Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
TOO MANY HATS

EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES FOR
WOMEN’S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT
WITHIN COOK ISLANDS CIVIL SOCIETY

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Philosophy in International Development
at Massey University, Manawatu, New Zealand.

Barbara-Anne Stenson

2013
This thesis is dedicated to my father

Peter Mark Stenson
(1958-2001)

Thank you for teaching me brave determination in all that I face.

E kau, e tuatini nga tua ngaru.
E ngaru popoki. E ngaru pārua. E akamāro’iro’i.

Swim there are many waves. Waves that overlap.
Waves that double. Be Brave.

(Tarapu, 1994, p. 43)
Abstract

This thesis explores the possibilities for women’s political empowerment beyond numbers represented in national parliament. Women’s perspectives and contributions to policy decision making are seen as a key factor in a nation’s development and women’s representation in national parliament is a key indicator of the Millennium Development Goal Three on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. However, this thesis argues that there are other forms of political empowerment beyond numbers in national parliament that should be considered.

Pacific women have the lowest representation in national parliaments globally. The international community is encouraging Pacific countries to increase the number of women in national parliaments by introducing gender quotas. However, there has been little investigation into women’s political voices in Pacific societies outside of national parliament. This thesis thus investigates how women’s political empowerment is understood within Cook Islands civil society and explores the various ways in which women in Cook Islands civil society exercise political power. A gender and development empowerment approach formed the theoretical basis for this research. Moser’s (1989) ideas on the triple role of women and practical and strategic gender needs were used as tools of analysis.

Fieldwork took place over four weeks in the Cook Islands in mid-2012. Development research principles, as well as Pacific methodologies, guided the fieldwork which utilised a mixed methods approach. The findings of this study show that despite women being underrepresented in national parliament women do exercise political power within Cook Islands civil society. Women often use strategies to exercise political power indirectly, through context-specific and culturally acceptable ways so as to maintain important social and political relationships. Women work collaboratively with government and many contribute to policy development and implementation. Despite this however, women are being stretched in their
roles within the community by neoliberal donor and government policies and programmes. The main implications of the findings, and the conclusion of the thesis, is that development policy and practice must take into consideration women’s multiple roles and recognise that advocacy work within civil society is an important strategic gender need. Civil society advocacy should be supported by donor programmes to encourage women to be politically involved in their country’s development.
Acknowledgements

*Meitaki maata* to everyone who participated in this research. I am very grateful for your time, energy and commitment to this project, and for your willingness to share your knowledge and experiences openly with me.

Thank you to Jolene and Peter for welcoming me ‘home’ and reintegrating me back into ‘island life’. Thank you to Tere and Brin for providing me a place to stay during my fieldwork and for embracing me as family.

Thank you to Vaine Wichman at the Cook Islands National Council of Women for opening up opportunities for me to observe the dedicated work of her organisation in encouraging and supporting Cook Islands women to thrive and reach their full potential.

A huge thank you to my supervisors Professor Regina Scheyvens and Dr Gerard Prinsen for your academic guidance and support. Regina, thank you for showing me that empowerment is not only an abstract theory but something you put into practice every day through your commitment to development studies students and through your research involving vulnerable people and communities – you are so truly inspiring! Gerard, thank you for always challenging me, it has been a huge growth opportunity and a real privilege to have you along on this academic journey. Thank you also to Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers for starting me off on the research process and for your continued support. And thank you to Massey University Scholarships Office for the Massey Masterate Scholarship which funded this research.

Thank you to Sharon for bridging the gap across time zones and oceans to guide me in writing my proposal. A very special thank you to my amazing friend Joy for navigating me through the ‘process’; and to Justin for your loving support and your encouraging kind words and prayers.

Thank you to my Mum, Faye, and Justin for your hours in diligently proofreading my thesis. And a special thank you to my Grandparents for supporting my goals of higher education and for sharing your enduring commitment for a more just world.

And, thank you to the Lord my Saviour, your strength is made perfect in my weakness.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... i
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ......................................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables, Figures and Photos .................................................................................................. ix
Abbreviations ................................................................................................................................. x

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING THE STUDY ...................................................................................... 1

RATIONALITY FOR THE RESEARCH .................................................................................. 1
POSITIONALITY AND MOTIVATION .................................................................................. 2
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES ........................................................................................................ 4
STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS ............................................................................................... 5

CHAPTER 2: EMPOWERMENT AND WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT ........................................ 7

INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................... 7
GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT ............................................................................................ 8
MOSER’S EMPOWERMENT APPROACH .............................................................................. 10
PRACTICAL AND STRATEGIC GENDER NEEDS ............................................................ 15
TRIPLE ROLE OF WOMEN ................................................................................................. 17
DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT ...................................... 19
NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT .............................................. 23
CHAPTER SUMMARY ............................................................................................................ 24
CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH............................. 57

INTRODUCTION......................................................................................... 57

PHILOSOPHICAL STANDPOINT .............................................................. 57

DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH PRINCIPLES.............................................. 59

POSITIONALITY AND REFLEXIVITY ................................................... 60

MUTUAL RESPECT AND EMPOWERMENT ......................................... 62

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS................................................................. 65

MIXED METHODS APPROACH .............................................................. 67

STRUCTURED OBSERVATION.............................................................. 68

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS...................................................... 74

FIELD JOURNAL .................................................................................... 79

DATA ANALYSIS......................................................................................... 80

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY ................................................................. 81

CHAPTER SUMMARY ................................................................................ 82

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH FINDINGS.................................................. 83

INTRODUCTION......................................................................................... 83

WOMEN’S FORMAL POLITICAL REPRESENTATION ......................... 84

WOMEN EXERCISING POLITICAL POWER IN CIVIL SOCIETY .......... 98

GENDERED ‘VOICES’ IN CIVIL SOCIETY ............................................. 99

‘SUBTLE STRATEGIES’ ........................................................................... 108
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................. 121

CONCEPTUALISING WOMEN’S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT .................. 122

WOMEN’S APPROACHES TO POLITICAL POWER .................................. 125

WOMEN’S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AS TRANSFORMATIVE
DEVELOPMENT .................................................................................................. 129

TRANSFORMATIVE EMPOWERMENT .................................................. 129

INFORMAL POLITICAL POWER AS A STRATEGIC GENDER NEED .... 131

WOMEN’S COMMUNITY MANAGING ROLE: EMPOWERING OR
BURdensome? .................................................................................................. 133

SHIFTING PARADIGMS: EXPANDING THE POSSIBILITIES FOR
WOMEN’S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT ........................................... 135

WOMEN’S ACTIVE PARTICPATION IN CIVIL SOCIETY ...................... 137

WOMEN’S DIVERSITY REPRESENTED ................................................ 138

WOMEN EXERCISE POLITICAL POWER IN MULTIPLE WAYS ...... 139

MEN IN CIVIL SOCIETY ............................................................................. 141

SHARING THE GENDER DIVISION OF LABOUR ............................... 142
STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH .................... 144
RECOMMENDATION ONE: CIVIL SOCIETY ADVOCACY .................. 144
RECOMMENDATION TWO: MINISTRY-WIDE APPROACH ............... 144
FUTURE RESEARCH ...................................................................... 145
FINAL CONCLUSIONS ................................................................... 146

Appendices .................................................................................. 150
APPENDIX 1 – INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE ................................ 150
APPENDIX 2 – INFORMED CONSENT .......................................... 151
APPENDIX 3 – INFORMATION SHEET ........................................... 152
APPENDIX 4 – RESEARCH PERMIT ............................................. 153

References ................................................................................... 154
List of Tables, Figures and Photos

TABLES

Table 2.1  The distinction between practical and strategic gender needs.................................................................16
Table 2.2  Different theoretical approaches to women’s empowerment.................................................................21
Table 3.1  Women in National Parliaments Regional Averages.................29
Table 3.2  Framework for assessing extent of women’s political empowerment in civil society.................................42
Table 5.1  Semi-structured interviews.................................................................78
Table 6.1  Civil society meetings structured observations.........................103
Table 7.1  Framework for assessing women’s political empowerment in civil society..............................................137

FIGURES

Figure 4.1  Map of the Cook Islands.................................................................46
Figure 6.1  Sketches of observed seating arrangements by gender...........100
Figure 6.2  Gender observations of the number of attendees, total speaking duration of main speakers, and numbers of contributions to discussion made by secondary speakers in civil society meetings.................................................................107

PHOTOS

Photo 5.1  Cook Islands Women Leaders Receive Tivaevae......................65
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AusAID</td>
<td>Australian Government Overseas Aid Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAD</td>
<td>Gender and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GADD</td>
<td>Gender and Development Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEM</td>
<td>Gender Empowerment Measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDI</td>
<td>Gender Development Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWC</td>
<td>National Council of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZAID</td>
<td>New Zealand Aid Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGN</td>
<td>Practical Gender Need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGN</td>
<td>Strategic Gender Need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCK</td>
<td>Third Culture Kid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WID</td>
<td>Women and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKAid</td>
<td>United Kingdom Aid Programme, Department for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>