

# Progressing Gender Equality in Tuvalu

Tuvalu Economic Empowerment Ending Violence Against Women  
Enhancing Agency Leadership And Decision-Making

November 25, 2016

Project name: Tuvalu Country Plan

Outcome areas: Leadership and decision making, economic empowerment, ending violence against women and enhancing agency

Project partner: Tuvalu Gender Affairs Department

Total funding: \$1,800,000\*

Funding timeframe: 2015–2018

Pacific Women is investing \$1.8 million over three years to implement the Tuvalu Country Plan. Great steps were made in 2016 towards empowering women in the outer islands and those with disabilities, through the work of the program's Gender and Social Inclusion Adviser.

There is no equivalent word for 'gender' in Tuvaluan language. Therefore, the concept of 'gender equality' can be challenging and confusing for Tuvaluan women and men. The country's National Gender Policy therefore seeks to help Tuvaluans better understand and adopt gender equal practices.

As part of the awareness raising of the country's National Gender Policy, Adviser Ms Natalie Makhoul, whose work is supported through Pacific Women, travelled with Ms Lanoula Fasai, Project and Monitoring Officer of the Gender Affairs Department and Ms Eseta Lauti, in-country Focal Point for the Pacific Community Regional Rights Resource Team, to the outer islands of Niulakita (population 20) and Nukulaelae (population 300).

Whilst conducting a workshop on Nukulaelae, Ms Makhoul observed that, despite accepted traditions of women not being welcome to raise their voices during community meetings of the local government (known as the Falekaupule), the community was supporting some women to be part of the implementing arm of the Falekaupule (known as the Kaupule).

Ms Semolina Faiva Tavita is the second woman on Nukulaelae elected to the Kaupule. Ms Tavita sees her role as providing a different voice on the committee to the five other male members.

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

Ms Makhoul reported that on her outer island visit, men were showing interest and were open to listening and discussing gender concepts. ‘This is a positive trend and signals that past consultations of the Gender Affairs Department in Nukulaelae are showing good results,’ she reported.

Ms Makhoul has also collaborated with Fusi Alofa (Tuvalu’s association for people with disabilities) and the Attorney General’s Department in relation to the adoption of the standards under the Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). As a result of this, six people in Tuvalu receive financial support under the government’s scheme to assist people with disabilities.

With Ms Makhoul’s input, the Attorney General’s Department has made a submission to the Ministry of Home Affairs to strengthen Tuvalu’s disability policies and laws to include CRPD standards. This includes recommendations for the scheme to be extended to apply to those acquiring a disability during their lifetime (such as through an accident or disease) and continuing financial support after the age of 70.

Looking forward, Pacific Women will support a national disability survey that will help organisations like Fusi Alofa by producing meaningful statistics on people with disability in Tuvalu.



Staff of Tuvalu's Gender Affairs Department with Gender and Social Inclusion Adviser Ms Natalie Makhoul (third from left). Photo: Ministry of Home Affairs.

*\*This Story of Change was originally published in the [Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2015-2016](#). All values are consisted with that reporting period. For the most up-to-date value of activities, visit our [interactive map](#).*