medal.

Today, I'm not crying anymore. I'm very comfortable where I am today. I've got land through my husband, and a house on it. Today, I'm standing on my own two feet. In the future I might go somewhere to be a leader.



# Tuaine Parima

MANGAIA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“In terms of the leadership roles I’ve had I think I would want to help my daughter get a good life by encouraging her to make sure she passes her school and gets a good job.”

I WAS BORN ON THE 27TH DECEMBER 1964 ON THE ISLAND OF MANGAIA. I WAS BROUGHT UP BY MY GRANDPARENTS AS MY MOTHER LEFT ME WITH THEM. I NEVER SAW MY DAD UNTIL I WAS 20 YEARS OLD. WHEN I WAS FIVE YEARS OLD, I WENT TO LIVE WITH MY PARENTS. THEN I WENT TO LIVE WITH MY FEEDING PARENTS TO CONTINUE MY EDUCATION. IN MY FEEDING LIFE THERE WERE 7 OF US, TWO GIRLS INCLUDING ME AND FIVE BOYS.

I went to Tamarua Primary School and then Mangaia High School, which later changed its name while I was there to Mangaia College when the fifth and sixth form classes were added to the island education system.

When I was 15 years old, I decided 'I'm big enough. There was a girl in the school who I used to follow and the ways of the youth then she challenged us to smoke at school. The result was we were suspended so when my feeding dad, who was a primary school teacher, was notified he stopped me at home out of shame.'

So I didn't finish school or get a certificate. I thought to myself, I can look after myself. I decided to find myself a man. At 20 years old, I had two children: a boy and a girl but once again as life is he looked somewhere else and I had to move on. And we separated. I grew a bit then because being alone with my two kids for the first time I had to think about us. I went back to my birth mum and step dad. He was good to us. They helped me and my kids alongside my step brother. I still went out collecting pupu<sup>15</sup> to make money to make ends meet. In those days the child benefit for children was only \$20 per child a month.

It was this time I met Mii Parima. We met through the Christian Youth activities in our village (Tamarua), as I had started to rejoin youth programs and girls brigade activities that I had left in my first relationship. In 1994,

I was married with my Parima. He was a Member of Parliament. We had five kids together. During this time I grew in helping Mii with his work to the community and to his family. We went to live in Rarotonga for a while because of his responsibilities to Parliament and the country.

On a holiday back on our island in 1998 I didn't want to go back to Rarotonga because I am used to my island living and not used to Rarotonga living which is a bit different. Over here you can grow and collect your own food, not like in Rarotonga where we had to buy everything because we had no land to plant.

In 2004, I lost my first child. In 2006, I lost another one. In 2007, our house burned down for no reason. Then in 2008, I lost my husband, my Parima. When my husband passed away, I really felt it and often back then would ask myself what's the use of living all alone'. It's really hard for me to share my story because of the losses.

What kept me going is hard to pinpoint. It all came so close together that I almost started thinking of a way out because it was really sore in my heart. I don't know, back then I remember looking at my remaining kids and thinking what will happen to them as my parents were not on the island to help me. I was really on my own again. I really wanted to follow Mii. To make matters even harder I had no means of getting a steady income because I'm not an office working woman. I was really on my own. I can remember praying very hard to God to keep me and my kids' safe in His care. Even now the pain of this time is still very strong in my heart. I would say looking back that maybe this is why I am still standing here on earth today, because I have decided to follow the work of our ekalesia<sup>16</sup> and work for my God.

<sup>15</sup> A SMALL SHELL FOUND IN THE ROCKS OF THE ISLAND.

Our 11 year old was very sick and passed away. The second passed away after a vehicle accident. The people began to say that we were having a family problem but I don't believe what they say. I know my living kids really felt the loss of their brother and sister and especially their dad. I had to be their strength. Back then when we eat I can feel their heaviness when we sit on the table without them. We have home prayers every evening and through this life I slowly helped them to get back up again. The son that used to sleep with Mii still cries in the night, but it's getting better now. I've told them he is sleeping. When we have evening prayers I always say to them 'well it's only us now, and ask God to look after us. Our eldest daughter I am encouraging her to pass her school so she can find a good job to be able to help us and to be a parent for her siblings.

Mii's brothers did ask me to give the kids to them to look after in this time given my economic status was not like before when Mii was alive but I advised them it was alright I want my kids and I want us to stay together.

When I think of Mii he was always looking after people and especially the elderly and destitute. As a leader he would always look after them no matter who they were. He was always behind village, church and island activities.

Mii saw in me my ways of always supporting his work in the community, the church. He pushed me to join the Mangaia College school committee and he always supported me in this area as well as in the other positions I held in the Girls Brigade and Vaine Tini work. He would always provide the food for my positions. Whenever he went to Rarotonga, he would always instruct us about our animals and the planting area because he knew I could manage to look after it while he was away. I never rested

when he went overseas, but when he came back I rested.

My life was enriched by the church-I'm a Christian lady. I think that's why now my life is getting stronger. Now I'm a Sunday school teacher, a youth leader, a Girls' Brigade leader for over 25 years and still leading uniformed organisation in my village and vice-president of Mangaia Island Women's Council.

Today, I collect shells for making jewellery. I do some baking, some embroidery and sewing clothes for elderly people. Even painting fabric which I self taught myself. That's how we live now. I teach my children to be strong-I don't want their lives to be like mine. My daughter is in Rarotonga attending college and I'm keeping going for their future.

In terms of the leadership roles I've had I think I would want to help my daughter get a life by encouraging her to make sure she passes her school and gets a good job before looking for a father to look after her one day.

My daughter is 17 now, she was 14 when her dad passed. My boys are 9 and 7. She has passed her exams and wants to go for further education.

For my sons, I don't want their life to be like mine. So I would encourage them to marry their wives and be responsible and look after their family. Be committed to their family life because I don't want them to have an upbringing like mine. I want them to be strong in the family life together with the mother of their children. I will push them to have a life much better than mine

I don't want any of them to ever fall into any trouble. So love your children because children that know they are not loved fall into trouble, but loved ones know it. Also to follow the Lord for all his blessings, and work for God, and give God's share back to him.



# Tokoa Samuela

MAUKE ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



I WAS BORN IN THE VILLAGE OF IVIRUA ON THE ISLAND OF MANGAIA IN 1953.

My mother told me I was a homebirth. I was number 6 in a family of 13 children. There were three boys, and ten girls. Today three of my siblings have died.

I grew up in the Cook Islands Christian Church. When I was small I went to Sunday School. I would do memory verse learning. I note that a lot of the memory verses I learnt when I was small are still very clear in my memory today. I loved the activities around the church, going to Sunday School, learning memory verses and sitting in the church for the church functions.

I went to Ivirua School in my primary years, and then I went to Mangaia Junior High School from 1965–1968. This school was located in the next village Oneroa. One of my teachers at this school, Kimiora Samuel is still alive today. There were many students in those days. I remember the Principal a *papaa*<sup>17</sup> Douglas William Kerr from Gisborne. His wife Beverly Kerr, taught dress sewing using patterns. She taught me how to place the pattern on the cloth in a way that avoids wasting the cloth. Kimiora taught us cooking. I can still make coconut cream cake. She taught me this recipe with egg white, sugar, baking powder, and flour and coconut cream. I am still baking this recipe today. I met Kimiora last year during the Manea Games in Mangaia, and asked her if she had forgotten how to make the cake and she said she had. In those days we mixed very well boys and girls at the school with no thinking of boy and girl things.

Agriculture was an important subject back then. Mr Taere Papatua taught us how to grow and we grew beetroot and pineapples.

My weaving skills were taught to me by my mum. I remember she never let me work on her mat that she was weaving in case I made a mistake and she would have to spend time correcting it. I know how to weave many things in kikau and in pandanus like mats, baskets, hats, placemats. I strongly believe that what you learn when you are young never leaves you and follows you as you grow older.

In those days if you had a family in Rarotonga then the family could send you to continue your education at the Tereora College on Rarotonga. We didn't have a family so after Junior High School on Mangaia I stayed home. During this time we were the children that helped our mum in the home, cooking, weaving, cleaning, and our dad in the plantation and in those days the pineapple plantation. The orometua vaine<sup>18</sup> of our village helped our families in learning to cook and sew and cut tivaivai<sup>19</sup> for us to sew. So the families in the village would work hard and save up for the cloth used to make tivaivai so that the mama orometua could cut it and we would tack and help our mother sew. We had a kikau<sup>20</sup> house that the family and village could gather in to sew and weave after our work at home had been completed.

My mum was a sewer and weaver and she attended to her prayers. That's one thing if parents follow a life of prayer; their children will be strong in the faith as well. I held the faith even though in later years I became a Catholic.

16 OUR CHURCH CONGREGATION.

17 OF EUROPEAN DESCENT.

18 PASTOR'S WIFE

19 EMBROIDERED BEDSPREAD

20 COCONUT FROND LEAVES.

My parents never look at the fact that I converted to Catholic, they happy that I continue to hold my faith in God in my married life.

I met my husband in the early seventies. I had our first child in Ivirua, and in 1976 my husband took me to Mauke to live with him and his family. I followed my husband's Catholic faith because of my children; I wanted my children, my family to have a strong faith in God. I was a stay at home mother and looked after the home, the children, planted gardens, and helped in the plantation work. I had my own garden and livestock. During this time I was approached by some of the women of the St Bernadette Women's Group to join the group. But I was hesitant because I had a big family – 7 girls and 5 boys. Some of them were born in our home in Mauke. We fed and brought up our own kids and my husband's mother supported on the side of our children's clothes which she would send from New Zealand.

For food, we feed all our children most of the time on fish and rootcrops and what we produced. We had a small kikau hut when we began our life together on the island and over the years we've built this permanent house we live in now.

George was working for the power station and got \$14 a week back then. We worked hard and I would help him in planting and preparing the fish for meals. Lucky I never got sick and was always healthy.

In 1979 George got a loan and we had a boat and he began his business fishing, mainly to feed our family. The loan was \$3,000 to buy the boat and engine. We were a bit worried about this amount because back then it is a lot, it still is. But bit by bit he began to pay it off from the sale of fish. Over the years our boys grew and began to help and accompany him even our girls. Our house built today is from the money from fishing over the years.

Even though married life is challenging sometimes. All the years of living together and during the challenging times when we were young and he was drinking, I stayed on, and prayed and prayed that he would leave drinking.

Today my aim is to build and keep everything we have built beautiful for my kids to come back to someday. I hold our money and do our budget. Before we had a pit toilet and then I aimed to get a flush so we wouldn't be shy when our guests used our toilet.

I don't like to waste the small money we get from fishing. So everything is always accounted for. I don't smoke, I don't drink, and George does admit that he is lucky to have me because of this.

I brought my kids up to work hard and never peu (play up). I taught them the value of saving when they were at the St Mary's School here in Mauke. I would give them 10 cents or 20 cents to put in their saving bank. But my children never wanted too much.

In leadership areas I would say I support my husband's role as mayor in terms of ensuring his responsibilities to the hosting and feeding of dignitaries is met. I also am by his side as the wife of the island's Catechist.

I am a member of the Legion of Mary prayer group. I am president now of the St Bernadette Catholic Women's Group and I continue to manage our fishing accounts. Recently one of George's cousins asked me to manage their retail outlet on the island, I don't know how this venture will do but I'll try my best.

I wish the best for all my kids today. I always pray they stay strong in their faith. Trusting in God.

# Kura Mamia Rio

TE TAUTUA VILLAGE, PENRHYN, COOK ISLANDS



“I work together with my husband to achieve the important goals of bringing up our children to be good and hardworking members of our community, our island and our nation.”

I WAS BORN IN THE VILLAGE OF TE TAUTUA ON THE 5TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1973. THERE ARE FOUR OF US IN OUR FAMILY FROM MY DAD. MY DAD IS HENRY MAMIA, AND MY MUM IS MAMA PI (RITE). I HAVE A SISTER, AND TWO BROTHERS. I AM THE FIRST BORN.

I went to TeTautua Primary and then to Tereora College. I was one of the students from the island who got a scholarship to attend the college in Rarotonga.

I went to Tereora in 1987 to 1992, and left to come back to Penrhyn after attaining Form 5 (upper 5th). When I came back to Te Tautua I worked as a Post Office Clerk. In 1996 I was transitioned. During the public service reforms, the Government had to let off many public service workers throughout the islands. I was one of the many from the island. So I went back to weaving for a living and helping raise my family.

I would say going to the College on Rarotonga was a very challenging time for me, as I had been brought up to always be happy, to work, and to be near my father. My father was a person who always wanted us his kids to be near him. He will always have an important influence in my life like that. So when I went away to Rarotonga, I was always very homesick for the secure home life I had on Te Tautua. In Rarotonga, where I was sent to live with a cousin and aunty and uncle, life was different because they were not often home due to work or other commitments. I was often home by myself and missed my family, my dad very much. Being my first time away from home with things not the same as living in your own home, and having no access to things you took for granted in your home made me always homesick. The scholarship allowance back then was about \$40 a month, which didn't give me much to live with.

I met my husband, Rio during this period I was working. We married in 2000. We have three children. A daughter (18 years), a son (9 years), and another daughter (4 years). I had three miscarriages however in between these children we have. Since my being let off work, I have made a life staying home and looking after my family and supplementing our home income and living with the weaving work I produce. I had already learnt to weave hats, fans and baskets at the age of about 12 years, when I would study my mother's weaving patterns. My mother never taught me to weave, I self taught myself.

My dad was a police man in the village and my mum Rite was a homemaker. My dad has been an important influence in my life, he taught me how to live my life peacefully and to work hard and to keep family together. He loved us all so much. He was always happy when we were all together. The ways and customs of our dad is in us his children and the way we live. His philosophy was for the home to be happy, peaceful, and united. I try my best to apply his teaching in my own family.

I remember one time in 1992 when I followed the island dance team down to Rarotonga for the Constitution Festival, I met some family friends from Hawaii who wanted to take me back to Hawaii for school. They asked my mum and dad if they could, but he wouldn't allow and so I came back home. I believe I am his pet.



As I have grown and my family is growing up, my advice to my girls is to learn as much as they can in their life. We have a daughter who my husband and I have taught to do women's work in the home, in the community. She can weave, care for the kids, cook and so forth. She is also very skilled in helping her dad operating the boat and machinery. We own our tractor and our carving and sanding machinery. She can take our boat across to Omoka from Te Tautua and she is very responsible. I believe her skills and attitude to life is from the way we live as a family with her.

Myself the skills I have in weaving are based on observing and thinking things through quietly and clearly. I have designed a few hat patterns that I believe are not being woven again for some time, and have been able while visiting in Sydney to share my skills at cutting and sewing tihaihai (embroidered bedspread). I self taught myself at a young age (12) to sew and continue in this area today.

I help my husband in his work as a member of the island council by ensuring his meeting obligations are completed and our food to community functions are honoured. Today I am an active member of our church community as a deacon's wife. I have involved in Sunday school teaching as well as being a secretary for the church women's group and involved in ensuring our supplies and equipment are safe and stocked for the various church and community obligations we are responsible for. I have been a Girl Guides leader.

I work together with my husband to achieve the important goals of bringing up our children to be good and hard working members of our community, our island and our nation.

# Young Women Leaders from the Pa Enuā

Lisiane Messine  
AITUTAKI ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

Eimoana Taia  
MAUKE ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

Benina Samson  
MANIHIKI ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

Tu Aratangi  
MANGAIA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

Wainika Taana  
RAKAHANGA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS

Samson Grieg  
MANIHIKI ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS





# Lisiane Messine

AITUTAKI ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“ This year I was selected by my teaches to become Head Girl. I didn’t expect to be elected but I am confident speaking in public and I like to be fair. ”

MY NAME IS LISIANE. I WAS BORN IN 1994. WHEN I WAS BORN MY PARENTS’ RELATIONSHIP WAS A BIT ROCKY. MY FATHER IS FROM SCOTLAND. HIS MOTHER, MY GRANDMOTHER, DIDN’T BELIEVE THAT MY FATHER WAS MY FATHER. SHE CAUSED PROBLEMS FOR MY MUM. EVENTUALLY, SHE LEFT MY DAD IN NEW ZEALAND AND CAME BACK TO THE COOK ISLANDS. SHE HAD NO JOB AND WAS A SINGLE MOTHER.

In 1995, a couple from Aitutaki heard about me. They’d been trying to have a baby but their babies both died. They asked my mum to let them adopt me. The couple took me back to Aitutaki where I still live. I’m happy I was adopted. I think it was a miracle and the best thing that could have happened in the circumstances.

In Aitutaki, my father owns a plantation. My mum does everything else. In 1999, I went to primary school. I wasn’t happy at school: I was fat and teased. My parents and friends supported me through that. I joined Sunday school, Girl Guides and sports. While I was in primary school my Dad’s business improved.

In 2005, I went to New Zealand to meet my Father and his family. They tried to convince me to stay with him but I would cry and cry until my adopted mother came to take me home.

In 2007, I went to college. I saw the difference between college and primary school. At first it was hard. Once again, my parents were very supportive. I started going to workshops on the island for the Red Cross, the Women’s Council and the Koutu Nui<sup>21</sup>. In 2008, I became a member of my church and an Ekalesia<sup>22</sup>. I also got a part-time job to help with my school fees.

This year, I was selected by my teachers to become Head Girl. I didn’t expect to be elected but I am confident speaking in public and I like to be fair. I think that’s why they chose me. I want to help people and become a primary school teacher. I have applied to Polytechnic College in New Zealand.

21 HOUSE OF SUB-CHIEFS

22 A CONFIRMED MEMBER OF THE CHURCH

# Eimoana Taia

MAUKE ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“ I think I really see the needs of young people on our islands and our views aren’t always represented. Maybe one day, I can represent them. ”

MY NAME IS EIMOANA TAIA. I GREW UP IN A FAMILY OF FOUR. MY PARENTS WERE MY ROLE MODELS. ESPECIALLY MY MUM. HER UNIQUE SKILLS AND HER PASSION FOR FLOWERS AND PLANTING IS ONE OF THE THINGS I ADMIRE MOST ABOUT HER. IT INSPIRED ME TODAY TO FOLLOW IN HER FOOTSTEPS.

Our life at home revolved very much around church, community and activities. I became a member of the church in different ways: through the Girl Guides, Sunday school and Christian Youth. I became an Ekalesia which means I can deliver sermons. I do this usually twice a month. This has really empowered me in public speaking.

I went to primary school in Mauke. When I was 14 years old and at college, I was selected for a scholarship to go and study in Hawaii. The program in Hawaii was for nine months. At first two weeks felt like nine months but at the end nine months didn’t feel long enough. I came back to go to college in Rarotonga. I never completed my final year of college because at the time I thought my social life was more important.

I went back to Mauke and was unemployed. I competed in inter-islands sports competitions and I went to workshops on health, youth and women.

In 2007, I met my soul-mate-Kurauru. In 2010, we got married and we continue to live on Mauke. Since then, I’ve been involved in flowers and in planting. I’ve also got very involved in arts and crafts such as tie-dying ‘pareu’ or cloth. This brings in an income and I love doing it.

In 2011, I became President of the Youth Council. We support and contribute to all the island’s activities. In 2012, I went back to school. I began studying at the University of the South Pacific. I plan to complete my certificate in management.

I think I really see the needs of young people on our islands and our views aren’t always represented. Maybe one day, I can represent them. Maybe a young Island Counsellor can do good things for the young people of our island.

# Benina Samson

MANIHIKI ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“I am really interested in working with the National Council of Women. It's where I learned traditional arts and crafts.”

I WAS BORN IN MANIHIKI IN THE VILLAGE OF TAUHUNU, ONE OF THE TWO VILLAGES ON THE ISLAND. I LIVE WITH MY MUM AND DAD WITH MY THREE BROTHERS AND TWO SISTERS. WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, I WORKED ON OUR FAMILY'S PEARL FARM AFTER SCHOOL. AT HOME, I STARTED LEARNING HOW TO DO CRAFTS, DESIGN AND JEWELLERY MAKING.

In Church I was 12 years old when I became an Ekalesia. I'm also a Sunday school teacher and I really support youth activities in the Church. I was a Girl Guide but now I'm in the Girls' Brigade.

In sports, I like playing all sports especially volleyball, netball and tennis. Sometimes on the Queen's Birthday our two villages will have competitions against each other. It's really fun. Since I was 23 years old, I have been on the Sports Committee.

I am really interested in working with the National Council of Women. It's where I learned about traditional arts and crafts. It has helped me with my sewing. When I was selected to come to the National Council of Women Conference in Rarotonga, I was surprised. There are many of us on the island who would have liked to come. I think I was selected because I spoke up on behalf of our young women when the National Women's Council came to Manihiki.



# Tu Aratangi

MANGAIA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“ I’d like to encourage youth groups to be introduced to the work that women do and to encourage them to participate in the National Council of Women. ”

I WAS BORN IN MAY 1996. I WAS BROUGHT UP BY MY GRANDPARENTS WHO WANTED TO RAISE ONE OF THEIR GRANDCHILDREN. WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, MY GRANDFATHER WAS WORKING AS A MINISTER; THEY REALLY TRAVELLED A LOT. I AM A SUNDAY SCHOOL STUDENT AND IN GIRLS BRIGADE. MY LIFE WAS VERY GOOD AND HEALTHY AS A CHILD.

I started my first year in pre-school when I was in Mangaia. We stayed there until I was in Grade 3. Then we moved to Penrhyn for four years. Living there was really fun: speaking a language I'd never spoken before and sharing their culture. One of the first things I learned to do in Penrhyn was how to weave a fan and where they get their materials from. I learned that when I was seven years old. With the girls, I learned how to husk a coconut. Penrhyn is one of my favourite islands that I have been to. People in Penryhn sing really loud. I'm proud to have spent time there.

After we left Penrhyn, we went to Mauke Island where I started college. I also became a member of my church and joined the Girl Guides. With the Girl Guides I went camping and I learned about what women do these days. It was an enjoyable life. On Mauke I learned how to make ei (flower garlands).

When my grandpa got sick, he retired from the Church. We returned back to our island home in Mangaia. I joined the Girls Brigade again, the brass band, and the island youth activities. We went to Australia to raise money for our brass band and it worked. Now I'm in the brass band playing tenor. My mentor in music is Pae Tuteru, he's a famous musician and the leader of our band.

Last year, I went to New Zealand to stay with my parents. I went to Ashburton College working towards my NCEA Level 1. I didn't like it there. I always cried for my grandparents. When I finished my school year, I wanted to come back home.

In February I came home to Mangaia. Now, I am studying for my NCEA Level 2 so that I can do what I want to in my life. Since I was a little girl and still today, I've wanted to become a police-woman. In July, I came to the Expo and I got to experience this position. It was really enjoyable.

I am very happy to have been picked to come to this workshop as a youth member. When I go home, I'd like to encourage youth groups to be introduced to the work women do and to encourage them to participate in the National Council of Women.



# Wainika Taana

RAKAHANGA ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“ My involvement in church activities is very strong and I believe that it is the foundation of my life. ”

MY NAME IS WAINIKA TAANA. I AM KNOWN BY MOST OF MY FRIENDS AS ‘WAI’. I COME FROM A FAMILY OF TEN CHILDREN AND I’M THE FIFTH ELDEST. I WAS BORN ON A CARGO VESSEL CALLED THE MANUVAI, SO I WAS BORN OFFSHORE.

During my childhood, my dad died and my mum was in Rarotonga with the rest of the family. All except me as I was living with my uncle on Manihiki: our homeland. I went to Ruamanu Primary School. It was our station school. I think I am full of love and I’m happy when I am working close to my friends and peers.

Staying with my uncle was a hard time in my life. The love between me and my uncle was not like the relationship I had with my dad. My uncle didn’t love me. This was what caused him to be unsupportive on the financial side for my education.

There was no support for my education until I was picked as the only one in my class to do Year 13-15 by correspondence. My interest in education was very strong at that time. I imagined my future was flashing before me, telling me what I would be in the future.

At the age of 16 years old, I joined some friend working as labourers in the commercial pearl farm industry. The main focus of my work was to earn income to assist with my education and other needs.

When I was 20 years old, I crossed to Rakahanga: Manihiki’s sister island. I went to visit my family there on my dad’s side. There I met my partner Tokamokoha Tupou. We made our home there. We have three girls: Kau, Reison and Mahina.

My involvement in church activities is very strong and I believe that is the foundation of my life. I am also interested in sports which are one of my hobbies. I am proud to have represented Rakahanga in an all Inter-Island sports competition.

With my low wages, I decided to join the Rakahanga Women’s Council. I became the vice-secretary in 2010. I believe that this is another way to help my family as I sit together with the old ladies and learn how to weave. The mama’s crafting earns good money.

Participating in this conference and other workshops has encouraged me to be confident and to be a strong future leader for my island, Rakahanga.

# Samson Grieg

MANIHIKI ISLAND, COOK ISLANDS



“ On the island, women are very active, even more than the men. But the men don’t care about the women. The lady Mayor helps the island and I think she’ll be re-elected. ”

MY NAME IS SAMSON GRIEG. I WAS BORN IN MANIHIKI IN NOVEMBER 1988. I’M THE SECOND OF SEVEN CHILDREN. IT WAS ONLY ON MONDAY, THE DAY BEFORE THE WORKSHOP, THAT I ASKED MY MUM IF I COULD COME TO THIS WORKSHOP IN RAROTONGA.

Back on the Island, I always help with functions especially the decorating. It’s God’s gift to me. I also cook and sometimes do crafting hats and fans. My decoration skills are well recognised in Manihiki. I do the same things as my sister Benina.

I was the youngest person to begin preaching in our church. I started when I was ten years old. I am now the President of the Church Youth on Manihiki. I teach at Sunday school. In the community, I used to work as a nurses’ aid but I’ve stopped that now. I have also been the treasurer of the Child Welfare Committee and on the National Women’s Council committee in our village. I’m also on the school committee and have been its treasurer and secretary. I want to help people that’s my goal. That’s why I became a nurses’ aid, to help people.

On the island, women are very active even more than the men. But the men don’t care about the women. We’ve decided to have a lady to run the island. The lady Mayor helps the island and I think she’ll be re-elected.

At the last election, I joked that I could stand up for the Council to represent the women. Some people really liked the idea and were agreeing that I should do it. Maybe it is time for me to stand for the Council. Who knows maybe after that I’ll become the Mayor or an MP. I see myself as a champion for women.



